

## JOURNAL

### PROJECT

Home Silk Road -  
Housing toward  
empowerment

📍 Lyon Metropole,  
France

### TOPIC

Housing

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EXPERT

# Journal 3: Home Silk Road - 1 Year On

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Home Silk Road's implementation officially ended in October 2002. However, the project did not suddenly stop. Ending the temporary occupation has been a complicated process, which lasted for months. This journal explores the 7 operational challenges during this final phase of the project.

## Executive Summary

This journal starts with a table showing the main implementation challenges faced in the final phase of the project. It gives a quick recap of project implementation before zooming in on each of the important challenges. The most significant challenges relate to leadership, communication with target beneficiaries and end users, and the participative approach for co-implementation. Monitoring and evaluation, as well as upscaling presented challenges too, although these were more straightforward to manage. The journal ends with some concluding observations.

### Challenge

### Observation

Leadership  
Challenge level



The Metropole of Lyon encountered a number of difficulties in relation to leadership in the final phase of the project.

Public Procurement  
Challenge level



Public procurement did not present any problems in this final phase of the project.

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

Challenge level



Cross-departmental working has not been a significant challenge in this phase.

Monitoring and evaluation

Challenge level



As expected, monitoring and evaluation work intensified towards the end of the project. In-depth qualitative evaluation undertaken with the families was one of the strengths of this project. However, timeliness of the findings was an issue.

Communication with target beneficiaries and users

Challenge level



A number of important challenges emerged in relation to communication with target beneficiaries and users in the final phase of the project. This was particularly the case for day-to-day communication with the families.

Participative approach for co-implementation

Challenge level



A participative approach lies at the heart of this project. Nonetheless, it has proved challenging in the final phase

Upscaling

Challenge level



Upscaling has been a priority in the final phase. There is already some evidence of scaling up and steps have been taken to support more. Upscaling is difficult to measure.

## Project Recap

The project officially ended in October 2022. However, finalization of some key activities continued until Autumn 2023. Before diving into the operational challenges, it is useful to set the scene by summarizing the main phases of project implementation.

- Phase 1: The first step of the project, following kick off in 2019, was establishing a temporary occupation on the site. A rich variety of cultural and social economy activities were initiated, focused on the iconic Jeanne d'Arc Residence building. During this time, the COVID-19 pandemic hit. It caused a series of major delays to project implementation, leading to a one-year extension.
- Phase 2: In January 2021, 7 months later than planned, 21 homeless families living in the Alfred Musset emergency shelter moved into temporary modular housing units onsite. As demolition and construction work took off, the occupation of the Jeanne d'Arc building ended. CCO (*Centre Culturel Océanique*, the partner organisation coordinating the temporary occupation) established a new Information and Orientation Centre. Many events and activities took place in the community-managed park. Throughout this phase, families were supported by Alynea (the partner organisation responsible for support and accommodation) and were given the opportunity to participate in the many initiatives taking place on site. Alynea opened a Workshop for Adapting to Active Life in the catering industry called BaklAAVA in early 2022, many months later than planned. The life of the site was stable for most of 2021 and 2022. During this time, the project had a positive impact on the homeless families' lives. The construction work made extensive use of social and environmental clauses. The site became a hub for cultural activities. Evaluation fieldwork and the production of an interim report occurred during this phase.
- Phase 3: The end of the project ushered in the final phase of construction work. At the time of writing, several of the future housing lots are in an advanced phase, with move-ins expected from November. The CCO is preparing to move into its new permanent home – a state-of-the-art venue with a theatre & concert hall, studios, working spaces and other amenities. The historic Jeanne d'Arc Residence's transformation is almost complete. It will soon be home to a student residence, accommodation for single mothers, a centre for public services, a restaurant, and a range of other cultural and social economy spaces to be managed by the CCO. During this final phase, the modular homes and the work integration workshop BaklAAVA needed to move offsite to make way for the construction of new lots. This move offsite was foreseen from the project outset, in line with the transitional occupation model. However, it turned out to be more complicated than foreseen.

For BakLAAVA, extra time and considerable effort from the partners was required to find an appropriate new site. By June 2023, BakLAAVA was able to move to a new home in Villeurbanne. The new site, known as Archipel, is close to Home Silk Road. It is a "third space" where multiple organisations have come together to create a Hub for food solidarity on a temporarily occupied carpark. The project is coordinated by Villeurbanne, and partly funded by central government. It seems to provide a good new location for BakLAAVA, which is continuing to develop its activity, although the costs of the move have been a significant hurdle.

For the homeless families, the situation was considerably more difficult in the final phase of the project. As discussed in an earlier web-article and zoom-in, the initial rationale of the project was that the families would move into permanent housing during the project's duration. However, this proved unachievable for an overwhelming majority. Despite their own efforts and those of the project partners, they were denied regularisation of their administrative status, meaning that they have limited rights, and are effectively stuck in a very precarious living situation. They continue to require temporary accommodation and cannot access permanent homes. A suitable site has been identified in Villeurbanne for the modular housing units to move to. However, it will only be available from November 2023, meaning that the families could not move there directly. Instead, they were moved to Lyon's 3rd District in the centre of the Metropole, in the summer of 2023, where they are currently staying in a disused elderly people's home, due for renovation. After a period of stability and improvement in their lives, they have faced uncertainty, disruption, and disappointment. Their current situation is effectively a return to conditions like those they were living in at the outset of the project. They have also had to move a significant distance away from Villeurbanne. All project partners are dissatisfied with this outcome and point to the role of State migration policy in generating it. The families continue to receive support after the end of the project, although relationships have been understandably strained. In November, the modules will move to their new site in Villeurbanne, which will be available until Spring 2024. The families will be able to move back in for that period. The outlook beyond that is uncertain. In the meantime, the modules are still on the Home Silk Road site. They are being used for the next couple of months to accommodate young asylum seekers for a short period, during which their minor status is assessed. After that, they will move to the new site.

## Leadership

In Home Silk's Road case, leadership was a strength for most of this project's implementation. The Metropole of Lyon used its capacity to design, manage and coordinate a major European project to support the partners' innovative aims for the site. The partnership was solid and based on a shared vision and clear roles. A collaborative and facilitative approach to leadership helped generate a culture of trust, flexibility and shared problem solving. This stood the partners in good stead to deal with challenges at the end of the project, such as finding new sites for BakLAAVA and the modular housing. The project also benefited from strong political leadership throughout. Local elections in 2021 presented a potential risk but in the end political support was maintained. The Mayor of Villeurbanne and the Vice President of the Metropole have been champions of the project, which has nourished broader territorial agendas e.g. a Welcome agenda and Housing First, which are carried by the political leadership of Villeurbanne and Metropole Grand Lyon.

Leadership challenges nonetheless emerged in the final phase of the project. The end of the UIA project means the end of the formal role of the Metropole of Lyon as project coordinator, along with the resources to support that role. The departure of the project manager in September 2022 disrupted the operational organisation of governance and communication between project partners. It was managed by reallocating responsibilities within the administration and engaging a consultancy to support financial reporting.

Another challenge related to the future role of the Metropole in governing the site. Home Silk Road was a transitional phase within a larger urban renewal process, *l'Autre Soie*. The Metropole is the coordinator of the former but does not have an important role in the latter. This created a challenge in terms of ensuring continuity beyond the end of Home Silk Road. Some partners were confident that the core activities and dynamics of Home Silk Road would be sustained after the project end. Others feared that certain elements might be neglected once the Home Silk Road governance ended. Uncertainty about the continuity of key project activities like the temporary housing and BakLAAVA made leadership more difficult and led to some testing moments for the partnership. It presented a challenge to the credibility of the project. The uncertainty was managed through dialogue and through jointly pursuing solutions to the issues arising. Partners seem reassured by the fact that solutions, albeit imperfect in the case of the homeless families, have been found for the continuation of key project activities. Most partners will be involved in the site over the long term, which means that they are invested in it and are expected to support the continuation of the project dynamics. Furthermore, all project partners work together on an ongoing basis beyond the project. In September 2023, at the final coordination meeting, the partners were still cooperating intensively and making joint plans for the follow up of the project, including in relation to upscaling. This indicates that despite the challenges, the solid partnership and shared vision remains intact.

## Monitoring & Evaluation

The monitoring and evaluation of the project was robust. COVID19 caused delays to the interim evaluation but this

was relatively straightforward to manage. In the final implementation phase, work on monitoring and evaluation by the consultancy Planet Public intensified in line with expectations, raising the challenge level to “normal”.

The final evaluation report was delivered in March 2023. It was presented to and discussed with partners before being finalised. An in-depth qualitative component based on interviews with members of the families living in temporary accommodation gave particularly rich insights into the successes and failures of the project from their perspective. This work gave the families a voice in evaluating the project, which was very important.

The only shortcoming of the monitoring and evaluation work related to timeliness. On the one hand, the evaluation came quite late in the day to make adaptations to project implementation. For example, the final report indicated low levels of awareness about the project amongst a sample of residents. With only six months of project implementation remaining, including the summer break, there was a limited scope to address this. Nonetheless, project partners have reported an increased engagement towards the end of the project. On the other hand, the evaluation was undertaken quite early in terms of assessing the impact of the project on the lives of the family members. The in-depth interviews were completed several months before the families were moved offsite. The evaluation flagged concern about the uncertainty of their future but was not able to capture the reality of their situation after the project ended. A proper *ex-post* evaluation would have great added value but is difficult to organise given the timeframe of the project.

Beyond the formal evaluation, the project partners have had a reflective approach and the final coordination meeting in September 2023 included insightful joint reflection on project achievements and limitations.

### Communication with target beneficiaries and users

Several major challenges related to communication with target beneficiaries and users were experienced in the final phase of project implementation. The most important, and difficult to address, concerned the day-to-day communication with families. This worked very well during the second phase of the project but was badly undermined in the final phase; first by uncertainty re. their future, then by their departure from the site. This situation damaged relationships and undermined trust of the families towards the partners. CCO reported that they no longer felt comfortable or legitimate in actively reaching out to the families given their situation. This is in sharp contrast to the second phase of the project where positive links were established. Engagement of the families in the temporary occupation and the cultural life of the site was not sustained in the final phase. Turnover amongst the social workers supporting the families also increased towards the end of the project, with a negative impact on continuity of support. The extent to which the project partners were able to overcome this challenge was limited given the situation of the families, which constitutes a failure to achieve the project’s initial aims.

As mentioned above, the final evaluation found limited awareness of the project amongst a small sample of residents. One of the explanations for this is disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to communication with and involvement of residents and stakeholders. Project partners, especially CCO, made efforts to address this and reported an increase in engagement of residents and stakeholders in the final phase of the project.

Currently, the finalization of the project is providing a last focal point for wider communication, including a press conference, a second film about the project, a study day etc. The *Autre Soie* website, which included a dedicated Home Silk Road section has been recovered, after being lost due to a fire in a data centre. Partners are planning to develop and maintain an archive of content relating to the project that will be publicly available on the website. The project partners continue to discuss and reflect on how to communicate about the project after its end, to support learning and upscaling.

### Participative approach for co-implementation

Participation was an integral part of Home Silk Road’s design. The aim was to experiment an inclusive city. Many project activities centred on a participative approach and co-implementation by partners and stakeholders: the temporary occupation by social economy actors, baklAVAA, the cultural life of the site, the community-managed park etc. CCO carried out many participatory and consultative activities: public meetings, workshops, open days, street salons, a website, public visits etc.

COVID-19 had a huge impact on the participative approach, and this continued to be felt in the final phase of the project. It took two years to get the momentum going again after successive lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. Yearly stakeholder seminars, for example, had to be cancelled during this period. Once it was technically possible to restart them, partners judged it too late in project implementation for them to be useful or meaningful. By the end of the project, involvement of stakeholders in activities on the site had picked up. This will continue going forward. CCO had also already begun to engage future residents.

The final evaluation report revealed that the public that engaged in temporary occupation of the site during Home Silk Road consisted mostly of the families living on it and people coming from further afield – Lyon and other parts of Villeurbanne for concerts, festivals etc. The high level of engagement of the families was very

positive, but as explained above, tailed off during the project's final phase. It is not surprising that many visitors came from further afield, given the predominantly economic function of the zone. One of the priorities for *l'Autre Soie* going forward will be the engagement of new residents in a participatory dynamic.

The genuine participation of the families in the project was undermined by their extremely vulnerable situation at its end. A high point in their involvement in decision-making regarding project implementation was during the attribution of the apartments in phase 2. They got a genuine say in the design and some choice regarding their future apartment. Again, this contrasts with the end of the project when their level of choice and empowerment was very limited.

## Upscaling

It is difficult to assess exactly what the role of a given initiative is in inspiring others like it. Nonetheless, Home Silk Road does appear to have contributed to the development of several new temporary occupation projects as part of the solution to homelessness in Villeurbanne and the Metropole of Lyon (see [web article](#) for more details).

In the final phase of the project, the question of how to further build on and scale up the project's achievements has come into focus. As with many innovative projects, partners' energy was so consumed with finalizing the delivery that it has been difficult to fully address the upscaling of the solution during its implementation. At the final coordination meeting, partners continued to discuss how to inspire more urban redevelopment projects to include vulnerable and excluded people from the outset through temporary occupation. They considered this to be one of the demonstrable successes of the project. Many of the project partners are well-positioned to achieve this goal. Villeurbanne, the Metropole of Lyon and Est Metropole Habitat are all involved in urban renewal projects within the territory.

Further action is planned in terms of documenting and communicating the project's achievements and limitations to an outside audience as well. This month, the project partners will host a study visit to showcase the project and encourage other urban authorities within the territory to develop innovative projects with European support.

Despite its limitations, Home Silk Road has demonstrated that urban sites undergoing transformation can be activated for inclusion and housing purposes through transitional occupation. It has also shown that access to better housing conditions, combined with social support and inclusion in cultural and community life, supports inclusion and impacts positively on people's lives. The project's failure to sustain this positive impact for its beneficiaries is a critical one. Its ethical implications need to be considered when it comes to upscaling. Future projects like this should attempt to judge better the chances of solving the beneficiaries' homelessness, and ensure that if this is not possible, improvements in their living situation can at least be maintained.

The project has demonstrated the role of migration policy in generating and maintaining homelessness. One way of upscaling would be to use the project to challenge the idea that maintaining people in extremely precarious situations by withholding access to rights is a legitimate way to regulate migration. However, the political context for this, in France and in most of Europe currently, is challenging.

## Conclusions

Home Silk Road was a bold attempt to use transitional occupation to experiment an inclusive city by testing new solutions for housing, accommodation, inclusion, and culture on a site undergoing redevelopment to become a new neighbourhood. It went through three main phases:

- Phase 1: This phase began in 2019 and focused on establishing temporary occupation on the site, primarily at the Jeanne d'Arc Residence building. The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant delays, leading to a one-year extension.
- Phase 2: In January 2021, homeless families moved into temporary housing units on the site, while demolition and construction took place. This phase included support services, cultural activities, and the establishment of BakIAAVA. Positive impacts were observed on the families.
- Phase 3: The final phase involved completing construction work on the site, including the transformation of the Jean d'Arc Residence into various facilities. Challenges arose during this phase, including finding new locations for the families and BakIAAVA.

Leadership was a strength of this project overall. However, challenges emerged toward the end, including changes in leadership roles and uncertainties about continuity of key project activities. The most significant problem was the situation of the families, which remained irregular for a majority and made existing homelessness and temporary accommodation impossible.

Monitoring and evaluation of the project were generally robust, although there were some timing issues in terms of adapting to feedback and measuring the true inclusion impact for the families. The evaluation report provided insights into the project's successes and failures.

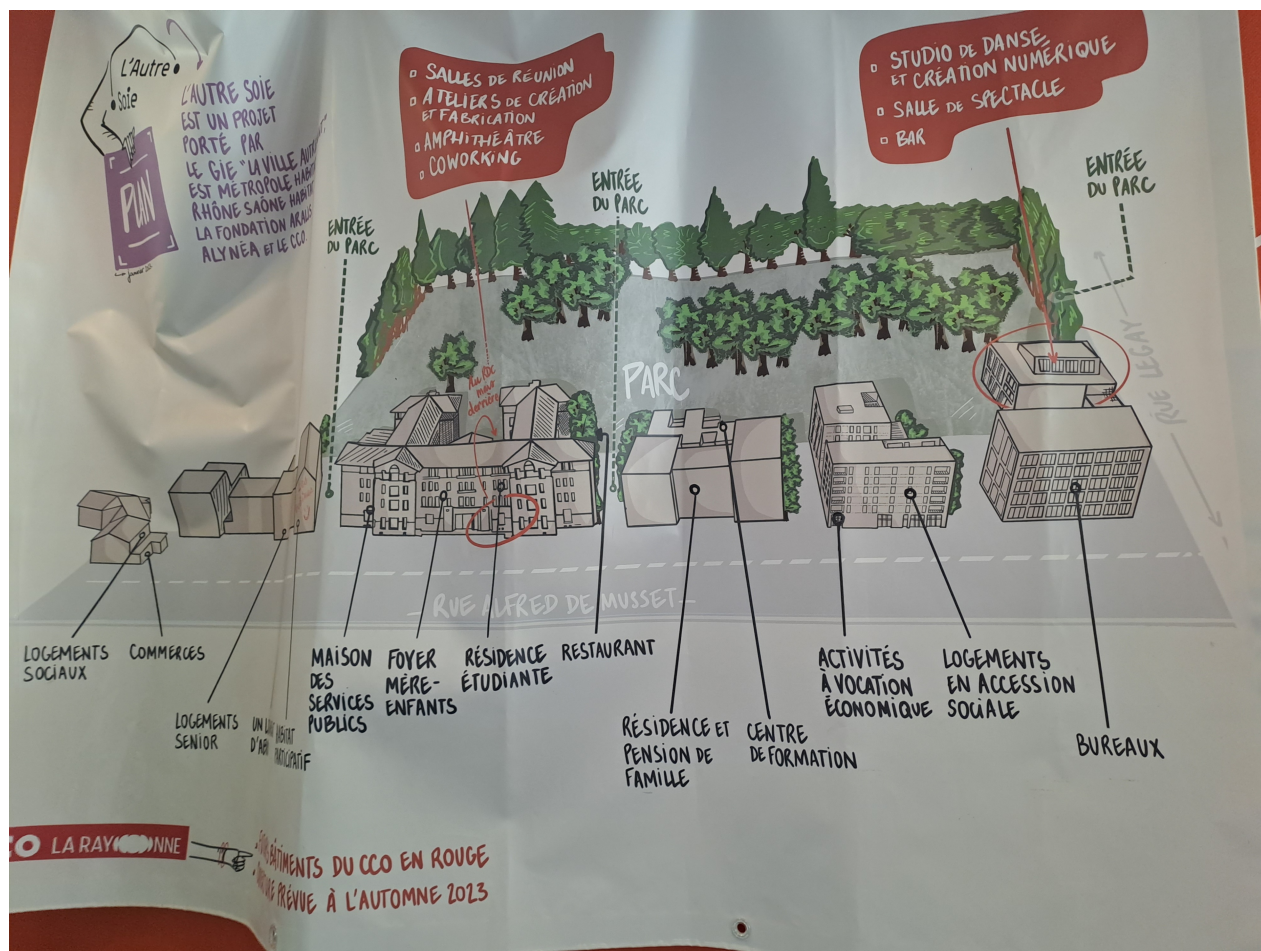
Communication with beneficiaries and end users faced challenges, particularly in the final phase, where day-to-



day communication with families deteriorated due to uncertainty about their future, followed by their departure from the site to an unsatisfactory temporary solution.

The project had an ambitious participative approach, which aimed to involve various stakeholders and residents in decision-making and activities. However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted these efforts significantly, as did the outcome for the families.

The project has been upscaled to some degree and could inspire other similar initiatives. It was clearly successful in activating an urban site for inclusion and participation from the outset of a redevelopment process. However, it also failed to deliver a sustainable improvement in the families' situation. In the end, the site has changed beyond recognition but only a handful of them have moved on from homelessness. Attempts to upscale need to grapple with ethical considerations and the interaction between migration policy and homelessness.



Drawing showing final configuration of the site



The iconic Jean d'Arc building nears completion

[Affordable housing](#)

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