

NEWS- LETTER N°1

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USER
Changes and conflicts
in using public spaces

Connecting cities
Building successes



EDITORIAL



Grenoble-Alpes Métropole is the French lead partner of USER project. Its President Marc Baietto, and Alain Grasset, Community Councillor in charge of USER project, wish all partners a fruitful work within the USER network.

The USER Project kicked off on 1st February. This is great news for the partners, who worked together throughout 2012, discussing what each one expected of the project and rallying their teams to the USER dynamic.

Getting involved in a project to share experience across Europe takes both modesty and ambition. Modesty to take a critical look at ourselves and acknowledge that the way we do things in our own city is not necessarily the only way to tackle the problems at hand. Ambition, because it takes determination to go in search of new ideas and fresh outlooks from others, and

to innovate on the assumption that many other local authorities throughout Europe will benefit from the project.

This is why USER deliberately addresses a subject that is often neglected in its own right in urban management projects, namely the use of public spaces. More specifically, it looks at the role that users can play in managing public spaces. USER encourages cities to break out of the traditional designer/users relationship, bring down the barriers and build urban space together.

USER's partner cities are working to enhance residents' quality of life by designing public spaces that are friendlier, safer and better maintained.

We wish the USER network members a very productive three years working on the project and hope that the residents of Europe's cities will reap the benefit of their efforts.

Marc Baietto,
*President of Grenoble-Alpes
Métropole*

Alain Grasset,
*Community Councillor in charge
of USER project*

WHAT'S NEW IN USER?

The main new about USER is the beginning of the partnership's works! Being now fully structured, our 9-cities partnership will begin its experience-sharing process. We wish to capitalize on the great diversity of our network to find out common tools and recommendations European cities could make the most of.



As European cities continue to grow and change, the main challenge is to make them places where people live together. Public space, as the city's community area, becomes the centre of attention. Making the city a place for

everyone means being able to provide residents with public spaces that are friendly, peaceful and well maintained. But the way these public spaces are used changes constantly, and this can lead to problems and conflict among the users. This, in short, is what prompted the USER Project.

USER aims to come up with new solutions for designing and managing public spaces that are both adaptable and sustainable. To do this, USER gives users a key role to play in planning public spaces. We want to factor in what people who actually «use» the city, and those who maintain it on a day-to-day basis, know from experience. We hope USER will teach us to draw on users' experience for a better understanding of the conflicts, so that we can adapt urban renewal projects accordingly.

USER's nine partner cities have joined forces to work on a common project: «produce successful public spaces» built to reflect the various local urban issues.

Public spaces in old, culturally-significant city centres

- › Lublin (Poland)
- › Malaga (Spain)
- › Riga (Latvia)

Single-use peripheral zones built in the 1970s-1980s

- › Krakow (Poland)
- › Grenoble-Alpes Métropole (France, lead partner)
- › Lisbon (Portugal)

Pericentral zones to be opened up and connected to the city

- › Copenhagen (Denmark)
- › Dresden (Germany)
- › Pescara (Italy)

The USER Project was officially selected by the URBACT Monitoring Committee on 28 January 2013. The project implementation phase began on 1 February 2013 and will run through to April 2015.

THE USER NETWORK WILL MEET NINE TIMES OVER THE 27 MONTHS OF THE PROJECT, IN THREE PHASES :

› Learning :

03 knowledge-sharing seminars;

› Implementation:

03 workshops organised in groups of three cities with similar problems;

› Knowledge-building:

03 knowledge-building and dissemination seminars, including the USER Project Final Conference (in April 2015).

Grenoble-Alpes Métropole (France) is responsible for operational project management. Fernando Barreiro, an expert in urban management issues, will provide support throughout the project, contributing to network discussions and helping the cities set up their local action plan.

UNDERSTANDING USER

USER partnership will strive to replace users at the hearth of public spaces design and management. The path towards “good” public spaces shall be clarified and facilitated, in order for partner cities to follow it at their local level.

The USER Project focuses on public space. Public space can be seen as more than just the physical space owned by the state based on property regulations. It is the space owned by all, and which, from a socio-cultural point of view, is the community expression of the contact and communion among individuals. The multiple dimension of urban space can, therefore, be appreciated not only in the quality of its physical form but also in the intensity and quality of the social relations it facilitates, in its potential to foster group and individual interactions, and in its capacity to encourage symbolic identification.

A core USER idea is that the design of urban public spaces and the main goals of urban planning are challenged by rapid changes in how cities are used. New trends in how pu-



blic spaces are used, what the new users' needs are, increasing malfunctions and conflicts among uses, etc., are challenging the way the city is usually “produced”, designed and managed. This approach entails a process of user involvement as a crucial dimension of the whole process. Because “user experience” is one of the main inputs to understand how the

spaces are used and what kind of conflicts are taking place. That is why each city participating in USER will build a local partnership with the “user community” and a local experimentation to evaluate uses, to propose improvements in uses, and to link this evaluation of uses with the daily maintenance, design and planning of public spaces.

THE USER PROJECT HAS THREE MAIN GOALS:

- › Friendlier and more interactive social-public spaces by solving malfunctions and conflicting uses,
- › Safer public spaces in a friendlier city and
- › Cleaner, better-maintained and upgraded public spaces for a more efficient city

These three goals will shape USER experimentation at the different levels. They will become the yardstick for measuring the achievement of a “good public space”. Each one will be associated with several indicators that will be built by all the USER partners in collaboration.

USER'S STRATEGY WILL BE DEVELOPED AT FOUR DIFFERENT LEVELS.

Transnational exchanges, sharing and learning. Thematic seminars focused on each of the planned USER themes : conflicts in using public space, safety in public spaces and management of public spaces.

A “peer review process”, where cities can learn, compare and generate knowledge on the basis of local practices, will be held in workshops grouping three cities.

USER at local level, finding solutions to malfunctions and changes in public spaces and mobilising users. Local action plans and local support groups will be launched and consolidated in each partner city. At local level, the LAPs (Local Action Plans) should be the main output of an experimentation process to test in a practical way a pilot process of improving the uses of public spaces in the city.

Capitalising knowledge and findings for dissemination at European level.

NEXT STEPS

The first USER event will be our first seminar, hosted in April by the city of Copenhagen. This seminar will lay the foundations of our 27-months experience-sharing process.

The USER Project's first seminar, on the topic of «Conflicts, dysfunctions and changes in public spaces», will be held in Copenhagen on 18 and 19 April 2013. It will be an opportunity for the various partners to share their knowledge and experience on the subject. The seminar will endeavour to provide methods for observing and analysing the various types of conflicts in public spaces, and share experiences that have helped defuse the situations and resolve conflicting uses.



THIS WILL BE THE FIRST OF THE THREE KNOWLEDGE-SHARING MEETINGS. THE GOAL OF THE GATHERINGS IS TO GRADUALLY EQUIP THE CITIES WITH TOOLS TO IMPROVE THEIR HANDLING OF PUBLIC SPACES:

- › **«Conflicts, dysfunctions and changes in public spaces» :**
learning to identify conflicts
- › **«Achieving more peaceful public spaces» :**
dispelling the tensions identified in public spaces to make them peaceful and safe
- › **«Improving public space management» :**
factoring in the changing uses and the constraints of public spaces to provide better day-to-day management.

THE PROVISIONAL SEMINAR PROGRAMME IS AS FOLLOWS :

THURSDAY 18 APRIL	<p>Morning : Public conference on the seminar topic with two experts from outside the USER Project.</p> <p>Afternoon : On-site visits to public spaces in Copenhagen with starkly conflicting uses</p>	FRIDAY 19 APRIL	<p>Morning : Workshops among the partners: more extensive discussion of the topic.</p> <p>Afternoon : Presentation of the project methods by the expert in charge of USER, and administrative questions</p>
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A researcher from the CSTB (a French national public research establishment in the construction and urban planning sector) specialised in urban management will be present at the seminar to give the USER partners information about methods and analysis techniques.

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