

Reflection	Interview of Mr André Régani, former Deputy Mayor of Besançon, concerning the implementation of a traffic plan in 1973 – 1974
Title	Implementation of a groundbreaking traffic plan in Besançon or how to remove obstacles to change
Keywords	Change management – Obstacles to change – Institutional communication
Origin	Witness: André Régani, former Deputy Mayor of Besançon in charge of transport, roads and traffic between 1965 and 1977. Date: November 2008. Context: 3 rd IMAGINE Seminar “ Change course! Towards a sustainable ... and desirable future ”. Written by: Hervé Maillot, January 2009.

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Related documents	Back to the table of contents Mind-map of the interview

About this document...

Energie-Cités is an association of European local authorities promoting sustainable local energy policies. The association was founded in 1990 and now represents over 1,000 towns and cities in 30 countries.

Energie-Cités has been promoting the “**IMAGINE the energy future of our cities**” initiative since 2006. Defined as a foresight platform of collaboration and exchange leading to action, the initiative is based on the acknowledgement that our current mode of development will not stand up to the new energy and climate paradigms.

The IMAGINE initiative aims at encouraging European territories to:

- Take responsibility for their energy supply and the associated impacts in natural resources, the climate and wastes.
- Prepare their future by adapting to energy and climate risks and redesigning their territorial policies on the basis of the new paradigm.

A foresight Seminar is organised on a yearly basis as part of the IMAGINE initiative. The aim of the seminar is to improve the concepts by confronting them with practical issues and to propose new avenues and methods for action.

The IMAGINE initiative also includes the “*IMAGINE Beacon regions, cities, neighbourhoods*” exhibition, as well as a blog and a discussion list as permanent supports for seminar participants to continue their discussions.

Summary

As part of his responsibilities on the Besançon City Council, André Régani was behind a number of innovations relating to mobility, traffic space and roads and public transport issues which, at that time, made the reputation of Besançon. 35 years later, they have left traces that are still visible and Besançon still holds the record for the number of passengers per bus per year in relation to the overall population (double the average of cities of a similar size). A new ambitious project is in the pipeline for a public transport system with dedicated lanes, possibly a tramway. Whereas at the time everyone was concerned with reproducing the existing rather than imagining the future, André Régani proposed a different vision. “Something has to be done”, “We cannot content ourselves with carrying on as before”, he said. A very sensible remark and one that is still highly topical.

Content

*Gérard Magnin (Energie-Cités' Executive Director):
"In what way was this traffic plan revolutionary?"*

André Régani: "What was revolutionary at the time was the consistency of the various options selected: new low traffic city centre, opening of new traffic roads around the city centre, development of the public transport system. When the city council made this decision in 1973, we focused on reaching one objective: to promote mobility and preserve the essential functionalities of the city centre whilst placing it at the service of the population and making it a pleasant place to go to. We had to develop the city around a single city centre and develop a town planning project. **We had commissioned traffic and transport plan surveys before the city council's decision. On the basis of these surveys, we realised that it would not be possible to follow purely technical conclusions and that we had to find something else to solve the problems of our city.** We, therefore, decided to ban transit traffic from the city centre while leaving drivers the possibility of accessing it. We took our inspiration from other cities like Göteborg. We went to see what was being done elsewhere, on grounds of pragmatism. We also invented a few things, like the establishment of a pedestrian precinct in what was the major access road to the city centre. This powerful decision stemmed from a powerful will: we were determined to get to the heart of the problem, we hit where it hurt, thus clearly stating our intention to give the city back to its inhabitants. Of course, this caused many tensions that we had to overcome. The consequences of this political will and its implementation in the field were quite significant as works covered a vast part of the city, and not only the city centre. This caused users a lot of difficulties. We had to make compensations and ensure that mobility and the ability to travel were maintained. This is why we gave top priority to public transport densification, both in terms of the number of services and frequencies. In 1965, 6 million passengers travelled on the network. In 1971, the figure rose to 8 million. The objective of the new traffic plan development was to double this number, which seemed impossible. In 1995, however, we broke a new record, with more than 20 million passengers."

GM: "How did the idea to change come up? What motivated your action?"

AR: "After seeing many things in many places, I realised that **traditional solutions pushed problems back without solving them.** Furthermore, when walking through the city centre with my family, I noted on several occasions that

we had to speak very loudly in order to cover the noise of the cars and that the air was barely breathable. I saw that we could not carry on like this any longer. We had to find a way to give people the possibility of moving around without all these nuisances."

GM: "What were the reactions of the Mayor and the municipal administration on reading the project?"

AR: "After giving his go-ahead, the Mayor never went back on his commitment to follow us in spite of the very strong pressures he had to bear. As for my colleagues, their attitudes and intentions were diverse. The administration was ageing at the time and tended to be opposed to change. However, by recruiting a young generation of engineers and technicians, it was possible to federate and mobilise a group around this ambitious project, a project which benefited from an essential inter-department co-ordination".

GM: "What can you tell us about the transport, road and traffic areas you were in charge of?"

AR: "During my first term of office, I was in charge of transport. It soon became clear to me that I also needed to be in charge of roads and traffic for this mission as it was inconceivable for these three sectors to be managed separately as part of the proposed project. Looking at the traffic without considering the territory on which the traffic was running was nonsense in my opinion. In addition, the three competencies all together represented an



important part of the municipal budget and this helped me in my arbitration tasks."

GM: "Did ever doubt of your capacity to achieve your mission?"

AR: "Not really, because I truly believed in it. However, I did have doubts about how easy it would be. The local press attacked the project with

a quite venomous daily campaign. From a personal point of view, there were attacks, and even threats, and I did feel tempted to give up”.

GM: “Are there things you would have liked to implement but could not as part of this project?”

AR: “Yes, electric buses for one. Following the logic of the traffic plan, we wanted to free the city centre of a number of constraints. Diesel buses were incompatible with our objectives in terms of noise, pollution and visual nuisances. Hence, the desire to introduce electric buses, at least within the city centre. However, despite the joint efforts of the EDF (the French electricity board), bus makers and our teams, this project failed”.

GM: “What advice would you give to people in the same situation as you were?”

AR: “I have no advice to give but I think that the main thing is **to believe in what you are doing, failing which it is impossible to find the necessary forces. You need to be a driver, despite all opposition, which requires some courage. You also need to be far-sighted.** The Besançon traffic plan was designed for a ten year period. We were probably far-sighted enough, since the plan remained in use for thirty years. The time dimension is essential. You also need to be able to see beyond the technical aspects of an issue. What is **essential is to have a vision that associates human and urban development in one way or another.** Finally, being half-hearted will not help you achieve valuable results in a city”.

Question from the audience (QA): “What contact did you have with the inhabitants?”

AR: “The plan included an important communication section. We knew that there would be strong opposition. My approach was that **democracy meant associating the population to the project by communicating widely and clearly, without exonerating the local authority from its responsibilities.** Based on this principle, we ensured that the city council made decisions that we could then apply and that consultations, preceded by exhibitions of the traffic plan, were

organised in each neighbourhood. The population was, therefore, informed prior to the discussions and all the partners involved were then on an equal footing as far as existing information was concerned. We held discussions, trade by trade, with the shopkeepers, who were the most opposed to the project, to identify the practical problems to be dealt with. The project was gradually accepted by the population. But the opposition was very strong! When you modify the circulation, everybody grumbles, when you change the public transport network, everybody grumbles, when you open a pedestrian precinct, everybody grumbles. So, imagine what happens when you do all three at the same time.”

QA: “Were population satisfaction surveys carried out during and after the works, in particular amongst those who were the most hostile to the project?”

AR: “Yes, of course! Quite rapidly, for that matter. In terms of communication, we tried to organise works so as to transform them into a series of events for the population. This concerned the way we planned works, carried them through and valorised them by showing what the city would look like afterwards. Cameras filmed the works as well as the intolerable and absurd situations we wanted to get rid of; the films were shown in cinemas to illustrate the progress made and the rightfulness of the project. Then, very quickly, some of the shopkeepers decided to side with the project; a situation we, of course, used to our advantage!”

QA: “Was it difficult to convince your colleagues of the need to shoot films showing the progress made and the proposed evolution?”

AR: “Yes, it was difficult. But **we dealt with the difficulties one by one. The technical unit and its staff were firm believers. The elected representatives were united by the project’s success. We wanted everybody to push in the same direction once things were under way, and when everybody pushes in the same direction, things happen”.**