

## JOURNAL

## PROJECT

A Place to Be-Come

📍 Seraing, Belgium

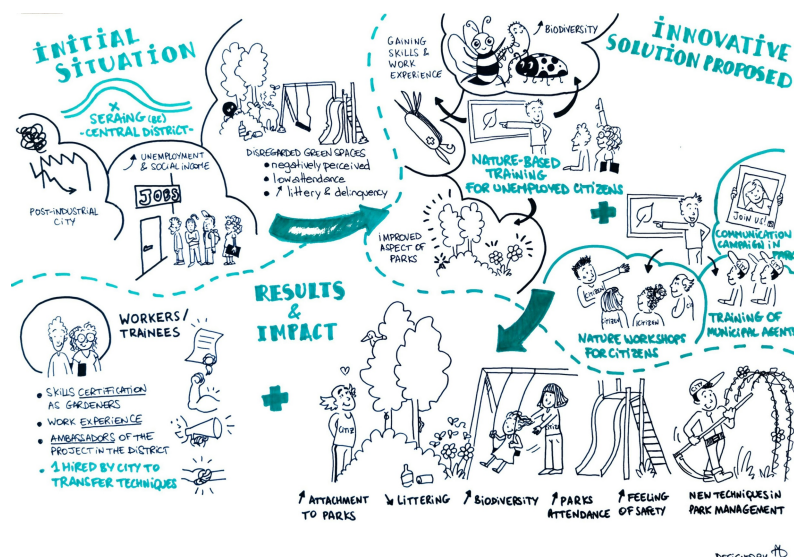
## TOPIC

Urban poverty

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# A Place To Be-Come: journal 3

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The third edition of the journal covers almost the entire 2022. The implementation of most of the project actions has been completed and the remaining ones need mostly a follow-up. The last months have been devoted to finalise trainings, workshops, the procurement for the investments, and to involve in the project as much as citizens as possible, in view of consolidating change at the institutional level and providing a fertile ground for civic engagement to thrive.

## Background

The project A Place To Be-Come (APTBC) has the ambition to fight poverty and promote social cohesion in two central neighbourhoods of the city of Seraing (Belgium) through a strong integrated approach. The target neighbourhoods are the most disadvantaged of the city and public spaces in Seraing lack the necessary quality that would help residents to build fulfilling relationships or feel encouraged to engage in civic life. In this context, the project aims to co-produce new spaces of encounter and engagement that help enhance cohesion and inclusion while meeting residents' needs and expectations. In practice, APTBC supports the improvement of green areas by training, employing and engaging local residents and municipal officials in sustainable green management; it studies and analyses social and economic needs to provide new services and encourage the upgrade of existing ones; it builds and renovates a day-shelter and two community hubs; it incites citizens to come together and ideate new collective projects for their neighbourhood.

## Partnership

- City of Seraing
- Association pour le Redéploiement Economique du Bassin Sérésien (Arebs) [project management, communication]
- University of Liège, Urban and Environmental Engineering Research Unit (LEMA) [community projects, urban analysis, participative workshops]
- University of Liège, Psychology and Neuroscience of Cognition Research Unit (PsyNCog) [psychosocial interventions, monitoring and evaluation]
- Centre Public d'Action Sociale (CPAS) Seraing [social services, socio-professional reintegration]
- Natagora asbl [nature-based trainings, workshops, green areas management]
- Letsgocity [communication, mobile app]

- Nunaat (former Psykolab) [soft skills development, psychosocial interventions]

## Executive Summary

The end of the project is approaching. With the major change accepted, the project will close at the end of August 2023, in 8 months. Most of the actions have been completed, with the exception of the three building sites, which are expected to close between the end of 2022 (*Maison du Peuple*), the end of the project (day-shelter) and maybe beyond (*La Cour des Marêts*). The next months will be devoted to assure a smooth handover from each partner to the city. The last year was rich in terms of involvement of citizens and municipal officers throughout all the activities: from nature-based trainings, workshops and events; to the calls for projects at the temporary community hub *La Ruche à projets*; to the networking that produced new projects (the *Medibus*) and project proposals; to the collaborative work on the mobile application; to surveys on site, psychosocial interventions and communication campaigns.

Globally, implementation challenges have been addressed and possible negative impacts reduced. This is the result of both a continuous effort put into it and the gradual maturation of what was sown in the past years. Today, the most worrying challenges concern leadership and the upscaling of the project, the second being strongly intertwined with the first one. In the [previous journal](#), leadership was considered a medium risk for the project because visible results of various activities had started to produce some awareness among political leaders and chiefs of departments. If what has been reached so far in terms of awareness and endorsement is not consolidated in the remaining months, the consequences for the upscaling and, more generally, for embedding innovation into ordinary praxis, might be detrimental.

While some challenges have remained similarly risky, such as public procurement and monitoring, organisational arrangements within the urban authority and the participative approach have slightly improved. On the one hand, the collaboration with and between municipal departments has set up and thrived under the impulse of the APTBC team. It is possible to assume that these changes have been incorporated and cooperation will continue as a new mode of action. On the other hand, a vibrant small community is born at *La Ruche* and sparks of committed participation have been ignited.

According to some partners, one more challenge is to be identified in the risk of dissipating all the lessons learnt, the results and the good practices that have been produced during the project and thanks to the hard work of every stakeholder involved. For this reason, the remaining time should be invested in consolidating outcomes, lobbying and taking care of transferring knowledge and expertise.

## Up-to-date at the end of 2022

While 2021 was a year of transition from the serious effects of the COVID-19 crisis to a return to our previous ordinary practices, this year 2022 brought to APTBC project a real momentum. Most of the activities that were delayed by the pandemic (and other occurrences) were caught up or even fostered: this applies to participatory activities at the temporary creative station (*La Ruche*) and nature-based trainings, but also the *Medibus* initiative, which is part of the day-shelter project. The boost for these actions was in part induced by an extensive preparatory work of networking and persuasion engaged since 2020.

The impacts of the green area management carried out in the three parks of the central neighbourhoods were evaluated through an extensive inquiry that was deferred to Spring 2022 to benefit from the removal of sanitary measures and good weather.

Major backlogs concern the three investments for the construction of the day-shelter, the renovation of *La Maison du Peuple* and the construction of the prefabricated module for the second creative station (*La Cour des Marêts*): for many reasons that will be detailed below, these activities could not make up the backlog resulting from some structural issues.

## What has been boosted or consolidated

The most relevant event for the project in 2022 is the **becoming of *La Ruche à projets* the shared space** it was meant to be since its first openings in 2021. In 2021, *La Ruche* hosted the group of trainees who were following the nature-based course. At *La Ruche* they met in the mornings, got ready for work, had lunch together and stowed their tools at the end of the working day. *La Ruche* is also the place where the stakeholders interested in the future of *La Maison du Peuple* regularly met. As it was mentioned in the second journal, a turn-over of the staff of Lema, the partner in charge of implementing this process, led to some discontinuities and made the overall process less coherent and more difficult to understand to both insiders and outsiders. In 2021, however, two circumstances made it possible to catch up: first, the end of the restrictions linked to the pandemic and, second, a new coordinator who took over the process and was able to trigger a collective dynamic one call for projects after the other. The calls for projects (in French: *appels à occupation*) are conceived as an opportunity for the winner to use a space, which is shared with others, where to develop an activity that might be of interest for Seraing

residents. The three successive calls, which have followed one another over a period of approximately ten months, have brought together 13 people and [developed 15 projects](#). This small but very dynamic group of people has been meeting regularly to plan collective actions, create synergies and discuss issues. It is this community which the APTBC team expects to become the core of the future *Maison du Peuple*. For this to happen, the Lema coordinator and the Arebs' team are lobbying for the recruitment of a new community manager who would take the lead after the end of Lema's contract. The community manager would, in their proposal, pursue the work engaged at *La Ruche* by launching two more calls for projects, expanding the actual community and taking care of it, and would also assure a smooth transition towards *La Maison du Peuple*. The actual coordinator of *La Ruche* points out that the city's financial difficulties<sup>[1]</sup> pose many constraints to the implementation of new projects and put council members in the condition of searching first for the solution to the most urgent issues and secondarily the remaining, less overriding ones.



Radio Seraing: one of the last projects supported by la Ruche à projets © Arebs

**Nature-based trainings and green areas regeneration**, as we have seen in the [previous edition of the journal](#) have been the most visible and renowned actions of the project, even during the first year of the COVID-19 crisis. The possibility to develop every activity outdoor assured a constant progression and a recognisable coherence of the overall mission since the beginning. For this reason, on the one hand, the results of green areas improvement needed just to be consolidated and monitored in order to maintain and keep on promoting public affluence in the parks: affluence has increased (final results will be available in the next months) and less complaints are collected with regard to parks' cleanliness and atmosphere. On the other hand, nature-based trainings for local residents and municipal agents were completed and their success among trainees has contributed to raising awareness on the positive impacts on biodiversity and well being of a sustainable approach to green areas management. In particular, 13 municipal agents and 2 heads of department followed a [complete training course](#). At the end of the training, through an evaluation form they expressed their appreciation of the training, even if many of them are worried about the possibility of a meticulous adoption of the new practices. On the other hand, the feedbacks that project partner Natagora has received from citizens and associations involved in their outreach activities and workshops are extremely positive. Park regeneration, the greening (flower meadows, vegetable garden, herb spiral...) of [10 small neglected areas](#) in the neighbourhood and more than [60 nature-based workshops](#) have brought many citizens closer to nature and made them more concerned about biodiversity and the importance of its increasing and conservation in the urban context.





A new vegetable garden at Seraing Cultural Centre © Arebs

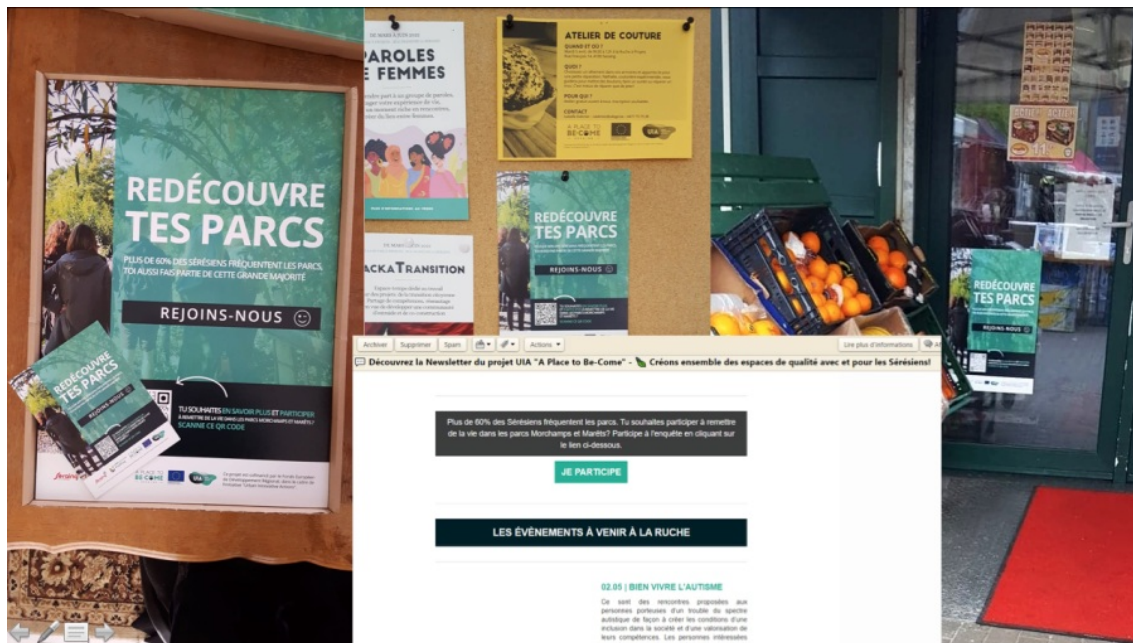
**Medibus** is an initiative that has been developed as a part of the project for the new day-shelter. As it was explained in a [dedicated web article](#), the day-shelter that is being relocated and built anew is essential in the city's strategy for meeting the basic and urgent needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised people who live in the centre of Seraing. *Medibus* is part of this mission and aims to contribute by providing aid to those who, for many different reasons, cannot have access to healthcare and are cut off from public assistance and welfare. The implementation of the *Medibus* project, which consists of the purchase of a fully equipped vehicle and the organisation of an offer of social and medical assistance, was carried out during 2022 with a great effort to find partners and build solid partnerships. Building upon two surveys that were conceived and conducted as part of the APTBC project, the team could identify access to health as one of the main concerns for vulnerable people in Seraing. In 2022 a significant progress has been achieved through a tight collaboration between Arebs, the association Un Toit pour la Nuit (manager of the existent day-shelter) and CPAS, which produced a detailed pilot project including all the needs in terms of human resources, materials, partners, maintenance costs, possible welcoming spots in the neighbourhoods. A partnership of some twenty entities and individuals - including the city, APTBC project, grassroots associations, medical facilities, independent nurses, and health insurances - signed agreements and wrote grant requests to assure the proper functioning of the proposed service. The *Medibus* project was at the embryonic stage when APTBC started and got boosted thank to a first, thorough analysis of needs and deficiencies and to a relentless work for building a network and creating new positive synergies.

### What has caught up

With the aim to support the increase in green areas' attendance and use, the project had planned to introduce psychosocial interventions, that is, incentives for action that in the case of APTBC took the form of an engaging communication campaign, conducted on a large scale throughout the project area, between mid-April and May 2022. This activity, which was scheduled earlier, was delayed by the pandemic crisis but was finally resumed and data analysis will be available in the first semester of 2023. The campaign consisted in disseminating widely throughout the neighbourhood by dropping leaflets in mailboxes and putting up posters in local shops, restaurants and public spaces. Through the leaflets, citizens were also invited to take part to a survey about their appreciation and use of central parks in Seraing. Engagement was encouraged through [a promotional video](#) that



would open if scanned via a QRcode and aims to sensitise about the importance of introducing a visit to a green area in one's daily routine for physic and mental health.



The communication campaign © Psy&Cog



The communication campaign © Arebs

Data collection about attendance and perception is based on two methods: first, the PsyNCog team was on the field in April-May 2022 to directly collect data via a questionnaire, which could also be filled online. Second, counting posts were arranged in September 2022 at parks' entrances to objectively measure attendance. These devices had to be removed in one of the parks, the park of Morchamps, due to continuous thefts and acts of vandalism. To remove this obstacle the team decided to use only data collected during the fieldwork in Spring 2022. As for data analysed so far, results are encouraging along with all the indicators of attendance, littering, security and feeling of attachment, but the complete analysis will be discussed in the next journal.

## Delays and issues

As we have observed so far, **investments in the APTBC project** have experienced significant delays for two main reasons: the delay is due, on the one hand, to an increase in construction costs that led to some revisions to reduce the gap between new estimated costs and allocated resources. Second, the process was slowed down by the necessary administrative procedures, which are longer than usual because the city of Seraing is on guardianship. This consideration applies to both the building of the new day-shelter and the renovation of an



ancient building, *La Maison du Peuple*, which is planned to become a community hub.

Construction costs in Belgium and across Europe have skyrocketed in the last year, as a consequence of increased demand that has followed the pandemic period and rising energy prices linked to the Russia-Ukraine war. In Belgium, the floods that caused great damages in July 2021 have also driven a higher demand in construction materials. All together, these circumstances have produced a large gap between estimated costs for the project's investments and actual companies' offers. It was necessary to adapt to the new conditions and the city council established to modify the budget allocation among the three scheduled investments, by distributing resources between the construction of the day-shelter for vulnerable people and the renovation of *La Maison du Peuple* for the future community hub. The APTBC team had to search for other funding for the third investment, the second creative station known as *La Cour des Marêts* to ensure its construction.

Works for the day-shelter were officially launched in September 2022 with an event that was attended by the mayor of Seraing, the team of the present day-shelter and some hosts. Works are expected to end in July 2023, right before the closure of the project. The day-shelter will host the same management team and some of its current visitors; therefore its delay does not affect very much the development of its future activities.



Inauguration ceremony of the day-shelter construction site © City of Seraing

Conversely, delays for the community hub might have a greater impact. Renovation works for *La Maison du Peuple* started in May 2022 and should be completed by the end of the year. Looking at the construction schedule, it seems that about 4-5 months are lost waiting for the regional authorisation and some other 5-6 months are added between the invitation to tender for works is issued and the closure of the building site. As we will discuss later with regard to project challenges, organisational issues can explain part of these delays.

*La Cour des Marêts* was supposed to be the second community hub to be realised for the APTBC project. As we explained in [journal 2](#), the implementation of this investment was complicated since the beginning and the rise in construction costs has worsened the situation. With the reallocation of budget, it was decided to search for different budget lines, namely from the Walloon Region. Today, at the end of 2022, a final approval has not been issued, so construction works cannot yet be launched.

Delays in the implementation of the two creative stations represent one of the major issues for the project. In fact, running two community hubs within two brand new buildings without time for testing and monitoring can limit project's coherence and break the progression of positive impacts.

Two issues that have been mentioned and we sum up here concern, on the one hand, the persistency of acts of vandalism and petty crimes in one of the parks, the park Morchamps. On the other hand, the city's hesitation to innovation and change. We will discuss both these issues in the chapter on the upscaling challenge.

[1] To recall, the city of Seraing is placed under regional guardianship, a measure fixed for Walloon cities that are in a deficit situation. Being under regional guardianship implies that the Regional Aid Centre for Municipalities (CRAC) may grant cities with credits on condition of adopting a Management Plan (Plan de Gestion), which contains all the criteria that the local authority must adhere to reach a balanced budget. Such criteria concern staff management, use of funding, and also public procurement when it exceeds established thresholds

## Implementation challenges

The following analysis is the result of a collaborative work that was organised by the UIA expert with project partners and consisted of two different steps: a first survey on implementation challenges distributed among partners in September 2022; a synthesis that was produced by the expert and was then presented and discussed during an online workshop attended by all partners on the 12th of October 2022.

### Challenge

### Observation

#### Leadership

#### Challenge level



Leadership in this project can be seen as distributed through three main levels: the first is Arebs, which is the municipal agency in charge of APTBC implementation; the second is represented by the chiefs of municipal departments, such as Works department, Prevention, Communication and Urban Development; and third, the top-level political leadership, the city Council. Among these three levels leadership is not equally distributed, but each level might contribute to bring innovation to the project. In the APTBC project, we have witnessed to a progressive transfer of knowledge, expertise and awareness from the first to the second and third level. If the third level, the political one, had agreed at the beginning of the project on the main goals and paths of change, it has nonetheless manifested little participation and interest in practice: they rarely took part to events and steering committees, they hardly made themselves available for bilateral meetings. With the advancement of the project, this has slightly changed as results became more and more tangible. A similar but even more effective process has occurred with the second level, which was more accessible for the team project and on which many operational results depended: it started with scepticism but it ended with collaboration, confidence and willingness to change. Along this process, it was necessary to work not only to achieve the project's objectives but also to convince the other levels of leadership to embark on the same endeavour and make the change possible throughout the administrative machine.

#### Lessons learnt and emerging issues

Many efforts have been put into making project's results visible, tangible and remarkable in this past year; if APTBC has gained the political support needed for these efforts to be transformed into a consolidated strategy for social cohesion and integrated into a coherent policy for the city central neighbourhoods will be seen in the months to come. As a lesson learnt from this experience, it emerges clearly the necessity to include this challenge while writing a project proposal. Leadership can be reluctant to take the risk of changing and innovating, especially in a context of economic crisis (not to mention an health crisis). At the same time, implementing a pilot project is a challenging enterprise and it would be easier if all the levels of leadership were aligned before the project starts. A new model of governance should be studied to make these levels work together since the design of the project proposal. The model should define a clear space of negotiation, mechanisms of collaboration between the management team and every municipal department; and a scheme of human resources which promotes a web of relationships across departments and the municipal agencies.



Delays with the implementation of the three investments have augmented in the last year. Every time that a delay was expected - despite the possibility of publishing the tendering file while waiting for regional validation - the delay materialised. As we have seen in the introduction to this journal, to the initial delays caused by extra-time requested in reason of the regional guardianship, the extraordinary increase in the costs of materials for construction added further delay. To this circumstance the team reacted with budget adjustments and a search for new funding. At this stage of the project, most contracts have been issued and need a close follow-up to finalise all the construction sites and achieve all the activities of project. The procurement for the second creative station, la Cour des Marêts, is still pending, waiting for the regional validation of a change in the budget line. Besides delays with big investments' cumbersome procedures, some bottlenecks were encountered also with more ordinary administrative processes.

In this context, a few innovations could have been introduced since the beginning and will be discussed below, but at this stage this remains a high-risk challenge for two major investments, the day-shelter and the second creative station, which most likely will not be completed by the end of the project.

#### **Lessons learnt and emerging issues**

Some organisational arrangements adopted at the beginning of the project could have helped to save time and facilitate partners' work. Let's see three of them. First, given the gap in competence and awareness about administrative and procurement procedures between project partners, a training provided in the first year to every actor involved in this activity would help to build a shared knowledge and transfer innovative practices into the daily management of financial resources. Second, the city's financial department could draft guidelines in order to propose direction to partners and establish a smooth collaboration between the project management and municipal departments. This collaboration could also include an officer at financial department in charge of following the project's contracts. And third, a formal agreement between the city of Seraing and the Walloon Region, which fixes derogation to the validation rule in case of European funding, could help to save at least two months between the selection of the project designer and the publication of the invitation to tender.



This year has been fruitful in many ways as far as stakeholders' collaboration and integration of activities is concerned. In the first years of the project, much of energy was directed towards the identification of mechanisms and tools facilitating internal communication and multiplication of meetings to organise the decision-making process. The COVID-19 crisis consolidated some forms of collaboration, mostly from a distance. Some partners considered this practice a little bit too formal and time-consuming, but the given circumstances limited the adoption of different approaches. Those tools and practices had the advantage to keep the partners engaged during hard times and build some relationships across city departments. Change happened in this last year, during which many positive results have become apparent and concrete. A real advancement is seen in the way that three departments, Public Works, Prevention and Communication, have changed their attitude towards the project implementation, they have improved their cross-departmental cooperation and their engagement has grown. More progress concerns the collaboration with the CPAS, the office for social services, and new collaborations and relations that have been prompted and underpinned by cooperating on some initiatives such as the day-shelter, the *Medibus* and *La Ruche à projets*. Each of these actions has requested a great amount of networking and teamwork to create new relationships, involve new partners, share goals and consolidate a common practice. This effort has been pursued by following multiple threads and channels of communication by different APTBC partners, sometimes together and sometimes independently but sharing a common strategy. Two considerations can be made in relation to this achievement: on the one hand, this is clearly a challenge that has been addressed with determination and patience; on the other hand, local officials have mostly proved receptive to change and innovation when encouraged to embrace the positive impacts of new practices.

#### Lessons learnt and emerging issues

The inherent nature of the APTBC project is one with a strongly multidimensional and integrated approach to urban poverty. This characteristic needs a particular attention not to miss the big picture, while concentrating on singular actions. In this sense, working on the improvement and empowerment of cross-departmental cooperation is crucial both to smooth the process of implementation throughout the project and in view of its upscaling.

Some barriers must be taken into account though: a recognised and validated system to assure the sustainability of the project in the medium-long term is still to put in place, especially with regard to a sustainable green areas management and participatory processes at the community hubs. This might make some practices more fragile and prone to disruption. In one year and a half the next municipal elections will bring changes at the political level and a solid integration of recently acquired good practices from APTBC would be essential to help with the transition.



The great challenge of the APTBC project has been since the beginning the creation of the conditions necessary for an organised and cohesive community of citizens to emerge. This would happen through the provision of spaces suitable for a community to grow and thrive (inclusive and attractive public spaces - including green areas, a new day-shelter and two community hubs) and the support to citizens' projects. As mentioned [elsewhere](#), Seraing is a context where participation is not common habit and, despite a large number of grassroots associations operating in the city and many citizens engaged with and through them in the production of services or civic activities, the relation citizen-authority is poorly developed. This is why, in this context, the pandemic has represented a great hurdle when it hit at the beginning of the second year of implementation. To this external constraint, some internal problems added: a significant turnover among Lema staff that is in charge of the participatory process; a lack of a comprehensive and clear strategy for the engagement of individuals and associations; little coordination between the online communication strategy and more traditional communication tools.

Despite these difficulties and blunders, in the last year the [three calls for projects](#) and correlated activities have succeeded in making *La Ruche* a place of reference where a committed group of citizens develops their projects, regular meetings are held to discuss further initiatives, working groups and round tables are organised to address issues and needs of interest for community and Seresian citizens. This accomplishment has been reached in a relatively short time thanks to a change in the approach: a coordinator who was completely dedicated to the assignment, with an assiduous presence on site, a strategy of reaching out every single person or association or public entity likely to give a contribution, express an interest or stimulate new ideas.

#### Lessons learnt and emerging issues

Given the difficult context, focusing on local associations first and trying to get to citizens through their involvement and intermediation is the solution adopted to keep on going and generate a dynamic process. This strategy has bore fruit at the beginning and has facilitated the flow of information by word of mouth. When the first call for projects was launched, *La Ruche* had been open for one year for occasional activities and as headquarters of nature-based trainees. The initial opening with little public activities has given the team the time to fine-tune the spatial layout, to test some uses and invite people in step by step, thus providing a friendly place, which could be appreciated since the first call for projects. Also, over the testing period at *La Ruche*, a charter and some rules were shared and will be easily reintroduced at *La Maison du Peuple* after the relocation.

## Monitoring and evaluation

### Challenge level



In the [previous journal](#) we considered two objects of monitoring and evaluation - outputs delivery and project results - for they refer to completely different outcomes of implementation and they are measured according to distinct criteria. If outputs delivery refers to implementation progress in relation to a time schedule and outputs specifications, projects results are measured against a set of identified indicators. We have already seen that project implementation is delayed and the project has been granted one more year: in this last year 2023 all the activities will be completed, with one unknown for the creative station of La Cour des Marêts. The RACI system, which was put in place in 2021 to facilitate the monitoring of project's outputs for all the partners, was abandoned in this past year because its compilation was perceived by most of the partners more as a burden than a useful tool.

Project results are measured by work package's objectives, but indicators that assess the integrated dimension of the project have not been defined in the proposal, with the exception of global indicators (i.e. rate of neighbourhood inhabitants living with a social integration income; rate of inhabitants job seekers who benefit from unemployment allowance...). The challenge is the transfer to the city of a monitoring system that can be adapted to their current competences and is coherent with Seraing's urban policies. This means that every indicator should be discussed with the municipal department that will be in charge of its collection and analysis.

### Lessons learnt and emerging issues

Throughout the project, the monitoring system has somehow evolved: partners tried to adapt their measures to ongoing challenges and when emerging issues demanded new solutions. Therefore, new indicators were studied and proposed to better fit the reality of fieldwork. This was done for example with psychosocial data. It must be noted that psychosocial data are collected and analysed in this project by a partner, the Psy&Cog lab from the University of Liège, which is a specialist of quantitative analysis. When partners are less familiar with methods for collecting and analysing data, a good choice would be to assign the expert partner (or the management team) the coordination of the overall monitoring system in close collaboration with each WP.

As a partner has pointed out during our collective discussion, for a monitoring system to be useful for the assessment of public policies, the indicators must be conceived according to existing urban, social and economic policies, that is, in the case of Seraing, they must be associated to the urban master plan, the social master plan and the territorial strategic plan (PST). This shortcoming can still be addressed in the last months, not to modify the current monitoring system in place, but including as a recommendation in the final report for the handover to the city the creation of a coherent monitoring system which should be based on indicators built thanks to the experience of APTBC project.





The communication strategy that was set up in 2021 was reinforced during 2022 and grew: a particular emphasis was put on reporting about *La Ruche à projets*, which needed to reach a large audience and maintain a constant flow of information. Generally speaking, for this year the best result of this activity can be seen in the smooth cooperation between the communication team, the other partners and city departments involved in the communication strategy. From *La Ruche*, to the nature-based initiatives, to the development of the mobile application, to the psychosocial interventions in the parks...every actor involved needed to communicate and everyone had to relate to the communication team and fit in an organic whole.

The big challenge of the past year was the finalisation of the application [\*Seraing en poche\*](#), which was expected to become accessible as a mobile application in the first months of 2022. This has not happened because a relentless work of exchange and negotiation with the city departments was unavoidable. To have an all-in-one final product, instead of having to follow and manage many platforms, the city requested that *Seraing en poche* includes - in addition to the already uploaded repository of local services - the whole website and the necessary widgets to facilitate the relation city-citizens. Transferring the information and the structure of the website to the app proved to be too long and demanding in the remaining time, so the possible launch of a beta version of the app before the end of the project is being discussed and the city wants to look for the necessary funding to update the app when APTBC is closed.

Communication was also a tool used as nudge, as a trigger to increase a feeling of belonging towards *Seraing's* central parks. Its results have still to be evaluated, but collaboration was very productive.

#### Lessons learnt and emerging issues

Communication, as transversal tool, has proved to be able to promote a model of cooperation and co-production that might become ordinary in daily practices at city departments, furthering collaborative projects and the emergence of new ideas and proposals to better serve the common good. We do not know if this approach has been completely acquired and embedded across departments, but in the remaining months it could be sponsored further.

At the same time, a boost toward autonomy and self-management could be given to the group of citizens who are now developing their individual and collective projects at *La Ruche*; in particular they could be helped to manage independently their communication on the social networks and be trained on how to use and update *Seraing en poche*. Every effort should be put into a transfer of competences and capacity building for those, municipal officers and involved citizens, who might take over the project's outcomes and stabilise them.



their tasks on a basis of urgency but also of habit and familiarity; second, budget deficit limits possibilities for the deployment of new staff, training or material. However, many changes that have been proposed or introduced through the APTBC project do not necessarily require additional costs but mostly a change in practice and approach: this is the case, for example, of the techniques for a sustainable green area management; the update of the communication system; a monitoring system based on already collected data and installed counting posts.

For the upscaling of certain innovative practices that have been introduced by the project, there is still a solution to be found that requires funding, as we will discuss below point by point. It is not impossible to get some extra funding, but the prerequisite is political will and municipal leaders' determination. The gain would be remarkable, though. On the political side, it is not enough to acknowledge the existence and the appreciation of a place like *La Ruche*, but it is necessary to take a step further towards its future sustainability. First, some topics - such as biodiversity and the natural capital - are particularly popular these days and can easily be granted attention and funding. Within the framework of the action plan for climate, for example, Seraing can define a strategy to maintain and improve its green areas in the city centre by supporting already trained municipal officials. Second, in Seraing the main policy tools - the urban master plan, the social master plan and the strategic development plan - should assure the political endorsement of an action plan which includes every action of APTBC and the means of its future upscaling.

#### **Lessons learnt and emerging issues**

It is never too late to seriously take into consideration how the project experimental actions will be transposed into policy and everyday practice, of course. In the case of Seraing, even the fact that the objectives of APTBC adhere precisely with those included in the main urban policies, as we have seen, is not enough to assure that continuity and coherence are pursued in the middle-long term. The APTBC team has nonetheless achieved some substantial results through at least three modes of operation: a careful and unrelenting work of forging links, building new relations and establishing strong ties; a commitment to transferring knowledge to all the involved stakeholders; the use of errors as a learning tool to advance and adjust their own approach and line of thinking. By getting many relevant different stakeholders together, they put an emphasis on local needs that were somehow unknown or neglected and persuaded everyone, through concrete actions and visible outcomes, to take a change in their activities and even suggest ideas.

Working for the upscaling of the project means to take advantage of every single action and bring its outcomes to a new level. This has happened, to start, with two projects that have been designed and proposed for the FSE grants, which are based on APTBC investigations and its collaboration with CPAS, to develop the missing chains in the field of socio-economic inclusion. Both projects<sup>[1]</sup> target people with a difficult access to the labour market and who face obstacles to find a sustainable employment.

#### **The future of parks**

Parks and green areas in the central neighbourhoods have changed considerably in three years and they are now much more visited and appreciated than they were two years ago. What can hinder the ongoing improvement process is lack of leadership more than anything else. Municipal officers are convinced of the advantages of a sustainable management of parks and have been trained to implement it. Moreover, this method does not require more funding and some advancement can be furthered through external funding that would be quite easy to get. This is why these last months should be devoted to both communicating and lobbying with the aim to generate the broadest possible consensus on the way forward.

#### **The future of creative stations**

*La Maison du Peuple* is due for completion soon. A small community is born at *La Ruche* and is eager to engage in the long term. Relocation to the *Maison du Peuple* is

not free from obstacles: first of all the adjustment to a completely new and different spatial layout, where current activities need to re-arrange their organisation and mutual relation. And more importantly, a new coordinator and community manager has to be identified as soon as possible. A few difficulties loom large: the current community manager from the partner Lema ends her collaboration with the APTBC project and someone with the right expertise and experience must take over to arrange and guide the process of relocation and, above all, to follow up on the work of keeping together the newly born community and making it thrive at *La Maison du Peuple*. What is needed is, first, a selection process that would ideally be designed and accompanied by the current coordinator, and second, the assurance of the necessary funding for the first years of the assignment. This is currently being discussed at the decisional level.

#### **The future of citizens' participation**

If a process of change has been launched and its cues are detectable in what is today *La Ruche à projets* - compared to what it was only one year ago - this is only part of the story. As we have pointed out elsewhere, the lack of a participation culture in Seraing is double-headed: on the one hand, we have citizens who are used to deal with public services more as customers than actors, without a strong personal engagement; on the other hand, we have a municipal authority that has still not undertaken a resolute process of releasing and decentralising power to underpin citizens' agency and empowerment. It is early to say if the pilot project has succeeded in paving the way for this process to be not only activated but also prosecuted. A promising sign in that direction though is the recent new position at Arebs dedicated to participatory activities. The person in charge is expected to develop all the actions that aim to improve and support citizens' participation in Seraing with a cross-cutting approach.

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[1] The two project proposals (Tremplin, to assure a sustainable employment through the acquisition of competences; Territoire zéro chômeur, to fight against log-time unemployment) have been submitted for FSE funding.

## Conclusion

During discussions with APTBC partners, it emerged that the gap between the project ambitions in terms of political leadership, governance system and citizens participation and the real conditions under which the project is implemented corresponds to a dozens or so years. In other words, the project proposal was too ambitious in relations to the actual context. Is it this necessarily a problem for a pilot project like APTBC? As we have explored in this journal and in the previous ones, significant progress have been made during these implementation years. Parks and green areas have consistently improved and are more visited and appreciated. The Public Works department, wary and sceptical at the beginning, is today a collaborative partner and municipal officers are now persuaded of the tangible benefits of a sustainable green management for both their everyday work and the environment of their city.

An important work of investigation has led to the identification of the missing chains - deficiencies in public services in relation to local needs - and the consequent effort of networking has brought together all the relevant stakeholders to study and develop new projects that address these very shortcomings. This work will not be wasted in any case, because it has contributed to produce a real change in attitude, vision and praxis.

If it is true that participation is not common practice, what has been done at *La Ruche* - and throughout the project - with citizens and associations has showed possible paths that will become increasingly commonplace and unavoidable.

So, is this initial shortfall a problem? In part it is, because it makes some goals impossible to reach precisely as they were defined. But on the field, it has encouraged the involved actors to boost the research of new solutions and tools for the implementation of the project and has showed how new ways of working, collaborating and enabling can make the difference.



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