



CoP Public Infrastructure and Social Services

Example of Good Practice

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Rural Taxi for Medical Purposes in Castellón Province

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1. Introduction

Public infrastructures between rural and urban areas have improved significantly in recent decades. The interurban road transport allows population to move with more versatility especially in rural areas given the distances and low accessibility in most of the cases. However, the low population density in most rural municipalities as well as demographic trends towards a more vulnerable population decreases the viability of public transport. In the province of Castellón (at North of Valencia), there is a lack of public transport to adjust to needs of the disabled and the elderly with reduced mobility, which in turn is also necessary for adults, youth and children with particular conditions (e.g. without private vehicles). One of the main challenges for those groups of people, mainly elderly, is the access to the hospitals. Moreover, it has been identified as one of the main causes of migration to more populated areas with better accessibility to health services and relatives.

The Provincial Government of Castellón (*Diputación*, NUTS 3) started up the Rural Taxi with Medical Purposes as a new milestone of its work within the “Repopulate Programme”, as a strategic priority to stop the depopulation of the rural areas¹.

¹ <https://www.dipc.es/es/actualidad/diputaci-n-pone-en-marcha-su-pionero-transporte-rural-con-fines-medicos>
https://www.elperiodicomediterraneo.com/noticias/comarcas/diputacion-reforzara-taxi-rural-sanitario-excelente-acogida_1178860.html



The pressure on regions to offer alternatives to conventional transport infrastructure is increasing. This initiative is relevant since it is a resource to enhance the social welfare of rural municipalities. Moreover, the success of this initiative opens the possibility of extending to all municipalities the public service through governance agreements. Other regions in EU can learn because it engages a specific public service for the most vulnerable population groups on low population areas.

2. Project Intention / Background information

The public initiative was launched in 2018 promoted by the Provincial Government of Castellón, within the framework of the depopulation project called “REPOBLEM” (repopulate), and with an initial budget of over 300,000 Euros. It intends to improve and strengthen access to health care for the elderly of municipalities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants. It is a free transport service for residents who do not have their own vehicle or manifest the inability to drive, to get assistance in hospitals, medical examination and dental centres in nearby municipalities. This initiative is financed by the province being the municipalities who is in charge to manage this service. The aid is resolved by order of request and is subsidized until the end of the year.

The main challenges carrying out this initiative are:

- The effective collaboration between local councils who must take charge of the efforts. They have to disseminate the initiative in order to make use of this rural taxi.
- The taxi availability at the municipality.
- The approval: the population sees it as a useful tool.
- The bureaucracy and administrative procedure people face. Lack of social service officers at municipal level.

3. Main Description

This measure helps the elderly’s families to find the balance between work and home life as well as preventing rural depopulation. The Provincial Government assumes the cost of travel and generates a new resource available to the municipalities so that they can contract with local taxis. This service has notable benefits for the most vulnerable population in that municipalities since it adapts to the schedules of each user based on door-to-door service. To do this, the user contacts to the local council who acts as a link with the local taxi (company)², helping him to arrange time and route. The requirements to request the service are either:

- Do not have the own private vehicle, OR;
- To suffer from temporary inability to drive, OR;
- Not having a valid license to drive.

² <http://www.ruraltaxi.es/>

The request form for the taxi transport service for medical purposes will be made by the user at the town hall of the municipality in which is registered, justifying the need by providing:

- ID card
- The doctor's note.
- True statement³ about the need for making use of the taxi service for medical purposes.

The first municipality that activate the service in September 2018 was Tírig (see figure 1), with a budget of 1,075.02 Euros until the end of the year. Given the low budget the local council asked users that only those who really need to make of use the service could request it, since the annual budget availability limits the service. Nowadays, the service is used by 112 municipalities out of the 115 with less than 5,000 inhabitants present in the province of Castellón. These municipalities consider the rural transport system for medical purposes useful to reverse depopulation. Rural taxi means for many municipalities the only one public service (e.g. the Montán municipality with 370 inhabitants has the closest hospital to 60 km. Accordingly, the mayor has recently published the success that this service means for the elder population).

The cooperation between stakeholders is being very important to carry out the rural taxi service. This initiative works together with other ones from social services such as the installation of nursery schools. Different stakeholders are involved during the process of establishing this service: both regional officers from social sectors and local councils. Then, local councils have to manage this initiative among their residents adjusting annual funding for the population that really needs it. The Provincial Government incorporates this important initiative into other anti-depopulation initiatives that it already offers to hundreds of families in the inland areas such as nursery schools, family relief units or direct aids to the natality. Likewise, the scope of the actions as a whole is relevant because it aims to improve the health and wellbeing of rural communities.

Moreover, the success of the initiative is such that has led to new governance arrangements. The regional (Territorial Policy, Public Works and Mobility Department, NUTS 2) and province of Castellón (NUTS 3) will design a plan⁴ of mobility, transports and roads in the province. The main aim will be enhance the mobility of population in rural areas as a whole. Among the novel practices this entails could be expand the number of rural taxi or even minibus. It could also give rise to extend the practice to the school route. It will be the first time of this collaboration in terms of mobility in the inland areas.

³ <http://www.caudiel.es/sites/L01120430/files/2018-10/DECLARACI%C3%93N%20RESPONSABLE.pdf>

⁴ https://www.elperiodic.com/pcastellon/objetivo-ningun-pueblo-castellon-transporte-publico_668667





Figure 1. Photo of the rural taxi for medical purposes in the rural municipality of Tirig (Castellón Province). Population (2019): 419 inhab.

Source: <https://www.elmundo.es/comunidad-valenciana/castellon/2018/09/23/5ba7a804e5fdeae0638b45c7.html>

4. References

Sources of information:

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