

JOURNAL

PROJECT

A Place to Be-Come

📍 Seraing, Belgium

TOPIC

Urban poverty

EDIT 31 JANUARY 2022

BY FRANCESCA

ANSALONI UIA EXPERT

APTBC Journal 2: how the puzzle is assembling as an increasingly coherent whole

See on UIA
website



This second journal covers the year 2021, between the first year and a half and second year and a half of implementation of the A Place To Be-Come project. Despite the pandemic, in 2021 progress has been made in almost every aspect of the project, but especially in terms of visible impacts on green areas and involvement of both local actors and municipal officers. The most relevant fact in terms of schedule is the major change that has been requested and granted, which will extend the project of one year, until the end of August 2023.

A Place To Be-Come (APTBC) aims to tackle urban poverty in Seraing by addressing its multiple dimensions, the economic, social and environmental. In a context of economic crisis, exacerbated by the ongoing health crisis, the project relies on local resources - such as grassroots associations, social services, existing green areas and ongoing urban policies - in order to activate synergies and dynamics able to boost a collective process for the improvement of the relationship between citizens and their environment. The target neighbourhood is the most disadvantaged of the city and lacks quality public spaces where residents could build fulfilling relationships or feel encouraged to engage in civic life. The ambition of the project is to co-produce new spaces of encounter and engagement that help enhance cohesion and inclusion while meeting residents' needs and expectations.

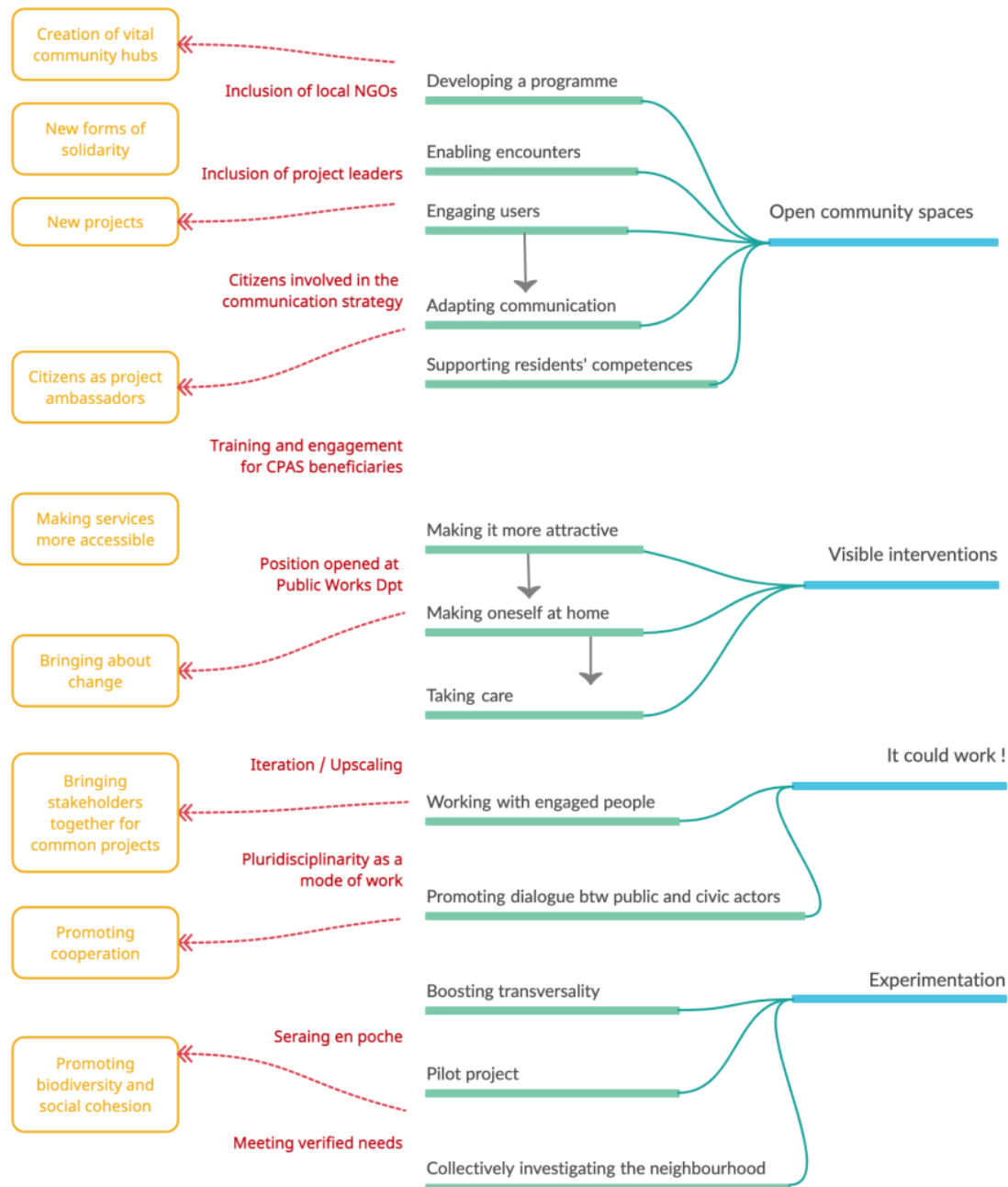
Partnership

- [City of Seraing](#)
- Association pour le Redéploiement Economique du Bassin Sérésien ([Arebs](#))
- University of Liège, Urban and Environmental Engineering Research Unit ([LEMA](#))
- University of Liège, Psychology and Neuroscience of Cognition Research Unit ([PsyNCog](#))
- Centre Public d'Action Sociale ([CPAS](#)) Seraing

- [Natagora](#) asbl
- [Letsgocity](#)
- [Psykolab](#)

Executive Summary

The main reasons why **A Place To Be-Come** is an ambitious and challenging project are the context on the one side and the multidimensional nature of the project itself on the other side. Seraing is a city that is not used to practice citizens' participation, its financial situation is difficult and the health crisis has hit here as elsewhere, affecting priorities and slowing down processes of innovation and change. This in part explains why it took two years to see some results, especially in stakeholders' mobilisation and engagement, which is an essential element of the project's success in the medium and long term. An extension of one year has been requested and granted and it is surely very much needed.



A scheme of APTBC impacts © Author (Arebs' source)

Some challenges that were identified as particularly relevant in the first journal, such as leadership and the organisational arrangements within the urban authority, have slightly improved in this last year as a result of a great commitment of the project team as a whole to mobilising the relevant stakeholders and building trust. Today, the process undertaken should be pursued and consolidated in order not to undermine progress achieved so far. Communication with target beneficiaries and users has also showed improvements and it can be assessed at the beginning of 2022 as limitedly relevant. Nonetheless, the access and distribution of its digital dimension

should be carefully observed by taking into account digital illiteracy as an obstacle to inclusion.

Monitoring and evaluation, together with upscaling, have turned into, respectively, a somehow relevant challenge and a major challenge for the project. This is explained by the fact that, as the project moves ahead, they gain importance and their planning becomes more strategic. In particular, identifying the resources needed and the vital conditions for taking to a higher level the innovative mechanism that have been tested, is already imperative.

What has not changed is the scale of challenge for public procurement and the participative approach for co-implementation. The main problem for public procurement is still the slowness of procedures, which have not been innovated for this project, and the regional guardianship that puts the city of Seraing in the condition of extending administrative delays even further. As for the participative approach, it remains one the biggest challenge for APTBC and the health crisis has certainly added hardship. However, by taking advantage of what has been realised so far in terms of engagement and mobilisation, drawing from what the team has learnt from [a visit in Turin](#) and putting a collective effort in this task, a change of pace is within reach.

Up-to-date at the end of 2021

After almost two years marked by difficulties and delays in part caused by the COVID-19 outbreak and in part also linked to some initial setbacks, in 2021 project implementation has been running more smoothly, partners have become more familiar with one another and the fruit of the first year could be harvested. There is still a lot of work to be done, especially with regard to citizens' engagement, services accessibility and the creation of community hubs, which remain the greatest challenges before the end of the project.

At the end of 2021, much progress has been made, some delays have been caught up and some others require greater attention in the months to come. A major change has been requested to extend APTBC of one year, so that now the end of the project is set to August 2023.

- **What has been boosted**

The activities that were more advanced in 2020, nature-based trainings and green areas improvement and regeneration, have allowed the whole project to gain a deserved visibility, reach a wider audience and obtain credibility in the eye of local actors, namely public officers, councillors and municipal workers. The first group of selected residents who received a nature-based training successfully completed its course. The department of Public Works hired one of the trainees at the end of his training and this newly recruited municipal worker is now in charge of the training of three recently selected trainees and overseeing the current state of green areas' maintenance together with the staff of municipal agents. The attitude and the perception of municipal agents toward the new mode of managing green areas as proposed and concretely implemented by Natagora has radically changed in 2021, laying the foundations for a more productive collaboration. Even if the qualitative evaluation of the impacts of this action on parks perception and use is expected in 2022, a positive feedback has been informally registered from users, passers-by and local organisations in the last months. In the same period, Natagora and the trainees integrated their work in the parks by adding two activities that would foster participation and knowledge transfer: they set up about 30 nature-based workshops initially meant for local organisations' members, then open to all interested citizens, involving more than 250 people. This activity, besides its relevance per se, have proved relevant for the project as a whole, because it has contributed to concretely engaging citizens and communicating about the project.



At work in the parks © Author

In the same vein, APTBC has had a momentum in 2021 in communication and networking. With a new communication officer who arrived in the middle of 2020, a comprehensive communication strategy was put in place at the beginning of 2021. This was accomplished through a collaborative approach aimed to agree on objectives, target groups, tasks and responsibilities. Some identified tools did not work as they would, but in the end a significant improvement in both contents and results can be pointed out. The Facebook page has gained followers and visitors, the newsletter reaches more than 500 subscribers, the [website](#) is rich in information. The communication plan has also included a rational schedule of meeting with local actors in bilateral configurations to deal with an extensive thus dangerous lack of interest in the project. This strategy, coupled with other actions and contributions, has produced good results and needs to be pursued. For many reasons, networking has been a critical point for APTBC at the beginning. On the one side, during the first year and a half of implementation the project team met some resistance in some institutional actors that can be explained by a mixture of poor interest, scepticism and “business-as-usual” attitude. To this, the health crisis has added limitations to face-to-face meetings and delays with the delivery of concrete results. However, the implementation of a directory of local services, which has required to make a lot of effort into developing relationships and building networks, has certainly helped to fill the gap with the social prevention department and local actors, who have been concretely involved and whose experience has contributed to expand knowledge about missing chains in services provision in Seraing.

In parallel with the creation of the directory, the design of the website and the mobile application *Seraing en poche* has speeded up and it is now in demo version. Its configuration will make accessible in digital form many public services - provided both by institutions and associations and organised into categories - the agenda of city events and a geolocation of services such as pharmacies, banks and shops.



A flyer for the mobile app Seraing en poche © Arebs

• What has caught up

As we have illustrated in a previous [article](#), in spring 2021 the process to collectively design one of the two planned community hubs was launched and continued quite smoothly over the summer, only to be temporarily interrupted as a consequence of a turnover within the partner staff in charge of its implementation. As it will be discussed in the challenges section, staff turnover is quite an issue in a three-years project. The collective process to create a community hub in the premises of the Maison du Peuple lasted six months and resulted in a group of motivated actors joining together and sharing common values and objectives. It is a start but there is still a long way to go to turn ideas into a project. The process is expected to resume in February 2022, while the renovation works on the existing building should start in March. An engaged working group is a good starting point, but what the [visit to Turin](#) has taught us is that a community is not built in a day and many conditions need to be fulfilled all along the process, which is a test-and-fail one. In this respect, WP6 activities, conceived to better understand and support the improving of citizens' relationship with their urban environment, could be completed at the end of 2021 with the release of a [final guide](#) for institutional and economic actors, grassroots organisations and citizens. The guide includes the results of a participative work that was carried out by Lema with local actors to identify their needs with regard to their neighbourhood and recommendations on how to take action: two surveys, one to

explore the commercial offer and service provision and its capacity to meet residents' needs; another one to investigate neighbourhood's concerns and urban challenges; two focus groups with economic actors to identify opportunities for improvement of the offer, and three workshops involving about 50 residents to co-design proposals for the regeneration of three identified public spaces, with a particular emphasis on a neglected green area next to one of three parks that are being upgraded by the trainees and project partner Natagora.



During a co-design workshop © Lema

As part of the nature-based actions of APTBC, 5 out of 10 spaces representatives of how to develop biodiversity in the city were realised in 2021 and 4 more are under way. What makes this action particularly relevant for the project as a whole is its participatory approach: every space is identified and then realised with the support and the collaboration of institutions, local associations and citizens, so that they become not only a way to make the central neighbourhoods greener and friendlier, but also an instrument of communication and mobilisation through visible results. This method has slowed the process but it has been a fruitful experimentation on possible future actions of *commoning* involving local actors and the municipal authority.



A workshop at a primary school © Author

- **Delays and issues**

Delays have affected many project activities, from investments, to trainings, to workshops with citizens. In particular, in the last trimester of 2021, the management team requested (and obtained) to UIA Permanent Secretariat a major change, that is an extension of one year for the project, justified by the delay in the process of implementation of the second creative station (community hub), one of the main investments. To recall, the project is being implemented in two neighbourhoods that will host a community hub each to be as close as possible to residents and assure a high level of accessibility to a variety of services. One of the two hubs was originally planned in the premises of an existing building that was to be acquired by the municipality. When the acquisition failed for the off-market price of the building, a new solution was sought for. The search for the appropriate location and the most cost-effective solution took some time and focused on lots already owned by the City of Seraing. The solution that was finally found and submitted to the UIA Permanent Secretariat for validation is a site inside the park of Les Marêts, which is undergoing substantial transformation with APTBC. To reduce timing for construction and open the new venue as soon as possible, a modular construction model has been chosen. The modular block will be located at a secondary entrance of the park, with the idea to contribute to the animation of this side of the green area. In particular, the proposal aims to create a place where information, practice and culture around the themes of health, food and nature can circulate and grow. In terms of delays, works are expected to start at the beginning of 2023 and end in April. This schedule means that the new creative station will be kick-started four months before the end of the project, leaving a short time for the handover to the municipality.

To prepare for an efficient transition, it will be vital to structure and launch well in advance the process to engage citizens and relevant stakeholder, in connection with the other participatory activities and events organised at the Maison du Peuple and the Ruche à projets. *La Ruche à projets* is a temporary creative station that was conceived as the place where a collective dynamics and a participatory process could start while waiting for the two permanent creative stations/hubs to be renovated or built. This plan has been disrupted by the health crisis and the Ruche à Projets has started working as a venue for workshops and meetings with great delay. As part of the strategy to promote the development of new competences and support the creation of economic-related activities, calls for projects were planned for 2021 to be hosted at the Ruche, but they have been postponed to the beginning of 2022. A series of [meetings and workshops](#) to present the call and its objectives was set up in the last months of 2021. The goal is to boost a dynamics with residents and interested citizens, and help them realise the desired project by providing a space and technical support but no economic contribution. Finally, the training in sustainable management of green areas for municipal agents was scheduled for the first year but had to be postponed many times, mainly for changes in the organisation of municipal activities, as a consequence of the health crisis. It started in autumn 2021, benefiting of the good trust that has been built throughout the first two years of the project. In this perspective, even if this activity is delayed, time has not been lost; it has instead served as a forward-looking investment for a more productive collaboration and knowledge transfer.

Implementation challenges

Challenges are part of an innovative process and cannot be eluded. The UIA initiative has identified 7 main challenges that are expected to impact, at different levels, every funded project. Observing the overall progress made in the last year of implementation, some changes and improvements need to be reported. Nonetheless, a great deal of attention and commitment must be devoted in the coming months to the participative approach and the upscaling of the project.

Challenge

Observation

Leadership

Challenge level



As it was clarified in the first journal, leadership has been since the beginning of the project a major challenge. The separation between the political (the municipality) and the operational level (Arebs) has resulted in a low level of engagement of the city leaders and lack of cooperation from municipal services in the first year and a half of project implementation. Another obstacle to a full leadership has being represented by the consequences of the pandemic, in terms of a decline in social and professional relationships, disruption of the priorities within municipal services and delays in the implementation of the activities. In particular the delays have left the project without concrete and visible outputs during the months of 2020 and until the second trimester of 2021, making it more difficult for project partners to engage and motivate a political leadership still cautious and uninvolved.

Increase in visibility. During 2021 some activities have paid off with regards to their capacity to strike the attention and show tangible change. For example, the interventions in parks and green areas have started to become more visible in the public space, attract people (see the [zoom-in](#)) and concretely show the positive impacts of the project. The work that has been done in the parks by Natagora and the workers employed through the project has completely transformed almost neglected green areas into enjoyable and welcoming places. Positive feedbacks from citizens may have played a role in the increased awareness of some elected officials. Some other activities, such as a regular and relentless communication at multiple levels, have generated interest and curiosity. A series of bilateral meetings organised by the management team with local political leaders to discuss about the project has facilitated the decision-making process.

Emerging lessons

As it was assumed in the first year, to get a stronger leadership would have required time and energy. It would have required promoting the project at the municipal level and convincing political leaders of its positive effects on the city of Seraing. This objective has been pursued in the second year, it has been productive and results should not be dissipated. The involvement of political leaders needs to be consolidated throughout the project and their commitment should be encouraged by showing how the project is generating change for the better, both for citizens and the municipal machine. At the same time, a roadmap towards the handover of project's outcomes needs to be implemented in advance with the direct participation of political actors. This means that for each action, goals have to be clarified throughout a collective process that involve the management team and representatives from the municipality; risks and opportunities must be evaluated and a shared agenda should be created as a guide for the last years of the project and its legacy.



Public procurement in the city of Seraing must come to terms with the limits imposed by being under regional guardianship, a condition that adds an additional step to the regular process of validation of public works. Nonetheless, despite the cumbersome nature of procedures and the slowness due to pandemic priorities, two elements made it possible to limit further delays in the process of investments implementation. First, the low level of risk linked to European funding gives to the project the chance to reduce idle times, so that while waiting for the town planning permit to be validated by the regional authority, the city of Seraing agreed to proceed with the tendering file for works. Second, the presence within the Public Works department of a professional who has been employed specifically to take charge of the APTBC project's investments, is a guarantee that the procedure, if not accelerated, is always followed up.

A major change was issued (and accepted by the Permanent Secretariat) for one of the two creative stations, which had come a long way before its location was finally confirmed. The challenge with this investment is time. Once the site was identified (a space in the Parc des Marêts), the designer was selected and works are expected to start in February 2023, with the project ending in August 2023. This time frame is a short one for building a community around the new place before the end of APTBC.

Emerging lessons

A race against the clock. The main challenge linked to public procurement procedures for a 3-years project is lack of time, if you have as main goal the co-production of space with the beneficiaries. For the day shelter and the community hub known as *Maison du Peuple*, a participative process was initiated but in order to stay on schedule with the construction/renovation works, a less ambitious and less participatory arrangement was set up eventually. A lesson learnt is that these risks must be evaluated when drawing up the project, especially if the community that is supposed to be there to cooperate for the design phase is still to be assembled and needs a long stage of mobilisation.

To date, the additional year that has been granted to the project with the request for major change will give more time to boost the community building process around both the first creative station and the temporary hub, *la Ruche à Projets*. This time could also be used to integrate into the same process the forthcoming creative station in the Parc des Marêts.

This year, the decision-making process was structured around two kind of formal and regular moments of discussion: two steering committees and four management committees. The working groups formed at the beginning of 2021, as explained in the first journal, were dismissed once a common strategy was defined for each subject (communication, participation, coordination and the management of the temporary creative station). Instead, according to specific and timely needs, ad-hoc meetings has been organised with relevant actors on specific issues.

At the beginning of 2021, after almost a year of pandemic, it was clear that some work needed to be done to improve the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms and dynamics; in particular, a disconnection between two levels of governance, the political and the operational one, and within the operational level itself was pointed out. From the start, the project strategy was defined at the operational level by Arebs, but it sometimes met the opposition of city departments, some setbacks with partners and poor support by political leadership. These circumstances were in part exacerbated by the pandemic. To address the problem it was decided to work especially on communication and team building. First, several workshops were organised to define a common strategy with all the partners. This initiative helped clarify partners' own perspectives and produced a coordination tool and a communication plan, which will be discussed elsewhere. The coordination tool, le [RACI](#), is a matrix that makes it easier to share and visualise partners' responsibilities. Its purpose is that for every action of the project, each partner knows exactly who is in charge, who is accountable, who must be informed or consulted. It was proposed to enhance coordination and it reached some results. Nonetheless, not all the partners filled it regularly, so that its value was eventually limited.

Second, several bilateral meetings with political leaders concerned by the project have been organised by Arebs throughout this year of implementation, with the aim to raise awareness, gain visibility and support, and discuss sustainability in the long term. This move was intended to promote the project, as we have seen, but also to encourage a smoother collaboration.

Third, the temporary hub called La ruche à projets could finally open and welcome some meetings and activities, to facilitate exchange and coordination among partners and with other actors. Nonetheless, so far the place has not become a vibrant and bustling space for sharing and co-designing, as it was meant for, mainly for coronavirus-related restrictions.

Emerging lessons

Halfway. This challenge has not been overlooked and different solutions have been arranged to ease the decision-making process. Nevertheless, if between the political and the operational level some improvements have been made, the partnership in charge of the work packages still needs to be reinforced, especially in the perspective of a greater sustainability of actions in the future. While partners' autonomy should be respected, each partner should work for a common strategy and transdisciplinarity must be assured throughout the project. Moreover, now that some municipal services have been engaged more concretely and feel more uplifted by APTBC, new arrangements could be studied and put in place with a view to anticipate the handover of the project.

During the first year of implementation of APTBC, the engagement of all the different actors connected to the project was difficult and slow for many reasons. Partners were settling in, municipal officers had to become familiar with new activities and new practices, local organisations were involved but no concrete (though temporary) outcome could be showed, because as a result of the pandemics only a limited part of scheduled activities could be carried out. Given that participation, at all levels, is a pivotal aspect of APTBC and the main key to favourable outcomes, it is quite clear that there was a lot to catch up in 2021. Some results of the activities that could be developed in 2020 - such as the mapping of grassroots associations, the first workshops and exploratory walks with citizens, and the

extensive work accomplished in the parks by the trainees - have started to be collected in 2021. This improvement was consolidated when more activities could be resumed, concrete outcomes appeared and more people could be involved in the field and not only remotely.

A certain progress has been reached with the engagement of municipal services and local organisations in comparison to the first year. On the one side, the creation of a directory of communal services and associations has given the opportunity to present the project extensively to city officials and deputies, and to all the already mapped organisations. This initiative was conducted on the basis of concrete output: a digital application, *Seraing en poche*, which has been conceived by the partner Letsgocity and designed to make a great variety of information accessible to citizens in one digital place. With this tool, it has been possible to generate interest, collect information and raise awareness about the project among a wide range of actors.

At the same time, the intense agenda of workshops that Natagora promoted and realised in summer 2021 with all sorts of public and private actors on the theme of the green city has certainly built new relations and connections and engaged the participants, motivating them to join the project. To this, we can add the satisfying involvement of municipal officers who have recently started their training on sustainable green management which was delayed many times.

Citizens' participation, on the contrary, is still difficult to trigger. The reasons are the same of the first year: a structural lack of familiarity with active participation in *Seraing*; a widespread attitude of private and public actors to play more as providers of services than facilitators of actions; the main project partner for the participatory action has also faced a significant staff turnover which has had an impact on their activities in terms of timetable and efficacy.

Emerging lessons

Participation as a tool. It takes time to build trust, to establish sound relationships and share the same vision with other actors. The positive feedback that municipal workers have been providing during their recent training is also the result of the radical way in which APTBC has transformed parks in one year and showed that it is possible and effective to work differently. This approach should be employed with other activities. Communication is a good tool, but with lack of time, relevant actors should be also engaged directly on the field in producing practical outcomes more than working on theoretical issues. This would help bring together people, discover what people are more interested in and test some practices. To start, drawing more on training modules on nature-based solutions and workshops for exemplary green spaces would have the advantage to rely on concrete activities that are already working and reinforce the dynamic among partners towards the common goal of promoting active citizenship.

Participation should be, like communication, transversal to all packages and mutually reinforcing across all the actions of the project.

The turnover threat. Turnover is risky but it also can bring about positive change. Turnover is a major problem when it happens in the middle of a process where actors' trust and engagement are key requirements for successful outcomes. In particular, if one's goal is to promote citizens' and local actors' mobilisation, promoting good and stable relationships should be central to one's strategy. Relationships need time and commitment to be built and consolidated and a lot of attention must be paid to preserving a common vision and maintaining motivation among partners. With regard to community hubs and the mobilisation process their creation is supposed to boost, it would be appropriate not to dissipate the advantage gained over these two years by the project in terms of legitimacy, through the intertwining of all WPs' activities, events, communication and networking, so as to maximise opportunities of making connections and creating bonds.



While evaluation is not a major challenge at this stage of the project, this is the case with monitoring. The approach to monitoring for the ERDF programmes is evolving from a focus on quantifying impacts to a focus on measuring the change generated for direct beneficiaries.^[1] Monitoring is conceived as the continuous observation of outputs delivery and project results with the aim to encourage reframing of interventions and/or indicators and facilitate adjustments during implementation. Of outputs and results, APTBC project is taking care efficiently of the first and is unsatisfactory on dealing with the second, which has to do with impact on beneficiaries. With respect to monitoring project's outputs, at the beginning of 2021 a system called RACI^[2] was put in place to both improve coordination and supervision of activities. This model has been created first as a communication tool, but being organised around tasks and responsibilities, it allows partners to visualise the implementation progress of each action. The effectiveness of this tool has nevertheless proved limited, as some partners have acknowledged, because on the one side not all the partners have embraced it and filled it with diligence; on the other side, even when filled in, the RACI has been perceived as an additional and demanding but not so useful task by some partners. Nevertheless, in the last year monitoring of outputs delivery has globally improved as a consequence of better inter-partners communication.

As for results on direct beneficiaries, APTBC is expected on the one hand to enhance the level of understanding of mechanisms that help reduce poverty during a process of urban regeneration and through their involvement in civic life. On the other hand, the project should contribute to increase citizens' participation by encouraging behavioural changes. Results are thus connected to a higher and more informed participation of local residents in decision-making processes at the city level, to an improved perception of the neighbourhood and an increased use of its public spaces. While outputs can be observed during the implementation of the project, results as they have been conceived here will be measurable mainly at the end of the project, only in some cases after the completion of specific actions (i.e. after psychosocial interventions of WP5). This way of designing project results as final outcomes does not facilitate monitoring direct outcomes during implementation.

Enhanced use of public spaces. This result is going to be analysed in spring 2022, when the psychosocial interventions in the parks will be finalised and a survey will be carried out to compare data. Some results are already visible even if they have not been measured: the team of trainees in the parks has noted an increase in attendance and most of all they have received encouragements by passers-by and neighbours. Project partners expect to confirm in the next months this positive feedback with data.

Citizens participation in public debate and civic life This result is difficult to measure because the number of attendees to participative workshops is not the only indicator of its achievement. The ambition of APTBC is to enhance throughout the project the capacity of the local community to understand urban development challenges, take part in public life and possibly play a role in the transformation of their neighbourhood. This process of change takes time and might be neither so linear nor consistent.

Emerging lessons

One or two result indicators should have been designed with the aim to make outcomes observation possible during implementation, in particular with regard to the capability of participation in civic life of target groups. Monitoring the mobilisation capacity of the project is crucial at this stage to allow partners to reframe their action if needed and discuss internally the possibility of adapting to unexpected challenges.

[1] European Commission, Staff working document, Performance, monitoring and evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the Just Transition Fund in 2021-2027, 8 July 2021

[2] RACI matrix is a model that describes roles, tasks and deliverables of each actor involved in a project, with the aim to encourage cross-control, facilitate coordination and keep outputs in focus (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Responsibility_assignment_matrix)

Communication with
target beneficiaries
and users

Challenge level ●

If we look back at the first year, communication was quite a challenge by reason of a delay in designating a permanent communication officer and the difficulties linked to the health crisis. We observe at this stage an improved situation from many points of view. First, an overall communication strategy was put in place in a collective manner and a communication plan was set up and shared among all the partners. From a global point of view, the collaborative work has not been as beneficial as expected: even if a plan and a schedule were established, the timeline has often changed and the programme has needed continuous revisions. On the other hand, the multiplication of contacts with both external partners and potential beneficiaries had been steadily growing thus broadening the audience and reaching a greater number of residents. As mentioned with regard to the participative approach, to raise awareness about the project and promote it to different targets demanded commitment, but in the end it could benefit from the opportunity to exhibit real albeit incomplete outcomes and showed some positive effects.

With the launch of the [website](#) of the project at the beginning of 2021, an important step towards the aggregation of information regarding the project has been made. In the first trimester of 2022 the mobile application *Seraing en poche* will be released to contribute to the ambitious goal of making local services more accessible for all citizens. The time that has been devoted to collect information and communicate with all the relevant stakeholders should facilitate the adoption of the application, given that the “analogical” part of it, the services directory, has received wide appreciation. Nevertheless, to encourage its distribution and broad accessibility, it might prove necessary to envisage the possibility that involved actors provide assistance to users at an earlier stage and the implementation of tools to directly engage residents into active use, for example through playful activities.

Emerging lessons

What has been observed in the latest months and in relation to some events organised by project partners, such as workshops, is that even though positive feedbacks and reactions can be easily collected through digital communication (facebook, for example), actual participation is still low and unsatisfactory. The greatest challenge for the next year is to take the leap from providing relevant information to triggering engagement and participation through communication. This goal will require further improving coordination between all the actors involved and strengthening the integration of project’s activities and communication tools.

Upscaling

Challenge level ●

At the beginning of 2021, the upscaling of the project was mainly a remote perspective to be patiently built through the involvement of every stakeholder and the main obstacle was the lack of awareness and motivation from some institutional partners and local actors. The only certainty was that the project would have left one new day-shelter, a renovated building and a new building hosting two community hubs. Today we have a better and more promising context, where the main institutional partners, the CPAS (social services) and the department of public works (in charge of parks and green areas maintenance) in particular, are engaged and motivated by the project. As for CPAS, they have been involved in the collection and organisation of a directory of existing services with the aim to identify the missing chains, in other words connections the lack or malfunctioning of which makes existing services ineffective or poorly accessible. This joint collaboration has contributed to build trust in the project and has encouraged CPAS to take responsibility for the future of the directory and its updating. On the other side, the department of Public Works, which employs municipal workers for nature-based maintenance and showed some mistrust in the first year, had the opportunity to witness the transformation of public parks brought about by the regular intervention of project trainees with Natagora. This direct experience of change has been the key for motivation and involvement in the last months and today the department has been taking a more collaborative and proactive approach to the project.

Emerging lessons

The future of parks. This is one of the most promising outcomes of the project in terms of sustainability. Despite the pandemic, it was possible to work to train a group of young unemployed residents and change substantially the way parks are and are perceived. At the same time, visible results have convinced the municipality that the method works and citizens appreciate what has been done. This result needs to be consolidated throughout the project so that a permanent modification in municipal practices is achieved.

The future of creative stations Creative stations do not exist yet, so their sustainability is to be planned from the start, from the first phases of conception and programming. As it has been illustrated with regard to the project team's [visit in Turin](#), much work needs to be done to federate people around an ambitious project and this is the greatest challenge for the next year if we want to create community spaces where positive social impacts can be maximised.

The future of accessibility. APTBC has been strongly committed to raise awareness among local actors, both institutional and associative, about which services exist in Seraing and what they are for. A thorough [analysis](#) of missing chains in social services was carried out to this purpose. The directory and the incoming mobile application aim to improve collaboration, to remove overlapping and increase accessibility of services. If we do not want to waste the efforts made, it is vital that the handover is well planned in advance. As it is suggested in the Digital Transition Partnership of the EU Urban Agenda, lack of skills in the use of digital technology can be a major limitation to access to many services.^[1] In order to help citizens enhance their possibilities of digital inclusion, neighbourhood-level solutions called digital centres are being tested in Europe to provide support and training to those in need of acquiring digital skills.^[2]

The future of citizens' participation. If participation is a redistribution of power among different actors, it is clear that its quality can vary a lot and depends on how much power is released from the authority and to what degree such power is distributed. In Seraing the relationship between citizens and public administration has been for a long time of the customer-provider type, which is characterised by a paternalistic approach of the authority and a "wait and see" attitude of citizens.^[3] To modify this culture takes time and calls for taking some risks on both sides. It is capital, while implementing the project through the involvement of residents and local organisations, to set up a **process of capacity-building** directed toward both the civic society and the local authority - in particular social workers and public officers - with the aim to support a transition from a "working for" to a "working with" citizens that necessarily begins with the a radical change of perspective, the acquisition of new competences and working methods. To bring about an action of capacity building in this context means to pay attention on how the relevant stakeholders will be involved in the creation of the two community hubs and how at the end they will have acquired a *savoir faire* that they lack today.

^[1] Urban Agenda for EU, Multilevel governance in action (2021 update) ^[2] See the Digital Neighbourhood Instrument booklet at <https://futurium.ec.europa.eu/en/urban-agenda/digital-transition/library/digital-neighbourhood-instrument> ^[3] N-Power: a guide for Neighbourhood Empowerment at <https://www.n-powerinterreg.eu/guide-empowerment>

Conclusion

A Place To Be-Come is a complex project that has been conceived as an integrated approach to urban poverty. In this respect, it aims to improve beneficiaries' living conditions by tackling a variety of urban, social and economic

conditions that all together contribute to deteriorating their quality of life. As a result of its multidimensionality, the project's actions are meant to complement and reinforce each other to reach a multiplier effect. This complex articulation has at least three consequences that increase the project's exposition to risks. First, if the outcomes of a single action are visible, the effects of its assemblage with other actions are much more invisible and to some extent unpredictable. Second, gaining a clear understanding of how actions, actors and their mutual relationships are intermingling is difficult when the process is ongoing; in this context seeing opportunities and seizing them is sometimes not self-evident. And third, in this context, delays can bring as well opportunities as risks depending on context. To give an example, a delay in the implementation of nature-based training for municipal workers has been an advantage because time has been a good ally for trust and engagement. Conversely, delays in public procurement will reduce the time available for experimentation within the lifetime of the project.

In 2021 the government of the Walloon Region set a plan of investments for Walloon cities to boost local and regional urban economy.^[1] Seraing was allocated about 16 millions of euros to obtain which the city is expected to develop a 4 years action plan in connection with its Programme Stratégique Transversal (PST) and focused on, inter alia, urban development, greening neighbourhoods, social cohesion and vacant land regeneration. In this context, it would be smart to integrate the upscaling of APTBC into the city overall strategy, aiming at an allocation of resources that continues the path undertaken with respect to citizens participation, improvement of central green areas and access to services.

[1] <https://www.wallonie.be/fr/actualites/une-nouvelle-politique-integree-de-la-ville>

Urban poverty

See on UIA website

