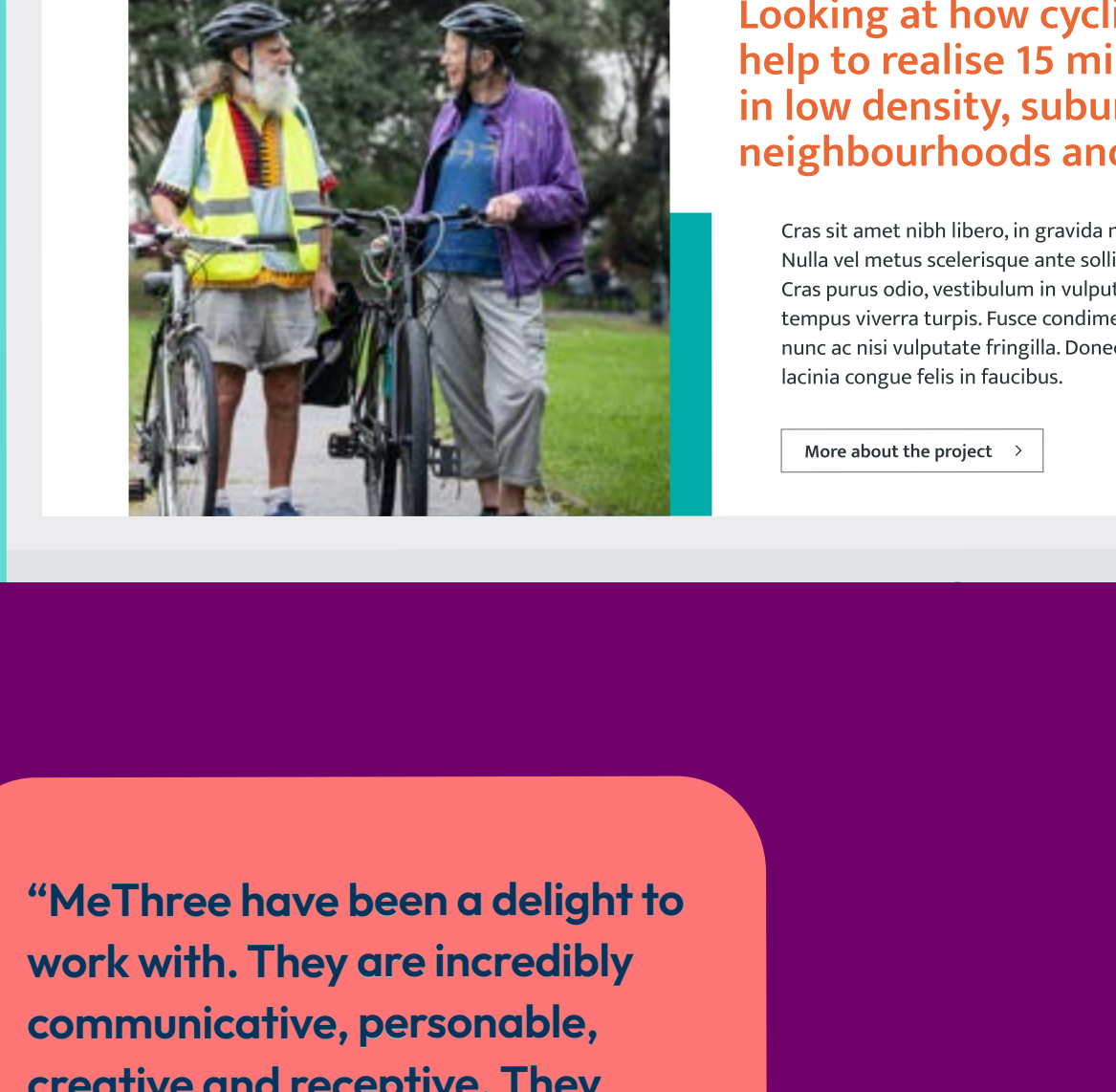
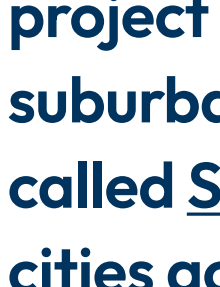
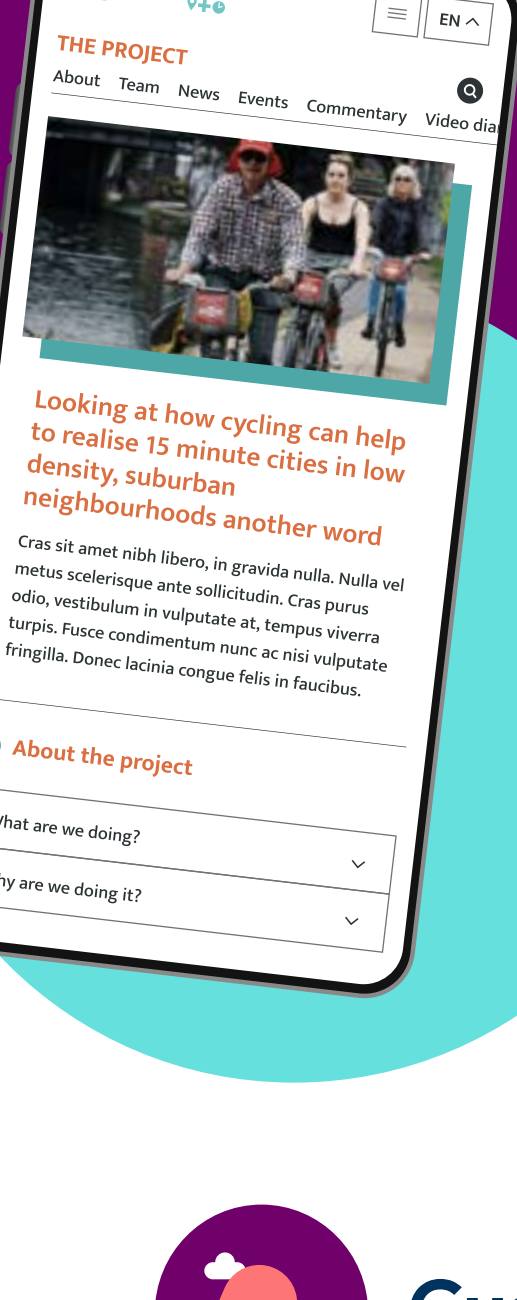




# How we created a multilingual WordPress site for Oxford University's Transport Studies Unit

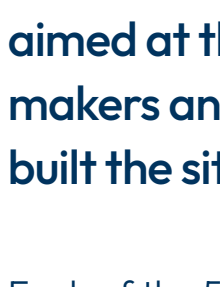


“MeThree have been a delight to work with. They are incredibly communicative, personable, creative and receptive. They made sure they fully understood our requirements and vision, and then delivered as promised.”



## Customer

The University of Oxford's Transport Studies Unit (TSU) is running a research project about sustainable transport in suburban neighbourhoods. The project, called SPECIFIC, is being run in five cities across Europe.



## Technical challenge

We worked with the SPECIFIC project team to create a new WordPress website for the project aimed at the general public, academics, policy makers and industry. We planned, designed and built the site.

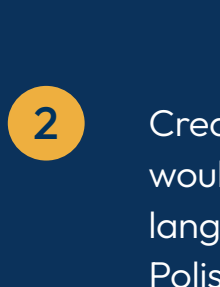
Each of the 5 cities included in the project needed to have its own section, with the content relating to that particular city written and displayed in the relevant local language by default - Dutch, English, German, Italian and Polish.

It was also important that someone visiting the site could view the whole site in their preferred language. So, for example, someone viewing the Maastricht city pages in Dutch, could then choose to see content for the other cities - and for the project as a whole - in Dutch.

The key technical challenge we faced was how to build the website in the cheapest and quickest way to support this translation functionality.

For a faster-paced delivery, and to keep the build costs low, we'd proposed using a Google Translate WordPress **plugin**. The plugin allows users to select a language to view the whole site in (via a language switcher).

However, it wasn't until we started putting test content in the staging version of the site that we discovered a limitation with this approach. The plugin works on having a single base language. We'd set the base language to English because the content about the overall project is in English. But the plugin assumed that all the city pages were in English even though they'd been added in the local languages. This meant a user couldn't translate the non-English city pages to English using the language switcher.



## Solution

We explored a few options:

- 1 Enter all the content for all the cities in English by default, then the user chooses their preferred language and views the pages in that selected language. Whilst this was the fastest and easiest route, all the non-English pages would be auto-translated, which wasn't ideal given the importance of the local languages in the project.
- 2 Create a 'polylang' site, meaning that each page would need to be created in every supported language (i.e. Dutch, English, German, Italian, and Polish). This approach would create extra content work for the SPECIFIC team and need a team of skilled translators.
- 3 Create a WordPress 'Multisite', consisting of 6 sites: one for the overall project plus 5 different city sites, each with a different base language. Whilst converting the single WordPress site into a network of 6 mini-sites would require additional development time to configure, it would allow each site to operate independently with its own language setting.

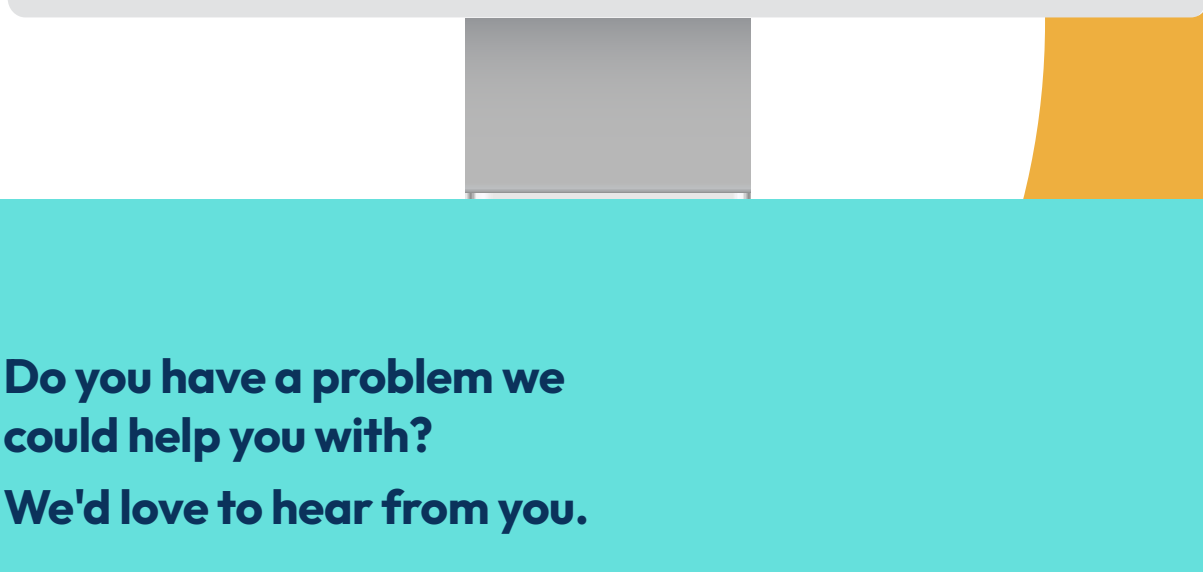


## Result

We reconfigured the WordPress setup so that the overall project, as well as each of the 5 cities, is its own 'site' with its own subdomain. The content for each city is written in the local language, and displayed in that language by default. Using the language picker plugin, someone can also choose to view the whole site in their preferred language.

What we learnt:

- There is more than one way to deliver a multilingual site, and picking the right approach requires a good understanding of the content and how it is going to be added to the site.
- Sometimes the solution isn't the one that you would expect. There is nothing inherently multilingual about using WordPress Multisite, but when combined with the translation plugin that we were already using it gave us the perfect solution.
- Learn to compromise. Sometimes the requirements fit perfectly with solutions that you have available to you but most of the time you will need to compromise somewhere, whether that means changing the requirements, budget or deadline



Do you have a problem we could help you with?  
We'd love to hear from you.

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We help organisations that have a positive impact on the world communicate better through quality design.