AA&U
The “Magic Carpet” project

Project Team: AA & U, For Architecture, Art and Urbanism (S. Stratis, assistant: A. Angelidou)
Volunteers: students from the Department of Architecture, University of Cyprus.

Kit-of-parts
- Two stripes of 10mm thick white cardboard paper. Each stripe is made of an assembly of eleven folding rectangular shaped cardboards 60cm X 72cm, held together with white fabric.
- Two cardboard signs, 200 cm tall with cut out words saying: “OUR TIME”.
- Two 200 cm tall cardboard daisy flowers in pots.
- One 120cm tall cardboard flower. All signs and flowers are connected to the two stripes with white fabric. They pop-out when the carpet unfolds.

Modus Operandi
Four volunteers assist the unfolding and the refolding of each of the two strips which takes place in 10 seconds.
Case 1: Assisting a seven year old students’ walking bus.
The volunteers carry the carpet and open it every time the students of the walking bus need to cross a road. They wait until all of them cross and then they refold the carpet and carry it to the next crossing. The carpet unfolds with the students’ demand: “One, two, three! Open Magic Carpet!”

Case 2: Assisting a Zebra crossing
The volunteers are stationed on the two sides of a zebra crossing, along a busy car avenue. When a person aims to cross by pushing the button, the carpet unfolds into the road in front of the car lanes creating a sort of a corridor through which the pedestrian crosses. In no longer than 10 seconds, the carpet is refolded back to its initial position.

Some remarks about the project’s aim and its implementation
“It is not magic! … It’s made out of cardboard!” This was a comment of a seven year old student of a Nicosia Elementary School, whom the “Magic Carpet’ assisted for crossing streets during their walk around their school neighborhood.
“It is not really magic… but, the idea is magic!” spoke out one of the project’s funs encouraging the AA & U team to finish the project.

Why do you need magic to cross a street in Cypriot cities, even across zebra crossings? Statistics have in fact, shown that there is an increasing number of accidents between pedestrians and vehicles that occur close to zebra crossings. The dominance of private cars in Cypriot roads plus, the small number of pedestrians create ideal conditions for ignoring anybody attempting to cross a street.
The two meter tall “OUR TIME” signs stand just in front of the car drivers’...
windows shield when they hastily stop for 10 seconds, impatiently waiting for the pedestrians to cross. Usually, there are not more than 2 to 3 people crossing at a time.

“Well, I felt like a king!” a person exclaimed when he was assisted to cross the busy road during rush hour. This was indeed, one of the aims; to make people feel that those ten seconds of crossing belong to the pedestrians who should feel neither threatened nor humiliated by the cars waiting to move on. The two 200 cm tall cardboard daisy flowers-in-pots are also unfolded to help creating such atmosphere.

“Well, I admit that if I were a car driver at this moment, I would have just behaved in the same manner!” remarked one of the “Magic Carpet” volunteers. Bruno Latour has eloquently talked about this man-tool relationship, by his “actant” notion, in “Pandora’s Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1999), demonstrating how a hybrid actor comes out from the relationship man-tool. Latour was talking about Man & Gun and in this case is about Man & Car. The “Magic Carpet” project aimed in fact, to distantiate for a few seconds, the man as driver from his car as tool.

The “Magic Carpet” gesture falls into a sort of critical spatial practice, operating in hostile environments through the employment of tactics. It does not have the power to change things. Nevertheless, there is a capacity to criticize things to be changed, hoping to contribute into a collective effort towards change of human behaviors.

(Text by S. Stratis)
PHYSICAL PARTICIPATION / THE "MAGIC CARPET" PROJECT / AA&U