

Sopotniki – Slovenia



Community-based



Responsive to vulnerable users



Established brand



Mobility Solution typology (MS)

Community bases door to door lift service

Description

- The service provides car rides to elderly people in 16 Municipalities in Slovenia, at no costs for the users.
- The free transport service enables elders to access healthcare facilities, attend cultural events, visit friends, go to the doctor, go shopping, etc.
- The Service is coordinated by the Sopotniki NGO.

Population and area covered

- 127.500; 16 municipalities (2.432,70 km)

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Why is this MS considered a good practice?

Sopotniki provides a valuable mobility service in rural areas catering to the social needs of the elderly, such as social inclusion, more accessible access to healthcare, and other public services. It has a reliable and efficient management, coordination, and organisation structure, which enables the provision of a transport service across different regions in the country and an efficient management of resources. Over the years, it gained great popularity and managed to involve an ever-increasing number of volunteers.

Organisers / Entity responsible for the implementation

The Sopotniki NGO Institute is the coordinator of the service. The structure consists of i) a central management team at the headquarters (4 people), responsible for strategic planning, regulatory compliance, fundraising, and coordination with municipalities. This team also oversees the recruitment, training, and support of volunteer drivers (almost 270 people with almost 19000 hours year offered); and ii) local units (13 people engaged as local coordinators), managing the day-to-day operations. Their responsibilities include scheduling rides, coordinating with drivers, and ensuring the safety and satisfaction of the elderly individuals we serve.

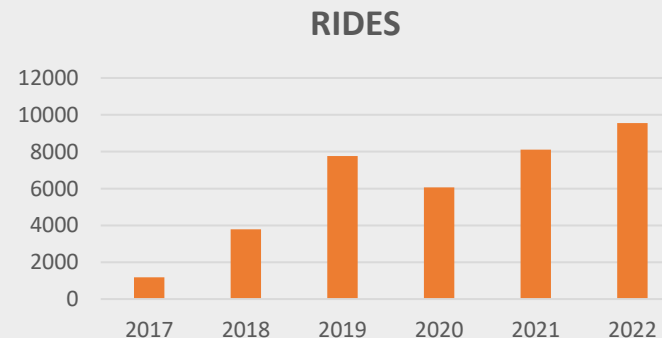
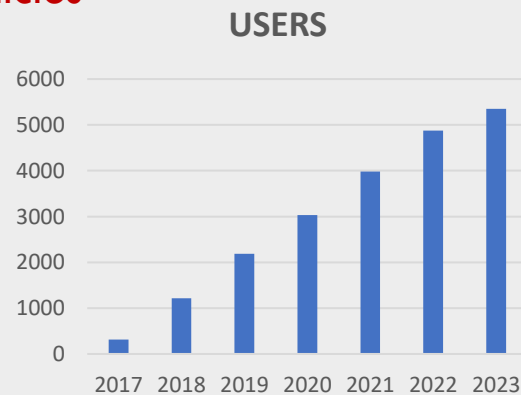
Sponsors or funding options

There are 3 main financing sources: donations from users, Public funds, i.e. grants from municipalities, Donations from private companies and sponsorships. Public funds from municipalities currently represent 80 % of financing. Municipalities in which the NGO operates usually provide a car, co-finance the work of coordinators and the activities of the NGO.

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Impacts

The number of users and trip have been increasing since the starting date in 2017. At the beginning, it started with 312 users and in 2022 this number reached 5350. The number of rides also raised from 1187 in 2017 to 9552 in 2022. The main origin destinations are shops, health centers, public administration and other essential activiteis. The main trip motivations are access to essential commodities, leisure, health. The access to touristic point of interest is marginal in the overall trip distribution. 66% of the users use the service to go to the doctor and 25% use Sopotniki to reach basic services like groceries, courier, and hairdrasser. The number of users transported in a month goes from a minum of 3671 to a maximum of 4458. The average length of the ride is 31 Km with a average distance from the nearest city of 7 km. The total travelled distance in 2023 was 414.633 km. The service is operated with 20 vehicles



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Costs

In 2023, the yearly cost of coordination of Sopotniki service is about 6.000 € per municipality. It includes:

- Personnel: Sopotniki staff, local unit staff who manage daily operations
- IT infrastructure: software, hardware, and support costs for IT system for operations, reporting, and remote monitoring
- Raising awareness: involving campaigns, advertising, and PR efforts - engaging communities is essential for attracting volunteers and users.
- Administration/overhead: Office space, utilities, supplies, travels.

Revenues

Government funding covers almost 90% of the service: grants/subsidies from various government levels. – These are provided by municipalities, local governments, and organizations in social welfare/community development. - Revenues from goods/services and private donations provide additional support and flexibility (10%).

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Main barriers identified in the implementation process

1. **Dependency on Volunteer Availability:** Sopotniki heavily depends on the availability of volunteers. A decline in volunteer participation or high turnover could disrupt the service. Also, volunteers might not always be available when needed, leading to inconsistencies in the service.
2. **Financial Sustainability:** Sopotniki's service is free for the elderly, meaning its operation heavily relies on funding from municipalities and private sponsors. Economic downturns, changes in sponsorship, or changes in local government budgets could disrupt funding and jeopardize the sustainability of the service.

Lessons learnt

The organisational framework with local coordinators that are a focal point between elderly users and volunteers is an example of good practice and social innovation. Furthermore, the internal organisation of the Sopotniki, i.e. coordination of routes, timetables, user information, is also part of a good governance. Sopotniki operates on a flexible schedule, with volunteers contributing as their time allows. This flexible model may be a critical factor in attracting and retaining volunteers, and could be a useful approach for similar initiatives.

What is necessary to implement the MS?

1. **Campaigns to recruit and maintain an active volunteer base.**
2. **Building up skills and Training; Development or acquisition of a suitable software platform**
3. **Allocate Resources to fund the startup and operation of the service.**
4. **Identify a fleet of suitable vehicles; Cooperation with Municipalities: build trust.**
5. **Legal and Regulatory Compliance:**
6. **Public Awareness and Acceptance campaign**

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Main milestones:

