

Experiences in the development and implementation of transport policy push measures at municipal, state and federal level: An empirical study from Germany.

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SHORT SUMMARY

This paper analyses the experiences of administrative staff at different federal levels with the development and implementation of transport policy push measures in Germany. To this end, two focus groups were conducted at municipal level and expert interviews were conducted with administrative staff at state and federal level. The results show that employees at all levels consider push measures to be important for achieving transport policy goals. Cooperation with politicians, administrative structures and financial and human resources are sometimes seen as obstacles to the development and implementation of push measures. The trialling of push measures and the slow progress in small steps are seen as beneficial. For the first time, the results provide an insight into the experiences of administrative staff with the development and implementation of push measures in Germany.

Keywords: Push measures, transport planning, administration

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1. INTRODUCTION

With a view to environmental policy goals, a reduction in CO₂ emissions in the transport sector in Germany is necessary. One way to reduce emissions can be the introduction of so-called push measures. Push measures describe restrictive measures that directly influence behaviour of the people and have the effect of modal shift and traffic avoidance and are therefore directed against private motorized transport. Push measures as disruptive interventions are those measures that are considered particularly effective when it comes to reducing car traffic and thus also reducing emissions in the transport sector (Kuss & Nicholas, 2022). Due to their disruptive nature, they are generally less accepted by the population than their supply-oriented counterparts, the pull measures (Wicki et al., 2019). Push measures are therefore associated with a number of challenges for politicians and administrators.

With regard to administrative action in Germany, it can be stated that push measures have not yet been applied across the board, particularly at municipal level (Rammert, 2019). There are various reasons for this. One reason is that push measures are often only accepted to a limited extent by the population and politicians consequently refrain from implementing them in order not to jeopardise a possible re-election. However, research results from Swedish cities show with regard to administrative staff that their individual attitudes would enable the planning of sustainable mobility and thus the implementation of restrictive measures (Pettersson et al., 2021). In addition to the reluctance of policymakers to implement push measures, administrative structures are pointed out as another possible obstacle with regard to administrative staff. For example, the implementation of measures to reduce motorised private transport requires changed structures within city administrations in order to change routines and norms within the administration and ultimately normalise the development and implementation of push measures (Hrelja & Rye, 2022). At the

same time, it is emphasised that the implementation of push measures requires long-term strategies (ibid.). In their study in Sweden, Pettersson et al. (2021) show that there are differences between the various federal levels in the planning of transport and mobility and thus also in the development and implementation of push measures. For example, planning at national level is primarily based on forecasts and predictions, while planning at municipal or regional level is more goal-oriented (Pettersson et al., 2021). This different approach can lead to conflicts between the different levels.

For the German context, no comprehensive findings are yet available on the experiences of administrative staff in the development and implementation of push measures and how push measures are viewed by administrative staff at different federal levels. As part of the Push & Pull project funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), one of the questions to be investigated for the first time is: What are the experiences of administrative staff at different federal levels in Germany in the development and implementation of transport policy push measures?

The approach of incrementalism by Charles E. Lindblom is used as an analytical perspective (Lindblom, 1959). The starting point of the approach is the view that the intellectual capacities of the various actors in planning and policy are limited and that a holistic view of a social system is therefore only possible to a limited extent or not at all. In the sense of incrementalism, the actors do not pursue long-term plans, but rather a policy of small steps that can be revised. Planning is orientated towards the status quo and is constantly re-aligned with it.

2. METHODOLOGY

Two different qualitative methods were used to answer the research question. Two moderated focus groups were conducted at municipal level and qualitative expert interviews at state and federal level. This approach was chosen because it was assumed that employees at state and federal level might not speak openly about their experiences in a focus group and therefore no meaningful information would be generated.

At municipal level, two focus groups were conducted with a total of 18 administrative staff from various municipalities who are actively involved in the development and implementation of push measures. Participants were recruited from cities of different sizes, different federal states, different specialised administrations and hierarchical levels in order to cover the broadest possible spectrum of experience in the development and implementation of push measures.

For the state and federal level qualitative expert interviews were conducted with a total of eight people from different federal states and ministries who hold different hierarchical levels, are located in different departments and are actively involved in the development and implementation of push measures. At state level, different sized federal states, ministries and departments were considered. At federal level, various ministries and departments that are important in the development and implementation of push measures were also considered. Qualitative expert interviews therefore represent a satisfactory alternative in this context, as they allow for more open dialogue in cases of doubt and participants can be assured of complete confidentiality.

The focus groups and interviews were fully transcribed and analysed.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results for the municipal, state and federal levels are presented below before being discussed.

Municipal level

Administrative staff at municipal level were unanimous in their view that push measures are necessary in order to achieve transport policy goals. This is because push measures can achieve rapid changes in people's behaviour and are often more cost-effective than pull measures. With regard to the development and implementation process, various aspects were discussed by the administrative staff, such as cooperation with politicians and administrative structures. The cooperation between administration and politics is therefore complex, dependent on the local context and there is no one-size-fits-all solution for cooperation between administration and politics that works for all municipalities. There was unanimous agreement that politics at municipal level is crucial for the development and implementation of push measures. An active policy that drives processes forward can therefore be an important promoting factor. Cooperation with politicians outside of the usual committee work in smaller, informal groups was also named as a positive aspect. Other factors that promote the development and implementation of push measures include making change tangible for people through temporal trial of push measures and thus taking away their fear of change. In this context, it was stated that it is important to proceed in small steps. Numerous different aspects were also named and discussed when it came to hindering factors. For example, it was noted that the administrative structures for the development and implementation of push measures are sometimes too complex, as too many different departments are involved in the development of a measure. This can lead to conflicts within the administration, which are perceived very carefully by the population. It was also noted that the administration as a whole is not adequately staffed and funded for the current dynamics in the field of transport and that the implementation of push measures is therefore difficult. In this context, it was also mentioned that in many municipalities, far-reaching transport policy goals are anchored in plans, but no connection is made between the transport policy goals and push measures in the concrete discussion on achieving the goals. The federal structures in Germany were named as a further obstructive factor. For example, legislation at federal level prevents push measures from being successfully implemented at municipal level, e.g. with regard to 30 km/h. Successful development and implementation of push measures would therefore require a bolder approach by the administration, new administrative structures, active communication of the benefits of push measures and more legal freedom for local authorities in the development and implementation of push measures.

State level

The importance of push measures for achieving transport policy goals was also emphasised by the staff at state level. However, it was also noted that there is little scope for influencing push measures at state level, as the federal level sets the legal framework in the transport sector and the municipal level implements the measures in practice. As an intermediary, the state level acts more as a coordination centre between the municipal and federal levels and can play a decisive role in shaping financial support. The state level is therefore seen by administrative staff as the weakest actor in the federal system with regard to push measures. This is also reflected in the experiences of administrative staff with push measures. At state level, for example, much is regulated via financial support and thus mainly in the area of pull measures. Within the framework of funding programmes, however, municipalities can also be encouraged to develop and implement push measures, e.g. by making push measures a prerequisite for the payment of funding.

The role of politics in the process of developing and implementing push measures was also emphasised at state level. At state level, there is already a stronger separation between administration and politics and if politicians are not in favour of push measures, there will hardly be any. However, the administrative staff have described various approaches for dealing with their dependence on politics. For example, there are sometimes proposals for measures from administrative staff that have already been developed in the past and will be presented if there is a window of

opportunity from the point of view of the administrative staff. The various departments and units therefore develop thematically appropriate measures for themselves, but these are not embedded in an overall strategy. In this context, it was also noted that the planning of transport policy push measures is hardly ever strategically derived from theoretical considerations, but is much more focussed on day-to-day business and the currently important issues. Due to the criticised lack of strategic planning and the focus on day-to-day business, it was also concluded that there is still a strong tendency to think in terms of different departments and that there is sometimes little cross-thematic collaboration at state level. In this context, the administrative staff also noted that, in their opinion, a gradual approach to push measures is the right way to proceed so as not to overburden administration and people and thus create greater acceptance.

The lack of human and financial resources and the partial lack of expertise within the administration were also cited as hindering factors. In addition, as at the municipal level, the legal framework set by the federal government was cited as an impeding factor. In the opinion of the employees, a strategic approach in the ministry and thus defined goals would be required for the successful development and implementation of push measures at state level. Legal advice would also be helpful, as push measures are sometimes not developed for fear of legal action. More human and financial resources could also be helpful to speed up the processes involved in developing and implementing push measures.

Federal level

Employees at federal level also emphasised the importance of push measures for achieving transport policy goals. At federal level, the instrument mix of push and pull measures to achieve transport policy goals and to create acceptance was emphasised in particular. At the same time, it was emphasised that this mix of instruments is mainly important for financial measures and less so for e.g. regulatory measures, as these are more difficult to implement in parallel and it is also more difficult to identify how a regulatory restriction can be compensated for by another measure. The employees also stated that there is a lot of room for manoeuvre at federal level, particularly with regard to financial and regulatory measures. Whether this room for manoeuvre is actually exploited, however, is heavily dependent on politics, particularly at federal level, which often does not want push measures due to possible resistance from the population. On the contrary, the federal level also waits for windows of opportunity in order to be able to introduce push measures from time to time. Accordingly, employees are already developing measures at federal level, which are then presented to politicians at a possible opportunity. However, these measures are developed independently of an overarching strategy. At federal level, work is carried out less with specific transport policy objectives and more on the basis of forecasts. With regard to co-operation with politics, most employees pointed out a clear separation between administration and politics. Accordingly, the administration fills political goals with life, but otherwise does not interfere in political discussions.

Discussion

The results show that push measures are generally regarded as important for achieving transport policy goals at all administrative levels, whether at municipal, state or federal level. An aspect, which supports the findings of Pettersson et al. (2021). What all levels also have in common is that the role of politics is seen as very important for the development and implementation of push measures, an aspect that has not yet been sufficiently empirically substantiated in other publications.

What all levels also have in common is that a process in the sense of small steps is seen as beneficial in the area of push measures. In the sense of incrementalism according to Lindblom, no long-term plans are pursued, but rather a policy of small steps that can be revised. At a municipal level, this is particularly evident in the transport trials that have been discussed and described as

conducive to the implementation of push measures. These are intended to enable people to experience change, but can also be cancelled in the event of failure. At state and federal level, it becomes particularly clear by waiting for windows of opportunity that may arise due to external influences and current problems. In other words, there is mainly a focus on the status quo, while at municipal level in particular there are sometimes plans and strategies that provide for push measures.

At the same time, the question arises as to whether proceeding in small steps in the area of push measures is the right approach, as their disruptive nature actually contradicts an incremental approach. The administrative staff also make this clear with their proposed changes: they call for more courage, changed administrative structures, the simplification of cooperation within the administration and, at state level, explicitly a more strategic approach on the part of the ministry in order to align measures with existing strategies and not start every discussion about measures from scratch. Hrelja & Rye (2022) have already emphasised the need for strategic plans in their work. The incremental approach envisages development in small steps that are orientated towards the status quo. In the transport sector in Germany, however, changes are necessary to achieve transport policy goals that sometimes require far-reaching upheavals. It therefore remains to be seen whether the current administrative approach of taking small steps and waiting for the window of opportunity is the right way to meet the challenges in the transport sector.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the experiences of administrative staff at various federal levels with transport policy push measures in Germany shows that administrative staff apply a small-step approach to the topic of push measures, in the sense of an incremental approach. There is therefore a certain contradiction between the administration's muddling through approach and the nature of push measures, with some disruptive changes. The comparison of the different federal levels in relation to the application of transport policy push measures in Germany comprehensively shows how the municipal, state and federal levels proceed in the area of push measures. This is the first time that an insight has been provided for the German context that can be used as a basis for further investigations, e.g. with regard to the concrete cooperation between administration and politics, the possible reorganisation of administrative structures for the development and implementation of push measures or also a closer examination of the EU level in the field of push measures.

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