

JOURNAL

PROJECT

Home Silk Road -
Housing toward
empowerment

📍 Lyon Metropole,
France

TOPIC

Housing

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EXPERT

Home Silk Road Journal 2: Get an update about Lyon's project

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This journal describes implementation challenges in the second phase of the Home Silk Road project. This project is testing an innovative housing solution and putting vulnerable people at the heart of the city. COVID-19 has had a considerable impact on implementation and partners have had to adapt and innovate to sustain progress.

Executive Summary

This is the second journal on the *Home Silk Road* project in Villeurbanne, a town in the East of the Grand Lyon metropolitan area. In the context of a major redevelopment programme, this project is turning an iconic brownfield site into an inclusive space through housing, culture, and inclusion. *Home Silk Road* is led by the Metropole of Lyon in partnership with the municipality of Villeurbanne; a municipal housing company - Est Metropole Habitat, and two non-governmental organisations - Alynéa and the Centre Culturel Œcuménique (CCO).

This second journal provides an update on the implementation of the project, and the challenges faced. The aim is to share learning from implementation. Significant progress has been made since the first journal was published in January 2020. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on project activities. Several key milestones have been pushed back and the project looks likely to end 12 months later than originally planned. New tests have emerged, and project partners have had to adapt accordingly. UIA identifies 7 challenges as especially important for project implementation. Particularly important issues for the project at this juncture relate to a participatory approach and to communication with target beneficiaries and users. The participatory approach has been central since the outset of the project.

Project Update

Journal 1 explained the first phase of *Home Silk Road*. Project partners turned a historic silk industry building, the

Jeanne d’Arc Residence, into a hub for culture and inclusion through a temporary occupation prior to demolition and reconstruction. 21 homeless families were living at the temporary Alfred de Musset shelter in a neighbouring building. Social support and engagement and cultural activities were taking place on the site.

This 2nd Journal focuses on phase 2 of the project. A major milestone was the start of the demolition and construction process in Jan 2021. Ultimately, this will transform this area into new residential neighbourhood with more than 300 affordable and social homes, as well as social and cultural spaces. In the meantime, the 21 homeless families have moved into new, high quality modular housing on-site. The modules will stay on the site for the next 3 years whilst construction work continues. They will later be deployed at other locations of the metropolitan area to accommodate vulnerable populations. The site’s central hub and CCO’s base has moved from the *Jeanne d’Arc* Residence to a neighbouring building where an Information and Orientation Centre has been established.

COVID-19 caused a series of major delays to project implementation, including pushing back the installation of the modular housing by 7 months. The cultural and participatory activities and the plan to open a restaurant on-site have been particularly affected.

Project partner Alynéa has continued to provide social support to the families throughout. Social workers assist residents with access to social rights, employment, education and wellbeing of children, French language and integration into the community. The families have been involved in designing the temporary modules. The social support has been affected by the pandemic, with fewer face-to-face interviews, for example. However, it has been maintained.

Overall, the partners have shown considerable resilience in adapting in the difficult circumstances of lockdown and social distancing.



Modular housing units installed on the site in Jan 2021, credit Est Métropole Habitat

Challenges Table

Challenge	Observation

Leadership

Challenge level



Leadership continues to be a clear strength of this project. Managing the project in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated strong, flexible and facilitative leadership. Recent local elections have re-enforced political support for the project at the level of the Métropole and the city of Villeurbanne.

Public Procurement

Challenge level



Public procurement is working well overall. The tendering process for the modules for temporary housing and a restaurant have been successfully completed, albeit delayed. The project has made use of social and environmental clauses in procurement. It is also setting up a social business that could help deliver on social clauses in the future. However, COVID-19 has made the implementation of social clauses more difficult.

Organisational arrangements within the urban authority (cross-department working)

Challenge level



The project has not experienced any problems in cross-departmental working. Some activities that were planned to further enhance cross-departmental working were not possible due to COVID-19. The strong coordination of the project continues to help this work well.

Participative approach for co-implementation

Challenge level



Participation of target beneficiaries, users, and wider stakeholders for co-construction is one of the hallmarks of this project. It was a major strength in phase 1. The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown have had a huge impact on this dimension. Partners have been resourceful and innovative in mitigating this but there is still a lot of catching up to do in the next phase of the project.

Monitoring and evaluation

Challenge level



Monitoring and evaluation processes have been pushed back due to delays in project implementation caused by COVID-19. There is therefore only a limited amount of learning to share so far. The evaluation design using a participatory process is very promising. However, the interim evaluation has been postponed to allow key project milestones to advance first.

Communication with target beneficiaries and users

Challenge level



Communication with target beneficiaries and users has been made significantly more challenging because of COVID-19. Partners have taken steps to address this and further efforts are planned going forward.

Upscaling

Challenge level



Given the delays to project implementation because of the pandemic, upscaling is not an immediate prospect. However, partners are planning for this by building support for the project locally and further afield. Some level upscaling is built into the project design.

Leadership

Political leadership

Local elections took place in France in the first half of 2021. Partners were initially concerned that the results might lead to a change in the strong political support for *Home Silk Road*, both at the level of the Métropole and the municipality of Villeurbanne. However, this has not proved to be a problem. The new political leadership is highly committed to the project and its goals in terms of housing, urban development, inclusion and culture.

The new green-red majority in the Métropole has laid out several ambitious plans that are relevant to the project: committing to being a welcoming city for asylum seekers and refugees, investing in social housing, and ensuring that no-one is returned to homelessness following the pandemic. Vice President Renaud Payre, responsible for Housing, Social Housing and Urban Policy, has expressed support for the project, as well as for similar experimentations in temporary housing on vacant land. The new Mayor of Villeurbanne, Cédric Van Styvendael, is the former Director General of project partner Est Métropole Habitat and was involved in initiating *Home Silk Road*. As a Metropolitan Councillor, he is also the Vice President responsible for culture at the level of the Métropole. Having elected representatives as champions is very valuable to the project and should help to capitalize on the project's results and scale up the innovations. It has helped the project maintain momentum despite the impact of COVID-19.

Leadership Style

The participative and facilitative leadership style of the project was described in the last journal. In the context of the pandemic, leaving space for initiative, "learning by doing" and shared problem solving between the partners, has been a real strength. Lockdowns and social distancing measures have undoubtedly made coordination more difficult and reduced the opportunities for face-to-face meeting. Nonetheless, the project partners have remained in productive communication, met regularly online and in-person, and continued to move the project forward. A flexible and solutions-orientated approach has been invaluable during this time. The impact of COVID-19 on different partners has been unequal, and the partnership has had to act collegially to find the best ways forward.

Public Procurement

Background

One challenge for urban authorities undertaking this kind of complex innovative project is the effective use of procurement. Public procurement is often seen as a constraint on innovation because it is so prescriptive about how operators must purchase goods, works and services. However, well-designed procurement can support specific policy goals, for example through the use of social or green clauses.

The strong framework for social public procurement in the Métropole of Lyon was laid out in the last journal. The Métropole has mainstreamed social integration clauses in tendering procedures through its social responsibility strategy. This could be a source of inspiration for other urban authorities.

Social clauses

Home Silk Road has made extensive use of social and environmental clauses in procurement. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown up challenges for the use of such clauses and partners have had to adapt to new conditions. For example, the tender specification asked the construction company that designed and built the modules to provide some 300 hours of work insertion for people excluded from the labour market. Initially, the project partners hoped that this would be in the form of individual placements for the site's residents. However, the pandemic has made the creation of new placements very difficult. Companies are mostly focused on keeping their existing workers and lack capacity for these activities. In the end, the insertion hours took the form of workshops about working in the sector.

Delays

One common issue with public procurement is the heavy administrative burden. The UIA framework necessitates tendering where the French national legislation would not require it. This can generate a heavy administrative process

and has been a source of frustration for partners. For example, the procurement process for the modules that will house the on-site social restaurant proved very cumbersome and time-consuming, especially from the perspective of project partner Alynéa. Combined with the COVID-19 crisis and initial difficulties regarding planning permission, this has contributed to a delay in the opening of the restaurant, which has been pushed back from Jan 2020 to June 2021. The project partners would have liked to develop a restricted procedure engaging specialized local organisations working with reuse and recycling of existing materials. However, this proved impossible in the timeframe given the COVID-19 situation. This is something that could be developed for future projects.

Structures for Integration through Economic Activity

One important sector when it comes to delivering social public procurement in the Métropole of Lyon are Structures for Integration through Economic Activity (SIAE). **50% of the integration objectives included in calls for tender by Metropolitan authorities are delivered by SIAEs.** As mentioned in the previous journal, the framework for SIAE is well-developed in France. These structures allow people furthest from employment, due to particular social and professional difficulties, to benefit from enhanced support to facilitate their integration into work. SIAEs are part of the ecosystem for social procurement.

Two SIAEs were envisaged as part of this project: an on-site social restaurant and a social concierge service

- The social concierge service has not proved workable, especially in the context of the pandemic. The partners have been exploring alternative ways of employing and training residents on-site, although this is complicated by the COVID crisis. As mentioned above, employers are focused on survival more than outreach at this time.
 - For the social restaurant, the partners have had to radically rethink the business model. COVID-19 has seen extended periods of lockdown, with restaurants having to close and then to implement new social distancing measures. It is not a good time to open a new restaurant. The project partners have therefore decided to focus on food production and distribution rather than opening for the general public, at least in the first instance. Initially, the plan is to produce food for homeless services in the Métropole. Later, a take-away format for the general public will be tested. Project partner Alynéa is in the process of recruiting and training workers with a view to being operational for the summer. Despite the challenges, the project is on track to deliver meaningful work integration opportunities for vulnerable and excluded people. The partners have found a way to adapt their plans in view of the overall project objectives and to meet the emerging social needs on the ground in the context of the pandemic.
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Organisational arrangements within the urban authority (cross-department working)

Effective cross-department working has not emerged so far as a major issue for this project. In fact, cross-department working appears to work well in both the urban authorities delivering *Home Silk Road*: the Métropole and the municipality of Villeurbanne. There is not a lot of new learning on this point since the last journal but a few experiences are worth highlighting.

The last edition of the journal described how the partners were planning a dedicated workshop to optimise engagement from different departments and at different levels in each of the partner organisations. Staff from all partners, including different departments within the two urban authorities were going to participate to ensure all staff had a global vision of the project, and to reach out and engage those working less directly on implementation. Unfortunately, this workshop was cancelled because of COVID-19. Nonetheless, it was a concrete initiative to promote cross-department working by showcasing the project in action and involving people across departments and organisations. The partners hope to organise the workshop in the coming months, and more learning may emerge then.

Like in all big projects, the partners have had to deal with turnover and staff changes in some key roles. This is a potential risk for effective organisational arrangements but has been overcome by strong communication and coordination so far.

Participative approach for co-implementation

Phase 1

The first edition of this journal focused extensively on the unique role that culture was playing in making *Home Silk Road* a participatory project during its first phase. Culture both supported and re-enforced other forms of participation and consultation. The temporary occupation of the *Jean d'Arc* residence was a cultural experiment in activating a site and creating participatory dynamics from the outset of a redevelopment. A huge variety of activities including community gardening, sculpture, music, cooking etc created fora for dialogue, exchange and co-creation. The last journal showed how this contributed to a participatory space, engaging residents, the neighbourhood, and other stakeholders in co-constructing the future of the site.

Phase 2

When construction work began on the *Jeanne d'Arc* Residence, the temporary occupation ended. CCO and other actors moved from the main building to a neighbouring one, where an Information and Orientation centre has been established. This marked the beginning of the second phase of the project. During this phase, the COVID-19 health crisis has created a lot of upheaval and challenges to the participatory and cultural dimensions of the project.

The space was entirely closed during some phases of lockdown. Partners were compelled to adapt to new social distancing and hygiene rules. Many key events were cancelled including two festivals: *Mémoire Vive* and *L'Aventure Ordinaire*, which should have taken place in Spring and Autumn 2020. These events play a very important role in bringing different stakeholders together to co-create the site. The fact that they have not been possible has undoubtedly impacted the dynamics around the site for the residents, people in the local area and in the wider Métropole.

The day-to-day work of engaging people in a participatory approach and animating the site was made much more difficult by COVID-19. The monthly participatory workshops had to be partly moved online. Many activities were impossible. A weekly information drop-in session was replaced with appointment-only visits. These changes undoubtedly impacted negatively on the strong participatory dynamics that had been established in phase 1 of the project. In many senses, the life of the site was suspended for a year. Partners are planning to compensate for this in the coming months but it is not easy in the unpredictable context of the pandemic.

In the circumstances, CCO proved highly resilient and was able to innovate to overcome some of the challenges. Residents of the site were still able to engage in cultural and creative activities. The relaxation of lockdown rules in summer 2020 allowed for an on-site programme that engaged some 6,500 people. The onsite park played a very important role in allowing this to happen. Community engagement and participation was also facilitated through digital tools like videoconferences, online workshops, etc.) This kind of resilience and adaptability is a key element of successful projects, even when the world is not facing a pandemic.

One of the key mechanisms for maintaining participatory approach in the context of the pandemic was through strong partnerships with neighbourhood organisations, local NGOs and public institutions. This is a particular strength of the project and something that other urban authorities could learn from.

Currently COVID-19 restrictions are being relaxed and the project partners are looking forward to renewing the cultural and participatory dynamics on the site. The coming months will undoubtedly be an interesting and challenging time!

Monitoring & Evaluation

State of play

The last journal outlined this project's plans for evaluation. An intermediary evaluation should have taken place by October 2020. However, it has been delayed because of the impact of COVID-19 on many of the key project deliverables. The project partners decided that it was not useful to proceed with an evaluation until more progress had been made on implementation of milestones like the move-in of families into modular housing.

Participatory design

The methodological approach to the evaluation of this project is highly participatory. All stakeholders have been

involved in designing the evaluation questions, criteria and indicators. This process took place between December 2019 and March 2020. The approach is to use collective intelligence to determine the most important questions at stake in the project and identify the right criteria and indicators for assessment. It seems likely that this will increase the added value and avoid the pitfall of evaluation as a tick-box requirement of little concrete use to the partners. It could provide inspiration for other urban authorities on how to evaluate innovative actions.

Evaluation questions

6 evaluation questions have been determined:

1. How has the Home Silk Road project enabled the development of an innovative approach designed around the locality and the existing policies and tools?
2. How has the partnership logic contributed to enriching project implementation?
3. Are the governance and economic conditions in place to ensure the project's scalability and sustainability beyond the UIA funding?
4. To what extent has the project helped the beneficiaries to overcome the difficulties they are faced with in life?
5. How has the modular accommodation on-site benefited beneficiaries and the development of the site?
6. To what extent has engagement in the project promoted integration of the site and its residents in the neighbourhood?

These questions aim to go beyond just demonstrating impact. The aim is to grapple with how innovative and sustainable the project really is; what has worked and what has not, and why. Indicators and data collection methodologies have been designed for each question. Learning points from the intermediary evaluation will be addressed in the next journal.

Communicating with target beneficiaries and users

COVID-19

Communication with target beneficiaries and users has been made more difficult in the context of the pandemic. One of the central goals of the *Home Silk Road* project is the creation of a vibrant, open space and multiple fora for communication with target beneficiaries and users. The contraction of activities onsite due to COVID-19 has reduced the scope for this kind of communication. Partners have taken steps to mitigate this but there has undoubtedly been a negative impact on the dynamics that were created in the first phase of the project.

Tools

One very practical issue was that the project website was destroyed by a fire in a data centre. Losing an online presence during the pandemic has accentuated the difficulties in communicating with some audiences. It serves to highlight how important effective digital communication is for demonstrating impact and engaging people in urban innovations today.

To capture and disseminate some of the project's impact, a short film was made about the modular housing at the point when families moved in. This included interviews with the families, political leaders and professionals involved. This kind of story-telling tool is very valuable in demonstrating the project's impact and supports an ongoing narrative at a time when the day-to-day life of the site has been very much curtailed. It can be used in conjunction with other tools to communicate the project to a wide range of beneficiaries and users.

Day-to-day animation & communication

Day-to-day communication with the residents on the site has been maintained throughout the project. Alynéa has continued to provide social support to the residents. However, the extent to which residents have been able to participate in a broad cultural and participative programme has been massively reduced. The opportunities for mixing of different stakeholders and for bringing people from the neighbourhood and beyond onto the site, have been dramatically reduced. The partners are hopeful to catch up on implementing events and cultural activities in the future.

Upscaling

Upscaling is an important challenge for the future. It is difficult to say at this stage what level of upscaling will be achieved and how well this has been prepared for. The delays to the project caused by COVID-19 have arguably overshadowed upscaling as an immediate priority. There will be more to say on how the project is building in scalability in the next journal, once project implementation has advanced further. In the meantime, there are both threats and opportunities.

In terms of local upscaling, land and property prices in the Metropole of Lyon and in Villeurbanne specifically remain on a steep upward trajectory. The availability of land for affordable housing is likely to be a major challenge for the future. The mobilization of public land for the general interest has made this project possible. Future replicability will depend on land use policy, and on sustaining the political commitment to create and maintain affordable housing in the city.

Now, there is a strong political commitment to affordable housing, to tackling homelessness and to being a welcoming city. It remains to be seen how this commitment can be delivered upon sustainably in such a booming housing market. Some degree of local upscaling is built into the project design. For example, the modular units have been built in order to be redeployed by EMH in other sites after the project. As highlighted in the last journal, the project partners are well-placed to upscale innovation from the project. Funding and finance are likely to be sticking points for upscaling, especially funding for this kind of intense cooperation between housing, inclusion, and cultural actors.

Another dimension of upscaling is transnational sharing of knowledge and experience. In Autumn 2020, the Metropole of Lyon hosted an online policy transfer meeting of the [Eurocities working group on homelessness](#). The Home Silk Road project was showcased and generated interest from cities across the EU. The project was also featured in an initiative led by UIA and URBACT in 2020 to exchange practices between cities implementing the right to housing. The project was presented at a workshop on leaving no one behind and was featured as a case study [here](#). The Metropole of Lyon is also a member of FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless. Investing time and resources into sharing the learning from this project and related policies and practices helps create scope for upscaling.

Conclusions

COVID-19 has put considerable pressure on the Home Silk Road project. It has delayed and disrupted many aspects of implementation. Nonetheless, significant progress has been made and a lot of learning generated by the implementation. This challenging time for the project has brought issues of leadership, public procurement, the participative approach and communication with target beneficiaries and users to the fore. The latter two are the most significant challenges at this stage. In the coming months, monitoring and evaluation and upscaling look likely to become more relevant as well.

The main learning points from this journal are:

- Strong political support within the leadership of an urban authority is invaluable for implementing this kind of project. It can help tackle unexpected events like the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - Participative and facilitative leadership helps to steer a project partnership through challenging times;
 - COVID-19 has demonstrated the need for flexibility and adaptability in the implementation of innovation;
 - The reduction in cultural life on the site due to COVID-19 has had a major impact on the project, demonstrating clearly how culture can support inclusion and participation.
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Housing

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