

NEWS- LETTER N°3

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USER

Changes and conflicts
in using public spaces

Connecting cities
Building successes



EDITO



Lublin. New uses experimentation on USER pilot sites

Today USER is making progress as a working group of cities focused on and engaged in “achieving successful public spaces”. Public spaces are the realm of citizenship - where people meet and interact. The USER cities are convinced that successful public spaces are convivial, accessible, safe, interactive and multifunctional places where people reinforce the feeling of belonging and the sense of community.

The two thematic seminars already held in Copenhagen (April) and Riga (July) were a valuable opportunity to discuss, exchange and learn together about uses and users of public spaces with a view to achieving

good public spaces. Striving for successful public spaces entails several challenges: among other things, new conflicts between different categories of users with different interests will emerge and new dilemmas may appear. The Riga thematic seminar was a wonderful opportunity to discuss “safer public spaces” and how to handle the dilemma between controlled and open public spaces.

At the same time, USER is making progress with “local trials” in each city, where the methodological issues become very relevant: how public spaces are currently used, who uses them, how we identify malfunctions and conflicts in public spaces,

how to involve users in finding solutions, what kind of solutions should be developed, etc. The cities have already launched their local support groups, involving different categories of stakeholders and users.

Preparing for the three city workshops is now the main activity within USER. Over the next months, the workshops will give USER partners an opportunity to deepen their experience-sharing by comparing their respective local strategies and the processes for drawing up their local action plans

Fernando Barreiro,
lead expert of USER project

WHAT'S NEW IN USER?

The USER project is entering a new phase!



Riga. Riflemen square, USER pilot site

After the first two thematic seminars, the nine USER project cities will now meet in subgroups of three cities to work on comparable public spaces. This means holding three parallel meetings, on three separate occasions during the project. Each USER city will host its two partner cities for a workshop !

The aim of these workshops is for the cities to :

- › Get to know the other cities' pilot sites and understand the issues they are addressing;
- › Share their experience in a targeted way, based on the practices observed and the requirements, in a peer review approach;
- › Discuss how they go about constructing their local action plan, take advantage of the other cities' viewpoints and advice, and draw inspiration from the partner cities' experience to enhance their own action plan.

THE FIRST WORKSHOPS WILL TAKE PLACE IN AUTUMN IN THE FOLLOWING CITIES:

LUBLIN : Poland	KRAKOW : Poland	PESCARA : Italy
16 — 17	14 — 15	21 — 22
OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	NOVEMBER



LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE USER NETWORK

The Riga seminar gathered USER partners together to discuss «safer public spaces».

Safety in public spaces is usually understood in terms of policing, i.e. safety from physical assault, video surveillance and the presence of police officers. But the USER project wants to go further and look at the feeling of insecurity that users can experience in public spaces, whether or not there are objective grounds for that feeling. How do we design public spaces in which users will not feel afraid? What uses should we support so that public spaces are conducive to socializing, and not a source of anxiety? These are the questions that were discussed at the second thematic seminar in Riga, which revolved around the presentation by Paul Landauer, a French architect specialised in safety in open spaces.

The feeling of insecurity influences people's behaviour and whether or not they want to use a public space.

To make people feel safe, the urban aspect and the human aspect are intertwined. A public space that is poorly maintained, confined or, on the contrary, too exposed is a source of anxiety. Similarly, a well-used public space in which people socialize is often a public space that works well. We need to address both of these aspects to make users feel safe, and not consider only the material aspect, as is often the case.

We have to strike the right balance between the objective need to make spaces safe, the need to keep them attractive even so, and the need to make users feel more responsible for the way public spaces are used. The photos below illustrate this problem.



Malaga. Can the image of insecurity conveyed by the damaged building facades be rectified by making the owner-inhabitants feel more responsible?



Istanbul : the way the benches are laid out in public spaces is a way of controlling social interaction and whether people stop in the space: when benches are scarce, there is little social interaction and people do not stay long. How many benches should there be, and how should they be laid out to ensure that a public space works well from a social viewpoint?



Copenhagen. «Eyes on the street» (Jane Jacobs): the feeling of safety in an open space also depends on the fact that people can see what is going on in the street, especially from neighbouring buildings.

An over-emphasis on safety: is over-regulating usage likely to restrict and discourage usage and social interaction? How can we make users feel more responsible for how public spaces are used, instead of relying on physical measures?

The overwhelming conclusion of the discussions at the Riga seminar was that we should first think about how to get people to use public space together, instead of immediately thinking of physical measures to make it safer.

WALKING DIAGNOSIS

Participants were able to apply the observation method known as a «walking diagnosis». This is a method used to observe, on the spot, how a particular location is used and how the location could be improved, and to build a diagnosis that all of the stakeholders agree on.

The purpose of a walking diagnosis is «to learn to see together». In a public space, for example, the aim is to gather local residents, users, public space managers, public policy-makers, elected representatives, etc. in order to observe the public space together. Their observation

can focus on: how the spaces are designed and equipped, the urban atmospheres; management of urban space, housing and facilities; uses, practices, signs of social life, etc.

During the visit, participants each note their observations on an observation grid.

They then discuss their observations and build a shared diagnosis of the site's improvement points and potential. Because it was drawn up collectively, this shared diagnosis proves to be a very solid basis for designing actions in the future.

URBACT PROGRAMME EVENTS



Dublin Trinity College. Photo credit: URBACT programme.

URBACT Summer University

Four USER project cities and the lead expert took part in the **URBACT Summer University** held from 28 to 30 August in Dublin, Ireland.

A total of 300 people from 150 cities and 26 countries gathered to discuss urban planning policies, with input from experts, and work on methods for constructing local action plans (based on a simulation of a Local Support Group in the fictional city of Allium).

The summer university is an excellent way for the cities to step back and take a critical look at their own practices, think about the activities of the Local Support Group, and take full advantage of the methodological input from URBACT.

Here is some feedback from URBACT partners who attended :

« It was a wonderful experience to know the opinions of other people - experts in city planning and management. What was really surprising was that many of us found similar solutions to Allium's public space problems, but the ways to achieve the goal in many cases were different. It was an amazing experience. »

Monika Klos, Lublin

« My main conclusion after the URBACT Summer University is that Riga has not yet experienced such beneficial, intensive stakeholder involvement. It is vital to involve all stakeholders as well as users of public spaces in the early stages of planning processes. And we have to remember that all our efforts and work to create more lively, convivial and interesting public places must address the needs of the people using the public spaces, especially those which are important for the local community. »

Ilze Rudzate, Riga

TRAINING SESSION FOR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

URBACT ran its second **training session for elected representatives** in Brussels on 16 and 17 September.

Elected representatives from four USER project member cities - Grenoble-Alpes Métropole, Riga, Pescara and Copenhagen - took part in the session. After the initial session in April on the integrated approach, this time the elected re-

presentatives worked on the participatory approach (i.e. involving the stakeholders) and social innovation.

Support from local elected representatives is essential to ensure the solidity of the local action plan, and their active participation in this training session shows that the USER project can count on their backing !

CONTACTS

GRENOBLE-ALPES

MÉTROPOLE (lead partner) :

> Claire PREDAL,
+33 56 58 51 73

claire.predal@lametro.fr

> Fernando BARREIRO

(Lead Expert),

+ 34 93 200 27 15

fbarreiro@teonetwork.com

COPENHAGEN :

Sia BOESEN,
+45 326 302 90

A32Z@tmf.kk.dk

DRESDEN :

Bruno BULS
+49 35 14 88 35 09

bbuls@dresden.de

KRAKOW :

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 33 96 26 77 05

urbactoffice@comune.pescara.it

RIGA :

Nika KOTOVIKA
+37 167 181 424

Nika.Kotovica@riga.lv