

# NEWS- LETTER Nº9

APRIL 2015



USER MALAGA

Changes and conflicts  
in using public spaces

Connecting cities  
Building successes



European Union  
European Regional Development Fund

## EDITORIAL



*Christophe FERRARI, President of Grenoble-Alpes Métropole, welcomes the delegates from the USER project*

The USER Project highlighted a wide variety of challenges entailed in improving public spaces in our cities. Town planning alone no longer seems to be the answer to city dwellers' needs. Analysis of the people who use public spaces suggests that we need to make cities and their public spaces more multifunctional. People use and experience public spaces in different ways: from mere subsistence to meeting other people, including functional uses and involvement in group activities. Some people, however, see public spaces as dangerous and disturbing, so prefer to confine themselves to private spaces.

Public space is where people interact with what is "in common" or shared. As the USER network's discussions progressed, urban social life emerged as a key discussion topic, overshadowing questions of urban

form or spatial layout. We saw that municipalities are rather at a loss, faced with the need for integrated approaches to improving public spaces, which would mean getting town planners, social workers, specialists in the local economy, the municipal police force and others pulling together to address the issues collectively. Moreover, it takes more than urban form to make a public space user-friendly, accessible and fit for purpose. The way the space is managed and maintained is also fundamentally important, and has to be adapted to changes in the way the space is used. This requires understanding, and sometimes influencing, the ways in which public space is used - which is not an easy task.

In any case, the professionals dealing with the question of public spaces should change the way they go about it and shift the focus to the

human aspects: the way people behave and interact socially. The USER Project has drawn cities' attention to the need to remove the barriers between town-planning and people-centred considerations.

To sum up, public spaces reflect the different aspects of urban life - mobility, leisure, the arts, shops and businesses, meetings, etc. - but they also underscore any problems arising from a lack of safety, conflicting interests, stigmatisation or a fear of difference. One of the main messages of the USER Project is that public spaces, whatever they are used for, must be endowed with an identity and adopted by the users so that they can become tools for inclusion and social cohesion.

**Fernando Barreiro**  
*lead expert of the USER Project*

# WHAT'S UP IN *USER* ?

After 27 months of discussion, learning, visits and local projects, the USER Project came to a close on 10 April 2015 at the closing conference held at Grenoble-Alpes Métropole (France).



*The USER Project's final conference*

## THE NINE EUROPEAN CITIES INVOLVED IN THE USER PROJECT ALL ATTENDED THE SEMINAR.

On the first day, 9 April, the project participants visited the pilot sites of Pont de Claix and Saint-Martin d'Hères, as well as another site in Grenoble (Teisseire district). We also spent a lot of time collectively evaluating the USER Project (see below).

The USER Project's closing public conference took place on 10 April. We decided not to spend the day simply presenting the outcomes of the USER Project, but to take the opportunity of this final seminar to continue exchanging our experience. This is why we picked the topic of involving local residents as the focus of the day's discussions.

### MORE SPECIFICALLY:

- By the end of the USER Project, the question of local residents' participation in public space improvement projects had emerged as a key discussion topic. During the first round of workshops in autumn 2014, the three subgroups of cities spontaneously decided to focus their discussions on this topic.

- In France, there is considerable discussion at the moment about setting up community councils in high-priority districts. Resident involvement is a very topical issue, and input from a European network such as USER is valuable.

This conference was an opportunity to close the project on a subject with a tangible bearing on the region involved, by addressing the following question:

**"Co-producing public spaces: a question of urban form and community involvement?"**

Ninety participants attended the seminar, which was divided up into presentations of the project's outcomes, presentations by experts and elected representatives of the USER cities, and workshop discussions between USER cities and professionals from Grenoble.



*Final seminar: small-group discussion of the USER Project review*

The outcomes of the USER Project (conclusions, local experiences, etc.) have been summed up by Fernando Barreiro, (lead expert of the USER Project) in a final report, which is available on-line: <http://urbact.eu/file/9715/download?token=irkEkga0>

The report also presents the local action plans of the nine cities in the USER Project.

**Now it is up to each city to ensure that the end of the project marks the beginning of new ventures.** The cities and their partners have to put their action plan into practice, and the knowledge generated has to be incorporated into the local projects. This is the starting point for the project to bear fruit in the nine partner cities' public spaces!

# MESSAGES FROM THE USER PROJECT

The USER Project's final report cannot be adequately summed up in such a short newsletter, so don't hesitate to go and read the online version!

However, we are listing the eight ideas that have emerged from the network's discussions, and which we are submitting to all those - professionals, elected representatives and local residents - who are working on improving the use of public space.

## 8 IDEAS FOR INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE PUBLIC SPACES IN OUR CITIES

### 01 TRANSIENT USES

Transient uses and developments are a good way to test new uses and new urban forms while encouraging users to get involved.

### 04 HELP USERS FEEL AT HOME IN PUBLIC SPACES

It is easier to use a place when you feel you belong there. Cities should give public spaces a stronger identity and help users adopt them as their own.

### 02 SEPARATE PUBLIC SPACES AND PRIVATE SPACES

Users will make better use of a site if there are clear boundaries between public spaces and private spaces.

### 05 FORM PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC SPACES

Each partner - including the users - involved in managing and maintaining public spaces should have a clearly defined role.

### 03 MAKE PUBLIC SPACES MORE FRIENDLY

Public spaces need to be inclusive so that all users can co-exist there while still experiencing the city in their own way.

### 06 PROMOTE AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

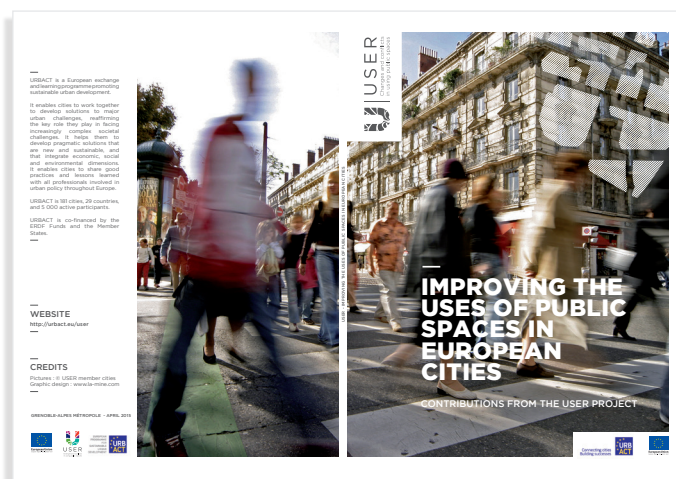
Because the problems associated with the use of public spaces stem from a wide variety of socio-urban factors, any action to improve public spaces has to be integrated.

### 07 USERS AS THE STARTING POINT

It is fundamental to consider users and their uses as the starting point for any work on improving public spaces, but this requires professionals to change their stance on the matter.

### 08 ENCOURAGE LOCAL RESIDENTS TO GET ACTIVELY INVOLVED

We can change the urban form, but if the local residents are not actively involved in the changes to public space, they are unlikely to change the way they use these public spaces.





# PROJECT REVIEW

Closing a project also means taking an objective look at our activities and the discussions we had, and rereading our local actions in the light of these two years of participation in the USER Project.

We thought it was important to collectively review the USER Project so that the participants could think about what they had learnt and what they could take away with them and apply in their future work on public spaces and European projects.

## THE MAIN POINTS TO COME OUT OF THE REVIEW ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- All of the participants came away with the same opinion: everyone involved in the USER Project had had a similar experience.
- There was a very strong feeling that participants had **learnt something in terms of opening up** to other ways of tackling the job, other ways of conducting town-planning and social welfare policies, other ideas on the relationship with users, and other cultures.
- It was very beneficial to have other people's views on our own practices: it made us **question** what we did and rethink things we had taken for granted.



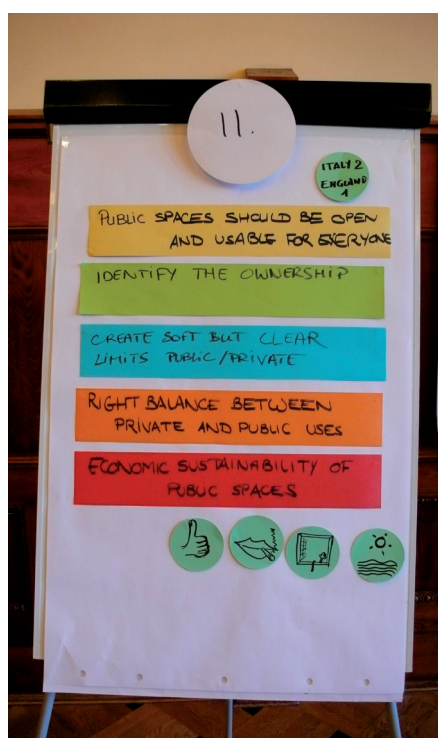
Site visits: vital first-hand learning

- The partners pointed out that **it was only a year and a half into the project that they felt they really understood what the other cities were undertaking** on their pilot sites, and that the organisation in subgroups of three cities had been particularly helpful in this respect. It was only when we had really come to know each other that we were able to tackle the major issues and discuss the practical aspects of what we were doing. Two messages:

- It takes longer than expected to acquire a sound understanding of the other cities' pilot sites and action plans. The site visits are indispensable for this, and the organisation in subgroups makes it easier to get to know the others.
- **Mutual understanding is possible!** Once we are familiar with the urban, technical and political context in which the other cities work, we can move beyond general issues and **discuss the actual methods and tools** each city uses to solve a common problem.

- The people who took part in the European seminars found it difficult to pass on the outcome of these seminars to their local partners.
- It is a **very complicated to establish a local action plan that is specific to the USER Project** when often the cities have already brought in a broader strategy to address the target public spaces. The cities' technicians and the elected representatives have trouble adopting this document and giving it real operational value. On the other hand, drawing up the action plan is a very good opportunity to extend and consolidate local partnerships, and often results in new, beneficial initiatives.
- The requirements inherent in this type of networked European project (written documents and reports) make heavy demands that slow down the development and implementation of actions in the field.

**So, what comes out of the USER Project is the richness of the knowledge acquired, learning about other ways of doing things, and frustration at not having more time to discuss issues in greater detail and turn our discussions into action on our pilot sites!**



Finding shared objectives



Discussing our common points and differences

# USER LOCAL ACTION PLAN

## PUBLIC SPACES AS ENGINES FOR INTEGRATED REVITALIZATION URBAN IN TRINIDAD AND PERCHEL, MÁLAGA

USER project fits within the context of a global process of revitalizing neighbourhoods of South and North Trinidad Perchel. USER has played an important role within this urban regeneration strategy whose aim is **to transform current adverse conditions for public spaces carrying engines for an integral development of the whole urban area in question.**

Main idea behind the project is to transform Trinidad and Perchel on the basis of the strength and potential popular culture of the city, located on USER area. And the mission of this project would transform the popular culture of the city in a new deal for the tourist and commercial industry Málaga. USER Local Action Plan should be implemented through potential (both physical and intangible) elements by incorporating short, medium and long term measures.

There is a need to reactivate **“urban attractive”** in the area, in order to reinvent new uses in its public spaces. In other words, attracting new Users in the area, by giving a better image and getting more permeability in urban spaces, both physically and socially.

User focuses on four pieces that bring the greatest potential for future development for urban renewal in Trinidad and Perchel:

- **Plaza de Doña Trinidad.** Historical reference in the area. The square itself and the building of the former Casa de Socorro, is conceived as Central Square of the neighbourhood.

Potential for tourism, cultural, commercial and public uses new development.

- **The axis Las Filipensas, Fray Alonso de Santo Tomás and the Spanish Legion.** Huge open square, inhospitable area bordering, which has no structure or function spaces. It is an under-used area. It has religious uses during Easter, and a transit purpose rest of the year. Nearby, Plaza de las Filipensas allocates a use as a Charity Food, giving a bad image of the area.

Potential due to good connectivity and location between two pedestrian bridges connecting old town, also as monumental heritage.

- **Plaza San Pablo.** Big surface with the facade of the church of San Pablo at the head of the square. Vacant plots surround it by the other 3 sides. It has a religious use at Easter, and little public use in the afternoons.

It could have a significant potential as **Plaza Mayor of La Trinidad**, both for its central location as the architectural significance of the Church. Good accessibility and connectivity with the rest of the neighbourhood and its major commercial cross.

- **Axis Convento Trinidad - Plaza Bailen - Trinidad street.** Trinidad Street and its extension to the Calzada de la Trinidad, is configured as the main via of the neighbourhood both for its history and its role cross communication of all the District.



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