



Press release

Saint-Etienne (France), 27th April 2022

Human Cities-SMOTIES: ten European partners committed to stimulate creativity in remote places

The partners of the Human Cities-SMOTIES project, financed by the European Union, met from 21 to 23 April 2022 for the 12th Biennale Internationale Design Saint-Etienne, France, to share experiences and make field visits. The aim was to develop a common methodology for developing creativity in remote places which are far from urban areas, while generating a sustainable impact.

Austria, Estonia, France, Greece, Italy, Iceland, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and the United Kingdom: academics and specialists from ten European countries took part in a conference on the Human-Cities-SMOTIES project at the Cité du design in Saint-Etienne on Friday, April 22, as part of the 12th Biennale Internationale Design Saint-Etienne. It was the occasion to introduce to the public this large-scale cooperation project which spreads creativity in experimental territories, rural or remote places. John Thackara, philosopher and design theorist, and author of "Reconnecting Cities and Countryside", also took part in the discussions.

The Human-Cities-SMOTIES program, which will run for four years (2020-2024), is led by the Politecnico di Milano. It relies on participatory design to involve the inhabitants of these territories in the development of cultural and creative activities, which contribute to their revitalization. This approach is based on co-design workshops, masterclasses as well as publications.

"This project is financed by the European Union to support the development of creativity outside the major urban centers. In each territory, the work is done in conjunction with local actors. We are developing tools and a shared methodology to support the transfer of knowledge and processes to generate creative ideas. It is a project turned towards the future: our objective is to generate a lasting impact, a strong legacy. It is not just about producing solutions for 2024, by the end of the program. We are thinking about the impact that these solutions will have on the territories by 2050, and even by the end of the 21st century," explains Davide Fassi, project coordinator at the Politecnico di Milano.

Turning remote territories around

The question of creative people's exodus to rural areas echoes the theme of "Bifurcations" of this 12th Biennale Internationale Design Saint-Etienne: in many countries, the health crisis has accelerated the exodus of urban people to rural areas to live and work.

"The Cité du design is proud to be a partner of the Human Cities network since its creation in 2006. As the only French city to be a member of the Unesco Creative Cities network, Saint-Étienne is a laboratory for participatory design, not only in the urban areas of the city, but also thanks to its rural wealth. Smaller municipalities are also involved in innovative approaches to improve their attractiveness and the quality of life of their inhabitants. As part of the SMOTIES project, they benefit from the support of the Cité du design, Saint-Étienne Métropole and designers to enhance their tangible and intangible heritage and develop creativity," says Marc Chassaubéné, president of the EPCC Cité du design-Esadse.

A SMOTIES experiment is currently conducted in the Dorlay Valley, 40 minutes from Saint-Étienne. In the heart of the Pilat Regional Park, this valley has developed textile know-how since the 18th century. It has a rich textile industrial heritage and infrastructures linked to the use of the river's water as a source of energy, with numerous water mills. *"The inhabitants wish to promote and transmit this heritage and know-how. We have therefore created a third place, the Turbine Créative, to promote textile arts and crafts, and the creation and design of fashion accessories"*, says Emmanuelle Gaide, co-director of this structure, in charge of training and animation.

Several other municipalities in the Saint-Etienne metropolitan area and the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region presented experiments, similar to those conducted at the Chartreuse de Sainte-Croix-en-Jarez, or to case studies supervised in Saint-Paul-en-Jarez, Doizieux and Dunières.

Many projects carried out by each partner of the European project Human Cities-SMOTIES were presented to the public during this conference. Among them : the Basso Monferrato in Italy, the Dolomites Polhov Gradec Landscape Park in Slovenia, the Oberzeiring in Austria, the Bobrek district in Cieszyn in Poland, the Penmachno area in North Wales in the United Kingdom, the Borgarnes municipality in Iceland, the villages of Joaveski in Estonia and Estreito da Calheta in Portugal, and Apano Meria, a remote and inaccessible area in the north of Syros Island in Greece.

The conference can be watched on: <https://youtu.be/55nW4uHdSjU?t=1214>

More information on Human Cities-SMOTIES: <https://humancities.eu/smoties>

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About Human Cities

Human Cities is a multidisciplinary exchange platform founded in 2006 that examines the livability of public spaces using participatory design as a tool for territorial development. Human Cities-Smoties is a European cooperation project that runs from 2020 to 2024. This new project is the successor of the Human Cities-Challenging the City Scale project (2014-2018). It is led by the Politecnico di Milano and animated by ten European partners, including the Cité du design.

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