

NEWS- LETTER Nº7

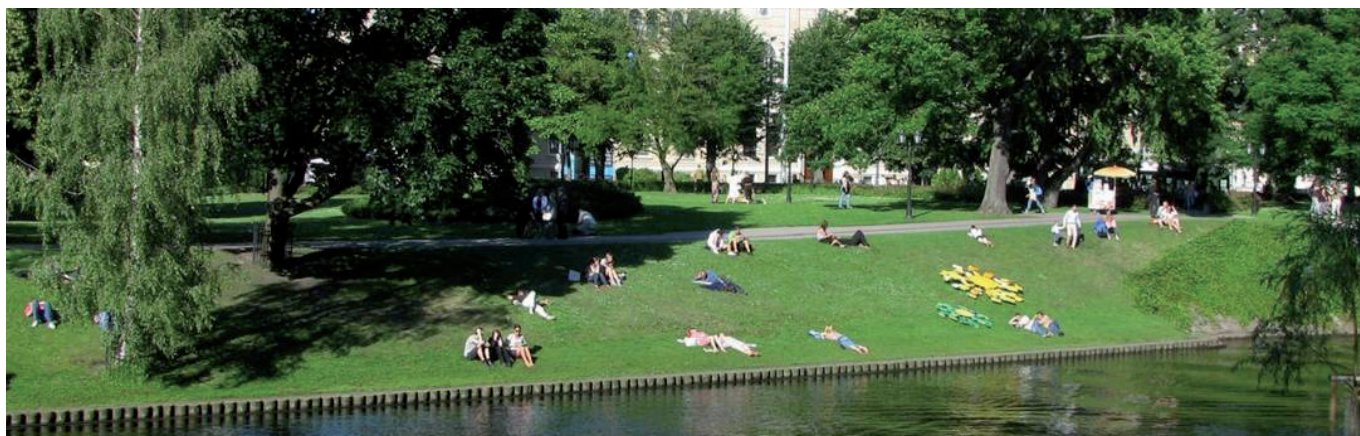
SEPTEMBER 2014

 **USER** MALAGA
Changes and conflicts
in using public spaces

Connecting cities
Building successes



EDITORIAL



Public space regeneration has been at the heart of recent changes in Riga city environment. Growing community interest in the urban lifestyle has encouraged the municipality to develop new public spaces and improve the existing ones.

Positive community feedback has acted as a driving force for further public space enhancements, and a number of successful neighbourhood public space development projects have been implemented. Moreover, these public and private initiatives have highlighted a need to revise existing municipal public space development policies and routine maintenance practices. The overall development of urban public space is guided by efforts to integrate many fragmented activities into a single master plan.

In the beginning of 2013, development of the new Riga territory planning was undertaken. This document aims, among other things, to enhance

transformation of the functional city territories to provide a diverse, lively, attractive, functional and safe urban environment. At the same time, Riga became a partner of the URBACT project “USER - Changes and conflicts in using public spaces” in order to continue work on public space regeneration and gain a better understanding of efficient public space management practices.

In addition, the Riga Sustainable Development Strategy-2030 lays the groundwork for a harmonious spatial structure of nature areas and urban public space. It suggests a complex approach to improving living conditions in the city, including such measures as establishing a network of urban public spaces, streamlining mobility for pedestrians and cyclists, reducing motor vehicle traffic in the city centre, etc.

Consequently, a comprehensive city-scale Public Space Thematic plan is being drawn up to address urban

green space, city waterways, waterfronts, streets and squares.

The selected approach includes public space diagnosis through analysis of its users' needs. It is largely based on the USER approach, ensuring diverse and responsive user involvement in all stages of planning.

The USER project in Riga therefore enhances the improvement of public spaces in a much broader context than selected USER pilot sites.

Irbe KARULE
Riga USER Project Coordinator

WHAT'S NEW IN *USER* ?

THE FIRST KNOWLEDGE-BUILDING SEMINAR HAS BEEN HELD IN CRACOW

The city of Cracow hosted the USER network's partner cities on 3 and 4 July 2014 for this important stage of the USER Project.



Work session with Peter Woodward

USER's role, as a working group and think-tank, is to identify what it sees as the fundamental issues for public spaces in the network's cities and bring them to the attention of European cities generally. These issues will serve as **the basis for the USER Project's findings and final deliverables**.

The Cracow seminar was an opportunity to together think about, clarify, organise, nuance and readjust the issues covered to date in the USER network. There was also lively debate about the format and content of the final deliverables. The discussions were chaired by Peter Woodward, an expert in facilitating town planning and participatory issues.

No final decision has as yet been made on the definition of USER's findings. The third round of workshops will be held in October next and progress has been made on the LAPs (Local Action Plans). All of these activities are valuable opportunities to share the network's knowledge and refine its findings.

The Cracow seminar was also a chance to **work on certain issues in greater depth**, where necessary, with three partners from different subgroups joining forces for each thematic round table. A half-day led by Peter Woodward was also spent discussing how to get users and residents committed to and actively involved in improving public spaces.

A more detailed account of our study and discussions can be found in the next section!



On-site activity at Azory with residents and students

WHAT THE *USER* NETWORK TEACHES US

GETTING RESIDENTS INVOLVED IN IMPROVING PUBLIC SPACES

Residents' involvement is vital in developing public spaces. Who better than the residents can talk about what they need, say what is not working, and suggest improvements? It is the residents who actually use the public spaces and their expert practical knowledge is invaluable.

The majority of the partner cities reported that it was difficult to involve residents in the process of developing public spaces. The most difficult part was getting users to actively participate in the project. The partners agreed on a number of guidelines for fostering involvement: go to meet residents locally, hold informal meetings (outdoors, for example), be flexible and use a variety of formats, choose times to suit the target audience (families, elderly people, people who work), etc.

Even so, it can sometimes be hard to get people involved if they are not convinced by the end result.

What's more, technicians and residents do not have the same understanding of the project because they are approaching it with different time frames, experience and knowledge. These differences breed disillusion and disappointment, especially as town planners cannot deliver everything the residents might have liked. Technicians must learn to use a common language, for example with the help of experienced associations that know how to communicate with members of the community. A public space development project is a long process - longer than residents' time scale - and this discourages many participants. This problem could be

addressed by breaking the project down into smaller actions that produce visible results in the short or medium term. This would have the added advantage of showing that it does not necessarily take heavy investments to improve public spaces.

Many questions have yet to be addressed and will be discussed at subsequent workshops. For example: are the residents and associations involved in the project legitimate representatives of those who use the public spaces? Do they represent the full diversity of users? To what extent should residents be involved: information, consultation, participation, co-production?



RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT (DRESDEN)

Over and above the local referendums or public consultation required by law before town planning schemes can be approved, Dresden has developed a variety of formats to get residents involved, depending on the type of project.

Dresdner Debatte is a new form of open, public dialogue on urban development issues. It draws on both online and on-site participation. The Infobox (set up in a red container) is installed in a public space and provides a place where the population can find information and leave their comments and ideas.

For smaller projects, residents are involved through forums, analysis by walking around, and workshops. It can include building aspects, as in the redevelopment of the Lindenplatz public space.

However, this type of consultation sometimes shows its limitations. For example, when there were plans to develop a vacant block into a playground, a public consultation was organised, but the vast majority of the participants were elderly people and the project was challenged. In the end, their opinions were not followed, the playground was built and it has since proved popular with families.



Resident involvement in the redevelopment of the Lindenplatz public space - Outdoor, on-site meetings

BUILDING A LOCAL PARTNERSHIP

Resident involvement, in itself, is no guarantee that public spaces will be developed in the best possible manner. Building a partnership with the various local stakeholders has proved to be just as vital. From the workers involved in its upkeep to local shopkeepers, and from associations to social landlords, all of these stakeholders have their own specific expertise in the use of public spaces.

Given the wide variety of USER Project pilot sites (type of public space, institutional organisation, etc.), there is no one-size-fits-all way of building this type of partnership. However, the partners have agreed on a number of basic principles.

The municipality has a role to play as mediator. It has to deal with a variety of interests and perspectives, and

try to find solutions that will draw people together in agreement. This is a slow process that consists in forging ties and overcoming obstacles. To foster synergies, it is important to share information and build mutual trust.

BUILDING LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS (GRENOBLE-ALPES MÉTROPOLE)

› Renaudie (Saint-Martin-d'Hères): one step at a time

This local partnership was built through a technical committee made up of the municipality of Saint-Martin-d'Hères, the social landlord Opac38, the institutional and financial partners, and the co-owned parking space management agent. Based on a common acknowledgement of the problems experienced with the public space, the committee drew up an initial project to make the Etienne Grappe sector more residential and hence more attractive. A shared diagnosis by the professionals concerned and the residents yielded three top-priority work packages for the outdoor spaces: restructure the parking spaces as covered, off-street parking, redevelop Allée Etienne Grappe, and alter the household-waste collection points on Allée Jean Wiener.

The decision process is complicated at the Renaudie site because of its distinctive architecture and the resulting land-management issue, along with the various decision-making bodies of the main stakeholders (the municipality, Opac38, and the co-ownership bodies).



Place Etienne Grappe



› Ile de Mars/Olympiades (Pont-de-Claix): develop an existing partnership process by involving more residents

The redevelopment of the Ile de Mars/Olympiades district relies heavily on a partnership involving a variety of stakeholders: the Pont-de-Claix municipality, the two social landlords, the social welfare centres, the co-ownership management agents, associations and the residents. The partnership is structured around a number of bodies set up as the project unfurled: a steering committee, a technical committee, thematic monitoring committees and working groups. Each of these bodies involves different stakeholders (elected representatives, professionals and residents) and allows different levels of discussion. The current organisation is based on a structure that existed before the project, but which has been adjusted to work more closely with associations and get residents more involved. As a result, even if the project is led by the town planning department, the "community life" teams are also very active in leading the process of working on and discussing the town-planning project.

Afternoon tea with children from the after-school care programme in the communal gardens

THEMATIC ROUND TABLES

At the Cracow seminar, the partners were able to discuss an issue that was important for them but which did not necessarily concern the whole network. These discussions took the form of round tables involving a partner from each subgroup ("public spaces to be connected up with the rest of the city", "social housing districts" and "public spaces in old, culturally-significant city centres"). Each topic was summed up by a spokesperson to share the knowledge gained.

CAR PARKING IN PUBLIC SPACES (CRACOW, PESCARA AND RIGA)

The cities face relatively different parking issues. In some cases, the area set aside for parking is too large, at the expense of public walkways. At the other end of the spectrum, allocating too small a number of parking spaces leads to "illegal" occupation of public space as motorists park on footpaths, lawns, etc.

In an attempt to find appropriate solutions, however, all of the cities are taking a similar approach, based on sustainable development principles. For the sake of consistency, the solution has to be part of a broader strategic plan for transport and travel.

These solutions are complex and entail offering an alternative to private cars. One of the long-term priorities is to change citizens' mentalities.



Parking problems in public spaces (Riga)

TEMPORARY USES (COPENHAGEN, LISBON, MALAGA AND PESCARA)

Why is public space unoccupied? Is it a problem? Should we design a new use, or do nothing? Municipalities can become temporary users with a view to building innovative, strategic developments. Temporary uses fall into one of three categories: flexible uses; a stage prior to a more permanent use; or a way of developing a permanent use.

They are an opportunity for town planners and residents to get to know what the various groups think, and learn to accept each other. They are a source of inspiration and motivation that can make people want to use the public space. This is because temporary uses make it possible to demonstrate the various needs and possibilities for using public spaces, and show how enjoyable a public space can be. This strengthens or even creates an identity for the public space. Collective projects such as these can also be an opportunity to change development policies and mentalities. The choice of materials and architecture is guided by the principles of flexibility, low cost, recycling, reuse, and so on.

Temporary uses can, however, run up against a variety of obstacles, the main one being cleanliness (sometimes private/public). Decision-makers can be afraid of losing control, especially if the project has little structure or organisation.



Benches and flower beds for homeless people in Sundholm (Copenhagen)

INCREASING ACTIVITY IN AND USE OF PUBLIC SPACES (DRESDEN, GRENOBLE-ALPES MÉTROPOLE AND LUBLIN)

Efforts to increase activity levels in a public space should use the existing resources, experience and synergies bound up in the identity of the city or even the district. If the focus is on local practices, both users and operators will be more inclined to get involved in bringing public spaces to life.

Before this sort of initiative can be taken, any areas of conflict must be identified and resolved: ownership of the public space, accessibility and the various needs (of residents, visitors, and environmental protection). It is essential to make a distinction between permanent users and passing users in order to avoid the NIMBY (Not in my back yard) effect. The goal is to identify the real social needs, but without exaggerating them or doing more than necessary to liven up the public space.

But should we always try to liven up public spaces? Can't public spaces be quiet places without social interaction? What role do ecological considerations play here? Shouldn't we sometimes avoid overcrowded places that threaten ecosystems?



Special event in Kochanowski Square, with poems attached to apples (Lublin)

EVENTS

THIRD ROUND OF WORKSHOPS

THE LAST DISCUSSIONS IN SUBGROUPS OF THREE CITIES WILL TAKE PLACE IN OCTOBER:

02-03

**OCTOBER
IN COPENHAGEN**

The group on "public spaces to be connected up with the rest of the city"

09-10

**OCTOBER
IN LISBON**

The group on "social housing districts"

16-17

**OCTOBER
IN RIGA**

The group on "public spaces in old, culturally-significant city centres"

These workshops will be an opportunity to explore new issues in relation to public spaces, and consolidate the local action plans. The cities are quite familiar now with the partners in their subgroup, so we can look forward to some absorbing discussions!



THE SECOND AND FINAL KNOWLEDGE-BUILDING SEMINAR

The USER network's last seminar before the final conference in April will be held in Paris. The meeting is scheduled for late January.

Following on from the Cracow seminar, the meeting will set out to consolidate and finalise the USER Project's findings and final deliverables.

A WORD FROM PERNILLE LEON, THE NEW PROJECT LEADER IN COPENHAGEN

"The 1st of September I started as new project leader in Copenhagen, as Sia BOESEN has now departed for a new job. I have been working in the renewal in the area since the end of 2013. I am excited to work with this project in the same neighbourhood and meeting you all, some of you I will meet soon for the 3rd workshop. I will be looking forward to work, bounce ideas and finish the project in Copenhagen."



BARRIOS DE LA TRINIDAD Y PERCHEL NORTE: STEPS FORWARD A USER LAP



Grupos observación directa

En este sentido durante este año se han desarrollado Foros temáticos con los miembros del grupo de acción local, seguidos de visitas de campos, en las que se han practicado técnicas de Observación directa de los espacios públicos a estudiar. Dicha información, junto a los encuentros con vecinos y jóvenes del barrio, han culminado en la celebración

de Foros temáticos en los que se trabajaron la identificación y el análisis de los problemas, causas y efectos que tienen lugar en los barrios.

Además se han instalado buzones físicos en varios puntos del barrio para recoger las distintas opiniones de cualquier vecino y/o usuarios de los barrios.

Fruto de todas estas actividades, los distintos grupo de trabajo, han elaborado de forma conjunta y consensuada, el documento presentado para su análisis, revisión y aprobación como definitivo.



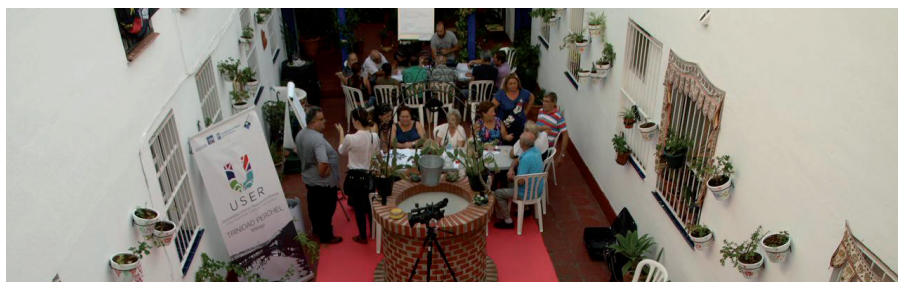
Reunión Vecinos Barrio del Perchel Norte

Los días 24 y 25 de abril del presente año, tuvimos la ocasión de acoger en Málaga la segunda reunión de trabajo ("Workshop"), recibiendo a las ciudades socias del sub-grupo dentro del proyecto USER, al que Málaga pertenece sobre proyectos desarrollados en centros históricos. Así junto a representantes de las ciudades de Lublin (Polonia) y Riga (Letonia), y el experto externo del proyecto, un grupo de miembros del Grupo de Acción Local USER, compartieron informaciones e intercambiaron experiencias. Durante estas dos intensas Jornadas también hubo tiempo para que conocieran parte de la cultura, gastronomía y floclore de Málaga y de ambos barrios.

A finales del mes de Julio 2014, la empresa encargada de la capitalización de resultados del programa URBACT, contactó con los responsables del proyecto en Málaga, porque estaban interesados en publicar un artículo sobre el proyecto USER en los barrios Trinidad y Perchel, en el Boletín de noticias del propio programa URBACT. El texto hace un repaso histórico de ambos barrios y nombra los Corrales como una buen ejemplo de gestión de espacios públicos-privados por los vecinos. Finalmente también menciona el proyecto Re-Block, que está siendo desarrollado en el barrio de la Palma en el marco del mismo programa URBACT.

Podeis consultarlo en el siguiente link:

<http://urbact.eu/en/news-and-events/view-one/news/?entryId=5359>



Reunión vecinos barrio de la Trinidad

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