Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) represent a new tool for city planning fostering effective, coordinated and consistent initiatives in European Member States (MSs) in line with the general guidelines provided by the European Commission (EC). In fact, SUMP, as stated in the EC guidelines, “should build on existing planning practices and take due consideration of integration, participation, and evaluation principles”. Indeed, a SUMP constitutes a comprehensive framework including present plans and provides a clear vision and reachable targets. Given its inherently strategic nature, it can, de facto, display substantially different forms and characteristics in each Member State. This work assesses the effective adoption of the most innovative SUMPs' principles in the different national frameworks, through a systematic comparative analysis of five key criteria.

The paper adopts a comparative approach in the analysis of the countries considered, when investigating urban planning instruments developed by national legislation and guidelines. The comparison performed is based on five, distinguishable and measurable, criteria: i) participation (stakeholders and citizens engagement), ii) policies' coordination and integration, iii) monitoring and evaluation tools, iv) long-term and sustainable vision, v) specific provisions for freight transport. In section one, the paper describes the present challenges of urban mobility policies and the Commission’s long-term strategy. Section two describes SUMP and comments it with respect to its main objectives and measure-types. Section three identifies the tools adopted by twenty-one MSs so to promote their sustainable urban planning, among all those currently put in place with specific reference to the urban transport sector. Section three also provides a literature of SUMPs' principles: participation, integration, strategy and evaluation, and urban freight planning.

Section four analyses these plans by checking for the presence of the previously selected criteria, representing the minimum requirements for SUMPs to be considered effective by the EC. The paper investigates whether the nationally available strategic planning tools, implemented before and after the publication of EC guidelines, can be considered coherent and well grounded EU principles.

The research shows in section five that only few measures put forward in SUMP’s guidelines have been formally implemented in MSs procedures, and suggests that a strong effort is still required from the Commission to reach the stated cohesion objectives. Nevertheless, the detailed inspection of the various planning tools indicates a broader understanding of SUMP by the vast majority of EU Members. Moreover, national experts, involved by the EC through its MS Expert Group on Urban Mobility, established in October 2014, are actively contributing to the dissemination of relevant best practices adopted within MSs. The paper systematically individuates the main inefficiencies at local level impeding the implementation of the new solutions envisaged in the SUMP guidelines aimed at effectively address the lack of coordination among MSs policies. The selection of five simple and easily comparable criteria, provides a new tool, useful to properly identify the areas of potential improvement. Future research will analyze the specific sources of these inefficiencies, questioning both the adequacy of the measures adopted at European level and the capacity of directly transferring them to the interested local authorities.