

SOM MOBILITAT: THE COOPERATIVE WHOSE SERVICES ARE INCREASING SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY

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In 2016, a group of mobility activists in Catalonia set themselves the task of changing their mobility habits to contribute to minimising environmental impact and lowering CO₂ emissions. The first challenge was to dismantle the current mobility model. This model has led us to a dead end in terms of congestion and investment in infrastructure, pollution and human health, the use of public space and the quality of life in our neighbourhoods and municipalities, and CO₂ emissions. The second challenge was to create a model on which our entire value proposition would hinge.

Travel by foot, by bicycle or by public transport whenever you can. If you must use a vehicle make sure it is electric, uses 100% renewable energy and is shared.

With this clear idea in mind, a cooperative of consumers and users was set up with the goal of shifting the mobility model from one based on the private combustion vehicle to one that is more sustainable and respectful of the environment and people's health. This legal entity combined the desire to create a sustainable cooperative model within the tradition of consumer cooperativism in order to promote collective empowerment and build communities with shared electric mobility services that reach all of Catalonia's neighbourhoods and municipalities. By combining mobility communities under a single technological umbrella, a regional car sharing network is being built collectively.

I. Catalonia's first electric car sharing cooperative

Som Mobilitat's innovative approach has made it a unique project in Catalonia. The cooperative is currently formed of over 2,200 individual members, 200 companies and organisations that travel using the cooperative's vehicles, and around 20 municipalities that participate as promoters of the project in their area.

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To give form to this diverse set of users it was essential to make a clear commitment to develop technology that is flexible enough to respond to each community's needs. This flexibility is then given order by the collective will to work on a single mobility model, a unified tariff and vehicle access policy for all communities. Three crucial pillars of the strategy for building the car sharing network stand out.

II. Communities: car parks that combine various mobility needs

The Som Mobilitat communities are made up of individuals, companies and public administrations and incorporate different types of electric vehicle (cars, vans, motorcycles, bicycles and/or cargo vehicles), depending on the needs of each community. The communities are created around a car park and function as an interconnected node in the cooperative's shared electric mobility network. These communities are mainly located within neighbourhoods and close to public transport stations whenever possible in order to facilitate intermodality.

To meet the most possible mobility needs with the smallest number of vehicles, the participation system is designed to be open to everyone. Hence, from the start the project has added mobility to the region. Driven by the individual cooperative members, the extra mobility made it possible to activate a community. It seems counterintuitive, but the cooperative's aim is not to create new forms of mobility but rather to replace existing ones by aggregating them into a community. What is most interesting about this aggregation process is that not only can it meet a person's mobility needs, it can also help to reduce them. Remember: *Travel by foot, by bicycle or by public transport whenever you can. If you must use a vehicle make sure it is electric, uses 100% renewable energy and is shared.*

The whole ecosystem has a very simple governance model: *One person (or entity or city council) = One vote.* A summary of the historical legacy of the consumer cooperative movement might be that participation generates a sense of belonging, that belonging boosts communities and that joining communities together makes visible a different model of building collective infrastructure.

The vocabulary used around a collective project like Som Mobilitat, such as governance, empowerment, participation and open and shared knowledge, reinforces the wider collective strategy to be everywhere and reach everyone looking to change their mobility. When the consumers are the owners of the cooperative and are responsible for much of its communication strategy, the collective discourse and message has the potential to mould itself to reach both a quantum engineer and a person with little formal education. The magic is that the members speak from personal experience about their participation in the cooperative and their use of the vehicles.

This strength of the project makes it easier for members from the same neighbourhoods and municipalities to organise themselves and set up a shared electric mobility community that responds to their mobility needs.

III. A platform project: technology as a support tool

This ecosystem is based on a major technological undertaking by Som Mobilitat that guarantees consumers:

- a car-sharing platform (web/app) that enables reservations to be made (searching the map and/or selecting the date and time), changes to be managed, battery charge levels to be checked, keyless locking and unlocking of vehicles and contact with the support service.
- a platform designed to be able to group workers together, satisfying mobility needs with a single vehicle and offering the possibility of a single organisation reserving vehicles in specific time slots and days (leaving them available for other members in the unreserved time slots).

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One defining element from the cooperative world underpins this whole technological project: intercooperation. In 2018, in collaboration with the Flemish cooperative Partago, The Mobility Factory was set up, a second-tier cooperative based in Brussels, the host location for all our electric vehicle sharing technology. Currently, 13 cooperatives from Spain, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom share ownership, governance and technology, which makes continuous improvement processes viable and guarantees sustainability and maintenance.

Further, in 2020, Som Mobilitat began working with Som Energia, a renewable energy producer and supplier, and Som Connexió, a telephony services provider, to begin sharing ERP (enterprise resource planning) developments – an internal management system that accompanies the app and which contains many of the cooperative's internal management processes. This may seem like a minor thing, but cooperatives, like companies, have many management processes in common. Sharing their development to make faster progress in the automation and digitalisation of the cooperative's operations has great potential.

IV. Self-financing to guarantee the project's independence

Funding remains one of the Som Mobilitat project's major challenges. To address it, all the crowdfunding options offered by the people and partner entities involved in the project have been explored. In recent years, participatory securities have been issued (to boost the technological project and the purchase of electric vehicles, giving an economic return on investment after five years), campaigns have been promoted for members to contribute to the share capital over the long term (to strengthen the cooperative and the projects it promotes, with an economic return of 3%), and mechanisms have been created with a collaborative rationale to speed up the financing of vehicles in the region, specifically the collaborative financing map. On the map, individual and institutional members can show their interest in a vehicle in a particular location and commit to making a financial contribution. By combining all the financial contributions promised in a location

a new electric vehicle sharing service can be set up. Thanks to this tool, residents of several municipalities in Catalonia have been able to purchase a number of electric cars that can be used by all members of the cooperative.