



How 'understanding people' becomes an indispensable part of industrial development processes.

# PEOPLE Newsletter

No. 1, May 2017

[www.people-project.net](http://www.people-project.net)

## » Power to PEOPLE «

PEOPLE is an international project co-funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ Programme (Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices, Knowledge Alliances for higher education).

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### In this issue, you will find more on

- Giving power to people
- PEOPLE pilot in Durham (UK)
- People Centred Development Approaches
- How Anna Kirah, design anthropologist, works with industry
- PEOPLE team member Ellen Bal
- And much more

### PEOPLE project partners

#### Slovenia

[Innovation Research Institute of the University of Ljubljana](#)

(IRI UL; project coordinator)

[Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts](#)

(ZRC SAZU) and company [Metronik](#)

#### United Kingdom

[Durham University](#) and company [Kemuri](#)

#### The Netherlands

[Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam](#) (VU) and company [Alliander](#)

#### Czech Republic

[Charles University in Prague \(CUNI\)](#) and company [VUPS](#)

# 1. Understanding PEOPLE

PEOPLE is a partnership of [nine organisations](#) from Slovenia, Czech Republic, United Kingdom and The Netherlands. Four higher education and research institutions, four energy-efficiency and sustainable living companies, and an intermediary organisation have joined forces to make sure understanding and working with people becomes an indispensable part of industrial development processes.

PEOPLE stands for People-Centred Development Approaches in Practical and Learning Environments. Our team of anthropologists, sociologists, energy efficiency professionals, innovators and entrepreneurs aims to:

- develop and integrate people-centred development approaches into research, teaching and learning;
- bring together interdisciplinary groups of students, faculty educators and industry professionals to solve real-life business challenges;
- enable students to gain valuable practical skills to complement their theoretical education;
- demonstrate the value of that education for industry.

➔ *Are you interested in innovation in sustainable living and energy and/or innovation in education? Make sure to subscribe to this newsletter as we will share with you what we do, how we do what we do and why it's all so very important.*

*Do you feel you can contribute to PEOPLE? Contact us through [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) or send us an email: [info@iri.uni-lj.si](mailto:info@iri.uni-lj.si)*



People-Centred Development Approaches  
in Practical and Learning Environments

Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



# 2. Giving power to people

PEOPLE is co-funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ Programme<sup>1</sup>. As such, PEOPLE addresses three urgent challenges for the European Union:

- the underemployment of European graduates in anthropology, psychology, and sociology fields;
- a lack of social science expertise in the sustainable living and energy sector;
- the need for better-engaged social science learning in higher education.

To tackle these challenges, PEOPLE creates an opportunity for students of anthropology, psychology, and sociology to gain practical skills in industry environments. Our students utilize different people-centred design and development approaches, tools and techniques. This empowers them to apply their knowledge and existing skills and solve real challenges in the industry of sustainable living and energy.

Within PEOPLE we promote the idea that meaningful and relevant products and services in the sustainable living and energy industry can only be achieved in interaction with the people intended to use these products and services. They are therefore actively invited to act as co-creators in development and design processes. This co-creation process empowers them to share their wants, needs and beliefs with our students, researchers, and industry professionals.

The key innovative contribution of PEOPLE is the implementation of [People-Centred Learning Cycles](#). Within these Learning Cycles we bring together interdisciplinary groups of students, faculty educators, and industry professionals to solve real-life business challenges. Working on four individual [case-studies](#), these interdisciplinary teams will test and improve existing products or services and seek new solutions for our four industry partners.

Within each national Learning Cycles we will program a number of interactive activities such as research trainings for industry professionals, entrepreneurship trainings for students and university staff and co-creation camps in which students, educators and industry professionals will all take part.

➔ *Would you like to actively participate in PEOPLE? You can do so at one of our Sustainable Cafés. In each of the four participating countries, we invite you to share your knowledge and experience and interact with our students, educators and industry partners. Find out more about our Sustainable Cafés on [our website](#).*

<sup>1</sup> Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices, Knowledge Alliances for higher education

### 3. A PEOPLE pilot in Durham (UK)

**Our four PEOPLE case-studies will commence with the start of the first Learning Cycle this September. In Durham (UK) however, we have already been testing our principles and methodology in a pilot project. This pilot is conducted by Durham University and company Kemuri.**

Kemuri is a company that manufactures multi-sensor smart power sockets and provides a platform for monitoring changes from normal patterns of sensory readings for elderly or other vulnerable residents of single person households. These sensors are embedded in a double power socket to collect temperature, humidity and motion data as well as data relating to power use by appliances connected to it. Data is transferred through a mobile network for processing by proprietary predictive analysis software and the output analytics can be accessed on any smartphone, tablet or computer with an Internet connection. This enables relatives, carers or managers of sheltered housing schemes who are responsible for the elderly or vulnerable person to receive information showing if activities are proceeding as anticipated or if any deviations have occurred to signal that the person requires a call.

The PEOPLE pilot project in Durham involves four students taking the [MSc Energy and Society](#) Field Study module at the Durham University [Department of Anthropology](#) and the [Durham Energy Institute](#). Their aim was to explore providers' and carers'/relatives' experiences of the Kemuri sensor system with Smart Power Sockets fitted in residences prior to students undertaking the study. However, the setting up of the trial was more complicated than initially foreseen.

It was not possible to introduce the sockets until a period after the students began their study, meaning that they had less time to collect data than anticipated. The students turned their attention to reviewing the processes involved in setting up the trial. They investigated the complexities and problems of involving a multitude of stakeholders, including the management and employees of two housing associations, residents and their carers, as well as the Ethics Committee of the university department.

The students' investigations have revealed issues surrounding time management in the setting up of such a trial and socio-technical factors relating to trialling such a product via hard pressed professional carers. Some residents were reluctant to recruit relatives to participate in the trial and it proved impossible to contact relatives directly without contravening ethical guidelines. This pilot has therefore been invaluable in providing lessons for the first planned PEOPLE Learning Cycle.

Although the focus of the pilot has been more concentrated on the research process than expected, some results have been forthcoming, prompting Kemuri to refine its product. They are introducing an "alert" message function to reduce time carers spend on monitoring residents' activities. The trial has also highlighted a need to provide the option for integrating a call centre facility into its Smart Power Socket system.

*Would you like to read more on Kemuri? You can visit them here <http://www.kemurisense.com/>*



Picture: Kemuri double power socket

## 4. People Centred Development Approaches explained

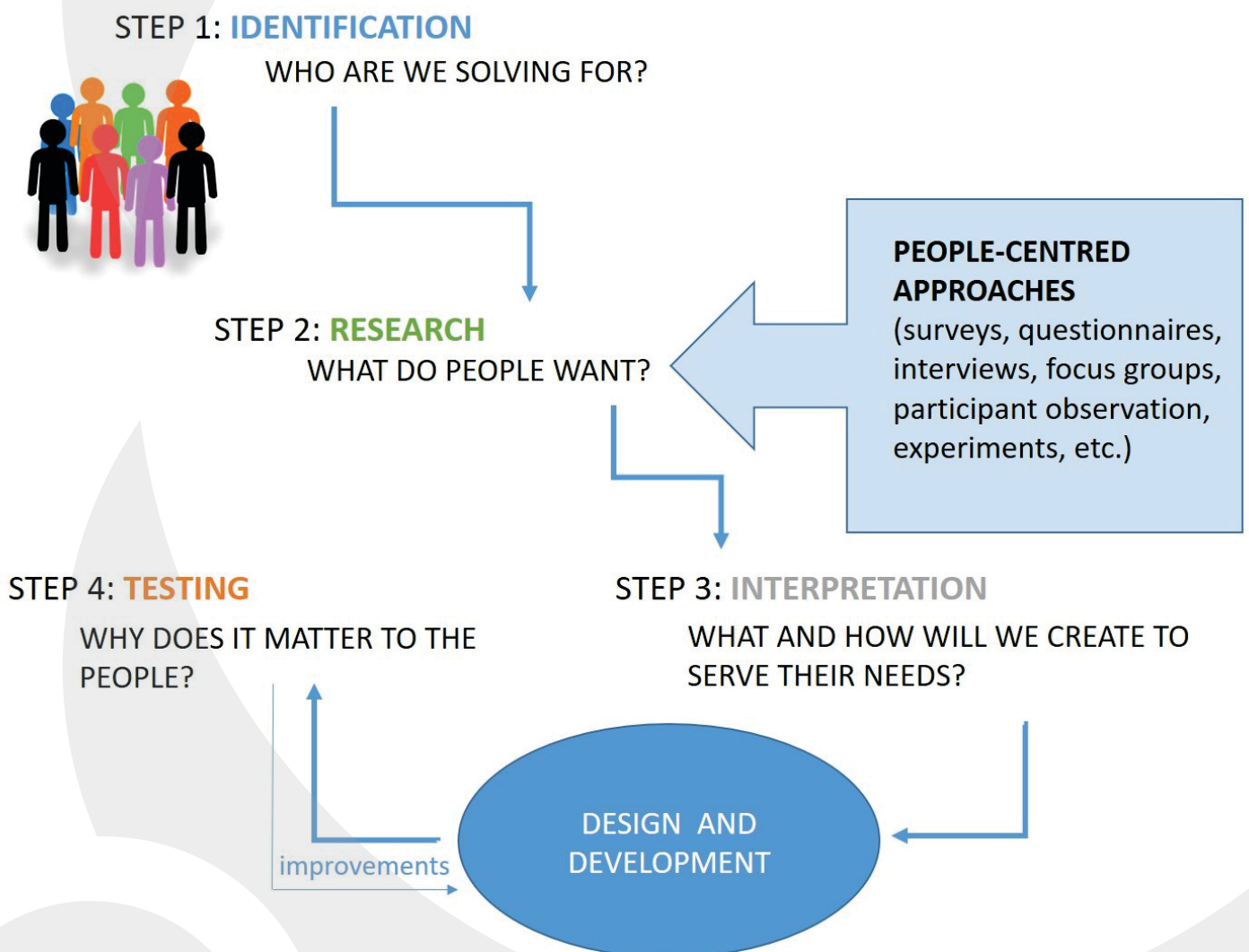
Within PEOPLE we use people-centred development approaches. But what does that mean?

People (potential users) should be involved in all phases of product development in order to create meaningful, relevant, useful, socially responsible, user-friendly, and sustainable solutions – by generating concepts and ideas, shaping products, forming services, testing prototypes or existing products, services, and systems. People are thus considered more than just “users” – they become active co-creators.

The dialogue between engineers (developers), research teams, design teams, and people should be ongoing throughout development processes. In other words, research should be part of the creative process in product or service development, and not only a problem-solving tool.

Research, however, is not an end in itself, or a mere data-collecting tool. Interpretation of qualitative and quantitative data is a crucial step and an iterative process in development. Researchers with backgrounds in anthropology, sociology or psychology have the unique knowledge, methods, and skills to do this and create an efficient link between industry and people, thus enabling the transition from users to active co-creators.

Picture: People-Centred Development Process (PEOPLE)





## 5. Interview with Anna Kirah, design anthropologist

To provide insight into the everyday practice of an anthropologist working with people-centred design and development approaches, we talked with [Anna Kirah](#), an internationally acclaimed design anthropologist and a passionate proponent of people-centred design and development approaches. She told us about her recent projects and shared some useful tips for early-career anthropologists looking for opportunities in industry or design.



Picture: Anna Kirah, private collection

### Where did you use a people-centred design approach lately?

While working for the Oslo Airport in Norway. It just opened recently and working for them has provided me with the opportunity to take creating products and services with people to a new level - which is, facilitating an organisation to actually think from a people-centred perspective.

### How do you do that, help organisations think from a people-centred perspective?

Well, you show them. You take them along on an observation journey. At Oslo Airport, I had to convince the airport staff they were doing something wrong. To achieve this, I took them to their own workplace and showed them how to watch people. By teaching them how to watch people, you are teaching them one of the core skills of anthropology. That is the most exciting part. Through co-creation we come up with a new product or service, but when you actually get a mind-set change in people - to me, that is far more valuable and relevant. Because the world is changing so rapidly, we need people to think differently, and I think that everybody should be thrown into anthropology.

### How do you explain the value of anthropology and people-centred approaches to engineers or airport staff?

You have to engage with people and meet them where they are: instead of telling them, you show them. This is probably the most important thing I learned from working for Microsoft: our expert hat is our biggest enemy. The more expert we get through our education system, the less able we are to see the world through different perspectives and to engage with people who don't think just like ourselves. That is why I would end PhD programmes as they exist today: they are focused on a narrow aspect, while we should be working across boundaries. So the problem is not in working with engineers: the problem is that the politicians are saying we need more technologists and less anthropologists or sociologists.

### How can we change the politicians', the decision-makers' mind-sets?

The best way is to show them the failed projects that are wasting tax-payers' money. As an example, I use a train station near my home, which is a disaster. The old wooden train station had a heated room, it was warm and passengers talked with each other while waiting for their train. Now we have a beautiful architecture on top of a hill: two glass boxes in which nobody is willing to stand because it is colder in there than it is outside. When it is -25 degrees Celsius, people stand outside. When it is pouring rain, they stand outside. So, how is that helping the world? They wasted tax-payer's money because they didn't ask the people what they wanted and needed: they built it for us, not with us.

Anna Kirah is a design anthropologist with degrees both in anthropology and psychology. She has worked for international corporations, such as Microsoft and Boeing. Besides being a member of the PEOPLE project's Advisory Board, Anna is the Managing Director of Design without Borders, an independent non-profit foundation in Norway. Furthermore, Anna has worked with local entrepreneurs and businesses in Uganda to identify and implement appropriate solutions that benefit crisis-affected populations. She is currently living in Norway.

## 6. PEOPLE team member Ellen Bal: an introduction

**Ellen Bal**, senior lecturer and programme director of the MSc Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam is a PEOPLE team member. We asked her to share her thoughts on the application of social sciences and the use of people-centered design and development approaches in the sustainable living and energy industry.



Picture: Ellen Bal by Yvonne Compier

“In industry, lots of products are being developed for a multitude of end-users, people with a diverse range of wants, needs and beliefs. These products need to fit these wants and needs, otherwise they’ll go unutilized. As social scientists, we can help to align these products with the needs and beliefs of their intended end-users by providing, what we call, the ‘social context’ and ‘cultural aspects’ of these products. In doing so we pair up our body of knowledge and research methods with the knowledge and skills of the engineers and designers working in industry. Together we create sustainable products that could have a profound positive impact on people’s lives.

One of my former Anthropology students, after graduating, went to an employment office to get a job. He told the agency he would do ‘whatever they couldn’t find anybody else for’. They paired him with the largest convention center in the city where they were in need of someone to ‘do something about’ the very technically-driven signage throughout the buildings of the center. He went to work, as anthropologists often do, by talking to all people involved, creators of the signage as well as intended end-users. In the end, he managed to bridge the gap between the makers’ intent and the users’ interests and ‘translated’ all the technical terms into a language that was both accurate and effective.

I myself contribute to the application of social sciences by developing a curriculum for our students that will equip them for employment outside of academia. I think it’s imperative for us as teachers to facilitate our students’ practical skills development and help them apply the knowledge and research methods we provide them with. Anthropologists can have an enormous added value for industry and society when they learn to effectively engage and cooperate with professionals outside of academia. I therefore interact with such professionals to figure out what they know, what they don’t know and where we, as anthropologists, can be of added value according to their perspective. And that is what we at the VU subsequently incorporate in our new masters’ programme.

With regards to the PEOPLE project I am really looking forward to working with our industry partner Alliander, a Dutch energy network company that provides energy transport and distribution to a large part of the Netherlands. I hope that we, in unison, will be able to create an inspiring example of the effective application of social sciences within industry as well as a set of hands-on tools for other universities and industry partners so that understanding people will indeed become an indispensable part of industrial development processes.”

## 7. From kick off to first results: PEOPLE and upcoming events

**PEOPLE is a three-year research project running from November 2016 till November 2019. What has happened since the start and what will happen in the near future?**

**November 2016** - Fifteen representatives of PEOPLE met in Ljubljana on 17 and 18 November 2016 at our **kick off meeting**, organised by the Innovation and Research Institute of the University of Ljubljana. This kick-off, opened by the Rector of the University of Ljubljana, Prof Dr Ivan Svetlik, set the ground for an intensive, dynamic, and fruitful cooperation between all PEOPLE partners. [READ MORE](#)

**February 2017** - On Friday, 10 February 2017, PEOPLE attended the kick off Meeting for all Erasmus+ Knowledge Alliances (KA) 2016 in Brussels, Belgium. At this event, organised by the Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), 20 different project coordinators presented their Knowledge Alliance 2016 projects to share objectives and exchange good practices. [READ MORE](#)

**March 2017** - From 28 February to 2 March 2017, the University of Bergen in Norway organized a world-wide conference titled "Energy impacts: People, Responsibilities and the Contested Futures of Energy Developments". The aim of the conference was to discuss issues pertaining to the social impacts of an accelerated pace and intensity of resource extraction and energy developments on an expanding scale. Fortunately, we were able to present the PEOPLE research concept, our case studies and some preliminary results to the diverse community of scientists (e.g. anthropologists, geographers, geologists, sociologists), involved in energy related research. [READ MORE](#)



Picture: Bergen 2017 by Gregor Cerinšek

**May 2017** - on 11 and 12 May 2017, all PEOPLE partners will come together in Arnhem, the Netherlands for the 2nd PEOPLE consortium meeting hosted by our industry partner [Alliander](#). We will share thoughts and experiences and develop PEOPLE further in co-creation. In our next newsletter we will share our most inspiring outcomes with you.

**September 2017** - All PEOPLE Learning Cycles will commence with the start of the new academic year.

**October 2017** - PEOPLE will have a role in the fifth edition of the international event [Why the World Needs Anthropologists](#), organised by the [Applied Anthropology Network](#) of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) in collaboration with several other institutions from Europe and U.S, including the PEOPLE project partners. This exciting event will take place in Arnold Wolfendale Lecture Theatre Calman Centre, Durham (UK) on 28 and 29 October 2017. The theme of this year's symposium is POWERING THE PLANET and it will explore how energy professionals and anthropologists benefit from each other's knowledge and approaches. We will inform you about the speakers and workshops through our Facebook and Twitter. Come and meet with us at our PEOPLE project stand at the "Energy Hotspot"! Registration is free. [READ MORE](#)



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