

NEWS- LETTER N°8

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USER

Changes and conflicts
in using public spaces

Connecting cities
Building successes



European Union
European Regional Development Fund

EDITORIAL



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After all the discussions, visits, questions and debates, now comes the time to draw together and summarise that which has gone before. The review will come later, because there is still time for productive discussions in the USER Project before its closure in April. For the time being, the project cities and our expert have embarked on a giant puzzle: collecting the fruit of two years of discussions, organising the shared knowledge and the experiences described so that we can deliver them to the public in the form of reports!

The cities will have to finish constructing their local action plans with their partners. Now they have to work out the details of how to carry out the

actions they have planned, ranking the priorities, costing the work, forming partnerships, etc.

The lead expert, with the help of all of USER network's members, will have to draw the main conclusions from our project.

We have no intention of stopping there, with "findings" or "recommendations", because it has become so patently obvious that the answers to be provided were shaped by the local context. The question of improving the way public space is used by getting the users more involved is a complex one. We have made a huge effort to understand each other, pinpoint the main challenges

to be overcome and define the policy directions we thought best suited to our cities. It is these reflections, these suggestions, illustrated by our concrete experiences in the field that form the results of the USER Project.

Now that the time has come to draw together and summarise the network's discussions, we realise just how rich and productive our experience sharing has been. Don't miss the project's final conference on 10 April to learn all about it!

Claire PREDAL
Coordinator of the *USER* project

WHAT'S NEW IN USER ?

The third and final session of the small-group workshops in three cities was held in autumn.

The progress made in mutual understanding within each group was unanimously acknowledged. It shows that three workshops were in fact necessary for the cities to gain a sound understanding of how the other pilot sites operated, and what the local action plans set out to achieve. It was during this last workshop that the partners were able to think about their practices, collectively and in depth.

WE CAN ALREADY LEARN A NUMBER OF LESSONS FROM THESE WORKSHOPS:

› **To understand a case study, actually visiting the site is far more instructive than long speeches and elaborate diagrams.** During these site visits, it is essential to meet the local stakeholders, whose point of view and experience provide invaluable input. This experience is always complementary to that of the council employees, which, though sometimes based on a contradictory discourse, is always instructive.

› **To be able to discuss core issues, i.e. review our practices in the light of other cities' experience, we must first understand the context in which these cities work.** This means understanding the issues at stake for their pilot site, along with the existing partnerships and how they work.

› In the USER Project, as in a local partnership, **it is fundamental to know the other people involved** so that everyone feels comfortable enough to express their point of view.



How to get local stakeholders involved. Visiting the site with local residents. Crakow seminar, July.

KEY THEMES OF THE THREE WORKSHOPS

In Copenhagen, the key theme of the workshop was user involvement. With Dresden and Pescara, they studied the following questions (among many others!): - :

- › What methods can be used to involve each type of user
- › How to reach an agreement among the various users (private users, public stakeholders, social stakeholders, etc.)
- › How to set up efficient participatory budgets

In Riga, the three cities (with Lublin and Malaga) discussed these two questions:

- › What tools and methods can be used to involve users in improving public spaces
- › How to organise the collaboration among the various local partners (different local council departments, associations, etc.)

In Lisbon, the discussions with Grenoble-Alpes Métropole and Crakow went into greater depth on the same theme as in the previous workshops, namely on the way to involve local residents throughout the project cycle (even in a phase of post-work follow-up). A number of thorny issues were raised:

- › Where should discussion and consultation stop? Who decides to start taking action and when?
- › How can the outcome of the discussion and consultation be transformed into a project?

The choice of workshop discussion topics was made by the cities themselves, not the lead expert. The similarity of the topics chosen is, in itself, an important lesson to be learnt from the USER Project. More specifically, when cities decide to upgrade public spaces so that better use is made of them, the problems they encounter are not questions of town planning or development. **Where cities find they lack essential know-how is in how to involve the local stakeholders and find out what users need and want, and use this input in the urban project.**

CLOSE-UP ON THE HOST CITIES' SITES



COPENHAGEN

What sets the Copenhagen pilot site apart is both its position in the city and the social project for the site. The Sundholm district has always been marginalised and cut off from the rest of the city because it used to house prisons and psychiatric hospitals. Today, the municipality is using a variety of methods to open up the area. First of all, it decided to officially recognise the presence of homeless people in the district's streets. Outdoor street furniture and shelters have been built for them to use, to help everyone accept their presence in the street and reduce the anxiety-provoking effect. It has also created shared garden space, which is cultivated by local residents with the involvement (under municipal supervision) of some of Sundholm's marginalised people. Lastly, it has launched a new housing programme in an undeveloped part of the district, with the main purpose of drawing residents from all types of social background.



The resolutely militant, participatory attitude adopted by the city of Copenhagen on this urban regeneration project has inspired many of the USER Project's member cities.

LISBON

Lisbon chose as its pilot site one of the districts in its "BIP-ZIP" urban renewal programme, the Bairro Horizonte. This is a sprawling social-housing development situated on the outskirts of the city.



The public spaces there are largely undeveloped, if not mere vacant lots, because there has never been any urban planning in this district. The main problem the city is addressing, when it comes to public spaces, is managing a participatory budget that allows local resident associations to submit proposals for developing public spaces, and carry them out with funding from the municipality. Against a backdrop of disputed land ownership rights, the city and its residents are managing to cooperate in a useful way. Based on these relationships and what has already been achieved in public spaces, the municipality is trying to establish a broader institutional partnership, involving the residents, to initiate a more comprehensive urban renewal process in the district.



RIGA

The city of Riga is working on two pilot sites.

The main site, the *Latviešu Strēlnieku* (Latvian Riflemen) Square, is right in the centre of Riga. It is situated at the entrance to the city, bordered by a university and the Occupation Museum, and it adjoins the presidential palace and the capital's city hall. However, it is not a very pleasant place, even though it is visited by large numbers of tourists on their way to the city centre. It is surrounded by buildings with no plants and very little street furniture. Much of the square is used as parking space for cars and tourist coaches, and there are no clearly-marked walkways for pedestrians to cross the square (people do not stop and linger there). The City is working on gathering the various users of the square and a broad-based institutional partnership to draw up a development plan together. The aim is to give this square the pivotal urban role it should have,



namely that of a welcoming, functional entrance to the city.

The second pilot site is a shopping street named *Spīķeru*. It is occupied by an open-air market, but is cut off from the rest of the city. The municipality is examining ways to open up this street to the surrounding districts, mainly by connecting it to the nearby city centre and the adjacent wholesale market. The aim is also to upgrade the street to make it more user-friendly and attractive.

WHAT THE *USER* NETWORK TEACHES US



As mentioned above, the main lesson to come out of these workshops is that the cities lack tools to help them **involve local residents and the users of public spaces** in general. However the discussions did yield very concrete ideas for improvements:

› “Get all of the different disciplines involved working together and establish permanent working groups. This creates real trust, which helps produce outcomes that will be more readily accepted by the citizens concerned by the project.” (Dresden, at the Copenhagen workshop)

› “It is important to find charismatic stakeholders who are known by the local people and who will help the city and the council employees to create trust. These people create ties between the city and its residents, and help establish productive cooperation.” (Crakow, at the Lisbon workshop)

› “During the workshop, there was a lot of debate about the possibility of combining a local representative assembly and certain deliberative powers. As a general rule, representative democracy should generate bottom-up initiatives, and be supplemented with local deliberative systems.” (Pescara, at the Copenhagen workshop)

In the light of this examination of citizen involvement, the USER network believes that **the traditional boundaries of urban planning need to be pushed back to achieve a genuinely effective change in public space.**

› “The traditional view of urban planning gives way to the idea of a “step by step” approach that makes it possible to factor in users’ viewpoints.” (From the lead expert’s report, Lisbon workshop)

› “Users’ practical experience should be valued and taken into account in urban planning. This approach is not only democratic but also more effective.” (From the lead expert’s report, Copenhagen workshop)

› “Plans to upgrade public spaces seem to be caught between the “micro” scale of local, on-site requirements and the “macro” scale of strategic city-scale planning.” (Grenoble-Alpes Métropole at the Lisbon workshop)

› “Effective public space renewal clearly depends on addressing the social aspects as well. Public spaces cannot be lastingly improved without at the same time tackling the underlying economic and social dimensions.” (Malaga, at the Riga workshop)



At the end of the workshop process, the cities all said they had managed to overcome their differences and discuss their common problems (or ideas!) together. With each successive meeting, it became easier to share experience:

› “Our goal should not be simply to copy-and-paste “best practices”. We should instead analyse these practices and adapt and transfer the procedures best suited to our particular city.” (Dresden, at the Copenhagen workshop)

WE CONCLUDE WITH A SELECTION OF THE QUESTIONS DISCUSSED BY THE CITIES DURING THE WORKSHOPS.

? How can we observe the new ways public space is being used, and analyse whether they require work to be done on the public space?

? How can we get stakeholders committed and involved in the long term in co-producing public space?

? What are the limits to user involvement? Should the municipality specify the non-negotiables beforehand?

? Can some users be excluded from the discussion and consultation process so that we can more easily resolve conflicts?

? How can we involve home-owners in the discussion and consultation?

? What system should we set up to monitor implementation of the local action plan?

? What is the citizens' role? What do we expect of them?

? How can we encourage users to come and take part in collective initiatives to redevelop public space?

? Do users believe that discussion and consultation will generate concrete results?

? How can we move forward when we can't get key stakeholders involved?

? How can the municipality help users feel more comfortable with public space?

EVENTS

THE USER PROJECT IS ENTERING THE FINAL STRAIGHT!

THERE ARE TWO EVENTS COMING UP.

WORK SEMINARY

06 FEBRUARY
IN PARIS

On **6 February**, the partners will gather in Paris for a brief workshop. Together we will finalise the text of the project's final deliverables, which the lead expert will have drafted beforehand. We will also decide on the thematic content of the final conference. A short but intense day's work ahead...

USER PROJECT
FINAL CONFERENCE

10 APRIL
IN GRENOBLE



On **10 April** the **USER Project** will hold its final conference in the home territory of the lead partner, **Grenoble-Alpes Métropole**. The partners will meet the day before to review the project. On 10 April, the delegations from the nine project cities will join local, national and European stakeholders for the final conference. During this event, which marks the project's closure, we will present the findings of the network's discussions, then continue with roundtable discussions to examine certain core issues from our debates in greater depth. We are counting on you all to join us!

CONTACTS

GRENOBLE-ALPES

MÉTROPOLE (Lead Partner) :

Claire PREDAL

+33 56 58 51 73

claire.predal@lametro.fr

FERNANDO BARREIRO

(Lead Expert) :

+ 34 93 201 54 74

fbarreiro@teonetwork.com

COPENHAGEN:

Pernille LEON

+45 236 941 80

CU8A@tmf.kk.dk

DRESDEN:

Bruno BULS

+49 35 14 88 35 09

bbuls@dresden.de

CRACOW :

Natalia BIERNAT

+48 692 185 566

Natalia.Biernat@um.krakow.pl

LISBON :

Miguel BRITO

+35 213 227 360

miguel.brito@cm-lisboa.pt

LUBLIN :

Monika KLOS

+48 814 662 850

mklos@lublin.eu

MALAGA :

Begona OLIVA

+34 951 928 833

programaseuropeos3@malaga.eu

PESCARA :

Cinzia LIBERATORE

+39 339 62 677 05

urbactoffice@comune.pescara.it

RIGA :

Nika KOTOVICA

+37 167 181 424

Nika.Kotovica@riga.lv