

Closing the Gap between Projects and People

An immersive and interactive workshop at the Nordic Edge conference late September shone the spotlight on how European project teams can get their message across to citizens.



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Entitled "How to make invisible projects visible", the workshop was not your average get-together around a table; it had delegates telling their project stories and seeing their thoughts materialise before their eyes in real time thanks to the wizardry of a graphic artist. The findings from this exercise were then "pitched" to the other delegates as a way to share insights and best practices in project communication.

The setting was the annual Nordic Edge conference and exhibition, which was held in Stavanger, Norway, from 25-27 September. The event is designed to showcase pioneering solutions from the Smart City Community, including the Lighthouse H2020 projects and to be a touch point with the European Union.

Attending the workshop for REMOURBAN were Elisabeth Schmid from youris.com Ruth Stallwood and Owen Harvey from Nottingham City Council. Ruth unravelled the Nottingham-Remourban story, detailing how it ties in with the city's strategy as the "UK's Energy City" and how the council has been "onboarding" its inhabitants, rallying them to the smart city cause. Elisabeth Schmid has 10 years' experience in communication for Smart City initiatives and urban regeneration programmes. In Stavanger she brought her insights gained through last-generation smart city projects.

During her talk Elisabeth stated: "Regardless of the actions put in place, there is a common thread linking urban innovation projects: to enable innovation, projects need to get citizens on board by overcoming their resistance, as living in a smart city may sometimes requires them to adjust and change their day to day behaviour." My motto

is "Think Global, Act Local". This means working on a local level, "enticing" citizens and stakeholders through smart city engagement, while upholding our aim of triggering a smart city revolution on a global level.

Communicating local good practices towards a broader, international audience can stimulate replication in other cities in Europe and beyond. The approach we follow in REMOURBAN is simple but effective: we always ensure our measures are tailored to the social and cultural context of the urban environment concerned. We address local residents through the channels they are familiar with: Internet and social media are sufficient to get through to people in a clear and effective manner. Local players like administrations, schools and residents' associations can be great facilitators of local engagement initiatives. Most importantly, we focus our communication on the long-term benefits and real value for citizens. Technical details and background information should however be made available to ensure transparency and to help people feel part of the innovation process."

The workshop was moderated by Josh Stinton, a storytelling specialist. He was joined at the workshop by Kristof Braekeleire, an expert in visual storytelling and graphic facilitation.

The Nordic Edge conference motto was "Smart with a Heart" to reflect that people are both behind and in front of technology and smart city strategies. The event included a three-day exhibition featuring all the 12 Lighthouse projects* along with other exhibitors from over 47 countries and some 4,500 visitors. It offered the opportunity for European project teams – and their lighthouse cities and followers – to share insights on what they're getting right and what they could be doing better.

*Triangulum, REMOURBAN, GrowSmarter, Replicate, SharingCities, SmartEnCity, SmarterTogether, mySMARTLife, Ruggedised, IRIS, MatchUP and STARDUST

Schlüsselbegriffe

smart cities, communication

Länder

Norway

Beitragender

Bereitgestellt durch
youris.com EEIG

Verwandte Projekte



**HORIZON
2020**

REMOURBAN

**REgeneration MOdel for accelerating the
smart URBAN transformation**

6 September 2023

PROJEKT

Letzte Aktualisierung: 18 November 2018

Permalink: <https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/124310-closing-the-gap-between-projects-and-people-/de>

European Union, 2025