ACUTE - Accessibility and Connectivity Knowledge Hub for Urban Transformation in Europe

WP3 – Practitioner Interaction

D3.4.4 Report on the UK National Pilot Workshop

Project Partners

Organisation	Country
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1. Workshop goals & structure

1.1. Goal and focus

The workshop reported on here was carried out as part of Task 3.4, which entailed the organisation of five National pilot workshops in the countries involved in the ACUTE project, with the aim of enhancing national collaboration and knowledge exchange amongst academics and practitioners.

The primary goal of the UK National Pilot Workshop was to foster discussion around maximising the impacts of research and translating research findings into practical applications and actionable results. More specifically, the workshop was centred on generating insights from sustainable mobility practitioners and researchers on key practices that enable the translation of research into practice and eliminate barriers in this sense. The workshop also aimed at disseminating the ACUTE results more broadly, thus generating dialogue around the links between research, innovation and practice.

Aiming to attract a broader audience and rich discussion, the workshop focus was not limited solely to the topics of accessibility and connectivity, but instead explored transitions towards sustainable mobility and the crucial role played by research in this process.

1.2. Workshop structure

The UK National Pilot Workshop was titled "Sustainable Mobility: From Research to Action" and took place on the 20th of November 2024, online via Zoom. The workshop started at 13:00 local time and lasted 90 minutes (see Figure 1). The workshop was led by Prof Enrica Papa, Dr Sabina Cioboata (University of Westminster) and Anja Ebers, a workshop design and facilitation consultant, and followed the principles of the Liberating Structures approach – a collection of interactive methods aimed at enabling groups to collaborate, innovate and solve problems effectively. It places an emphasis on inclusivity, diversity and engagement, making it particularly valuable for workshops.

Figure 1: Screenshot of the UK workshop setting

The UK National Pilot Workshop workshop followed an interactive and structure agenda comprised of the following:

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1. Welcome & Orientation (15 min: 13:00 – 13:15):
The session began with an introduction to the workshop objectives, a brief overview of the ACUTE initiative, and practical instructions for participants including information about the need to prepare pen and paper, to interact, and to turn on cameras. Using a series of consecutive prompts such as "turn on your camera if you participated from home today/ if you commuted today / if you are working towards sustainable mobility etc.", attendees were primed for the need to have cameras on in order to facilitate discussion and interaction throughout the workshop.

2. ACUTE Project (10 min: 13:15 – 13:25):
The ACUTE project was introduced in more detail using a series of slides. These presented an overview of the ENUAC funding call, JPI Urban Europe and DUT, the ENUAC projects portfolio, the aims of ACUTE, its methodological approach, and a summary of some of the main insights on project impacts and research-practice links.

3. 'Creating Space' (20 min: 13:25 – 12:45):
This section used the Liberating Structures method "TRIZ" (Theory of Inventive Problem Solving), and focused on challenging participants to reflect on practices that are counterproductive and that should be eliminated when striving to translate research into practice. In order to do this, they were asked the provocative question "How can we successfully discourage practitioners from using research for the transformation towards sustainable mobility?" Attendees were required to reflect on this individually, and then to discuss their examples of counterproductive practices in smaller breakout rooms, with results being subsequently harvested in the chat, where everyone was asked to write down a key practice. Participants were asked to be specific and provocative in their answers, with the aim of generating an animated discussion, being creative, thinking outside the box, and eventually using these in order to come up with solutions. This exercise was concluded with a discussion on whether anything from the lists of counterproductive practices resembles current existing practices.

4. 'Identifying Essentials' (25 min: 13:45 – 14:10):
Following the TRIZ exercise, the next section moved on to exploring productive practices and solutions by using the "Max Specs" and "Min Specs" exercises. Participants were initially required to individually write down a long list of "must do's for translating research into practice". In breakout rooms, participants then discussed their lists and came up with a collective, comprehensive list ("Max Specs"). In order to stimulate further discussion and brainstorming, the next step involved asking participants to work together in the same groups in order to reduce the list to a minimum in order to indicate only the most critical actions. This process generated interesting debate and helped distil initial ideas into a refined set of critical steps. Participants were asked to record their short lists into a set of prepared slides which were shared during the workshop.

5. Harvest (10 min: 14:10 – 14:20):
Sharing the slides with recorded essential 'must do' lists, each group shared their "Min Specs" in order to identify complementarities and differences across groups.

6. Take-aways & Farewell (10 min: 14:20 – 14:30):
Before ending the session, participants were asked to share in the chat one critical take-away from the session, reflecting in particular on what inspiration they have drawn from the session and what actions from the ideas shared could be implemented right away, without any additional resources. At the end of the session, participants were reminded to explore the ENUAC project portfolio online, as well as to read the final ACUTE report once published.

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1.3. Participants

The participant group was a mix of practitioners and researchers working in the field of transport and mobility. The participation call was launched publicly through the platform Eventbrite and registration was required. Information about the event reached researchers, funding agencies, public and private organisations, and the recruiting was undertaken with the aim of achieving a mix of practitioners and researchers during the session. Over 50 attendees registered for the session, but the workshop eventually consisted of 15 participants: 8 practitioners and 7 researchers.

2. Outcomes

2.1. Results 'Creating Space'

A number of different counterproductive practices emerged from asking participants "What can be done to prevent practitioners from the use of research for the transformation towards sustainable mobility?". These include the following:

- Don't talk to anyone and work in isolation, just within academia.
- Don't share any findings or knowledge with industry.
- Don't align in any way your work to needs on the ground.
- Produce inconsistent and conflicting results which are confusing and cannot inform any decision-making.
- Create lots of complex new theories, or create results which are highly theoretical.
- Create tools which are difficult to understand and impossible to use.
- Publish only in academic articles, or publish in places that are only accessible with high fees.
- Don't give municipalities any funding at all through funding calls for larger projects.
- Participate in conversations only in academic forums, and go to really expensive conferences that practitioners do not have access to.
- Write solely in academic jargon and never make efforts to communicate and break down complex ideas and theories.
- Always finish with the conclusion that further research is needed.
- Provide answers to problems which are irrelevant in practice.
- Not involve practitioners in co-writing funding calls.
- Assign economic values to *everything* and undertake endless cost-benefit analysis.

Interestingly, by the end of the exercise participants agreed that many of this practices are actually in line with what is currently business-as-usual.

2.2. Results 'Identifying Essentials'

The exercise of developing a list of essential practices that are crucial for translating research into practice took place in three breakout rooms. Each group recorded their agreed upon list of maximum 5 items and then presented this back to the group. The following actions were highlighted as being critical:

Group 1:
1. Work with communities, actively involve and empower them to foster ownership, trust and long-term adoption of mobility solutions from the bottom up.
2. Facilitate co-production between researchers, practitioners and end-users in order to co-create solutions that are useful and co-identify real needs on the ground.
3. Demonstrate best practice by highlighting successful case studies and pilot projects in order to encourage replication and further development.
4. Ensure that research aligns with clear and future-oriented long-term visions and goals for sustainable mobility.

5. Focus on the "socio" in "socio-technical": bring to the forefront social aspects in order to ensure that technological solutions address real societal needs.

Group 2:
1. Reach out to politicians alongside practitioners and don't shy away from being political.
2. Tailor communication and dissemination strategies to practitioners and politicians (decision-makers), ensuring that you resonate with both groups.
3. Introduce a 'research broker role' in projects, by including a dedicated intermediary that bridges gaps between researchers and non-academic stakeholders.
4. Use accessible and adapted language and think of creative communication strategies: storytelling can be more effective than complex technical modelling.
5. Join research projects which have funding mechanisms that also support non-academic partners to be more active and involved.

Group 3:
1. Be proactive in reaching out to practitioners and advocate for urban transformation (expand your role beyond just doing research).
2. Engage with cities in order to understand their real needs and if possible, offer real, practical support when possible. Listen, be reflexive, and take a reiterative approach.
3. Call for municipalities to also be funded through large projects in order to support their active involvement in research projects.
4. Use alternative dissemination and communication channels beyond academic publications, and talk to groups that could help (e.g. influencers, community groups etc.).
5. Step outside comfort zone and engage in forums where academics seldom participate, with private sector players or large organisations – take critical stance but make your voice heard.

3. Lessons learned
3.1. Methodological take-aways
In terms of workshop structure, organisation, and methodology employed, the main take-aways are as follows:

- Eventbrite is a useful tool for attracting registrations from a wide audience – in an initial phase, 50 attendees registered and an additional number signed up to the waiting list as well. Nevertheless, a significantly smaller number joined (20 participants) so the workshop could have benefitted from a more targeted list of invitees.
- It is important for the description of the workshop to be very clear on how participants are expected to contribute during the session: a number of participants who had initially joined dropped out of the call when hearing that they would be expected to participate and potentially have their cameras on.
- However, a small group of participants (12 in this case) can provide very rich and valuable contributions if they are properly engaged.
- Starting with an overview of the ACUTE project and its main findings in order to spark interest in the project and set the tone for workshop discussions was useful.
- Having the workshop led by a professional workshop facilitator was highly valuable in terms of providing clear instructions for all activities, time-management, and keeping participants engaged at all times.
- Participants found it highly stimulating to take part in a workshop using the Liberating Structures approach. Creative methods of engagement such as the "Creating Space" and "Identifying Essentials" made participants feel confident to express their ideas, stimulated them to think outside the box,

supported constructive dialogue, and made the workshop feel not only insightful and informative but also inspiring and enjoyable.
- The timing for all activities worked well and the workshop felt dynamic and engaging. However, all discussion sessions could have benefitted from additional time in order to go into more depth on some of the ideas.
- Considering that the group was small, it could have been useful to consider having a round of introductions.

3.2 Workshop take-aways

In terms of translating research into sustainable urban mobility action, the main actions highlighted through the workshop are as follows:
- Actively involve and empower communities to ensure long-term ownership and adoption of mobility solutions.
- Co-create solutions with researchers, practitioners, and end-users to address real needs on the ground.
- Highlight successful case studies and pilots to inspire replication and trust.
- Align research with clear, future-oriented sustainable mobility goals.
- Engage both politicians and practitioners, embracing the political aspects of mobility transformations
- Tailor communication to decision-makers using accessible, creative methods like storytelling, and use alternative dissemination channels to reach broad audiences.
- Include a research broker role in projects to bridge gaps between academics and other stakeholders.
- Join research projects where municipalities are also funded.
- Step outside academia by engaging private sector players and large organisations, while maintaining a critical stance.

Figure 2: Workshop take-aways