

JOURNAL

PROJECT

Home Silk Road -
Housing toward
empowerment

📍 Lyon Metropole,
France

TOPIC

Housing

EDIT 02 DECEMBER 2023
BY RUTH OWEN, UIA
EXPERT

Journal 4: Home Silk Road - A Final Look Back

See on UIA
website



This final journal looks back at the successes and failures of the Home Silk Road project and shares some lessons for other Urban Authorities.

Catch up with the last developments since the project's official end in Autumn 2022, find out about the long-term sustainability, what other Urban Authorities can learn from *Home Silk Road*.

Executive Summary

The *Home Silk Road* project, which officially concluded in October 2022, was an innovative urban project focused on housing. The central premise was that a site undergoing redevelopment could become a testbed for an inclusive city with vulnerable people at its heart.

Key innovative elements of the project included testing mobile and modular temporary housing, transitional occupation, and environmentally sustainable and inclusive construction practices.

The project experienced many successes, notably demonstrating the power of transitional occupation to prefigure and create a new neighbourhood. However, it also faced challenges, particularly in sustaining improvements in the living conditions of families experiencing homelessness. While the temporary housing offered a positive impact during the project, it failed to provide long-term solutions for these families.

Project Progress

Home Silk Road officially ended in October 2022. Several important developments occurred after this date, including:

1. The families continued to live in units on the site until summer 2023. They were then relocated to allow for the next phase of construction. The family members were mostly from the Balkans and were living in a situation of incomplete rights because of irregular administrative status. The initial project rationale was that stable and more adequate living conditions combined with social support, would enable family members to regularise their situation and move on from homelessness. The implicit aim was for them to find permanent homes on the site. However, by the end of the project, most families were still stuck in an irregular situation, unable to work legally and access social rights. Project partners worked on finding a new place for the families to live in the modular

accommodation. They also attempted to negotiate with the Prefecture (the local representation of the Minister of the Interior) and obtain a derogation from the rules to access social housing, or exceptional regularisation. This proved unsuccessful. Eventually, a new site was found in the local area for the modules. However, it will only become available at the beginning of 2024. The families have therefore been moved in Lyon's 7th district, a completely different neighbourhood in the centre of the Metropole. They are staying in a former nursing home that is awaiting renovation and was vacant. Both partners and beneficiaries are dissatisfied with this outcome, which has disrupted the stabilisation and inclusion achieved during the project. A very small minority of the families moved on from homelessness during the project because they were able to regularise their status. Otherwise, the project largely failed to bring about an end to homelessness. It had a positive impact on the lives of the family members during the project, but this was not sustained.

2. Since the families moved off the site, the modular units have been used to provide short-term accommodation for young asylum seekers, whilst their minor status is assessed. This has taken place on the project site and will last for a couple of months. After that, the units will move to their future site.
3. *BakLAAVA*, the mobile *Workshop for Adapting to Active Life* in the catering industry, moved to a new site in summer 2023. Since then, the team has worked on establishing operations in a new setting called *Archipel*, the new site is close to Home Silk Road in Villeurbanne. 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.
4. Several of the site's key buildings will be completed this Autumn. *L'Autre Soie* is the new name of the renovated heritage building formerly known as the *Jeanne D'arc* Residence. This was the home of the temporary occupation during the first phase of *Home Silk Road*. The completion of the reconstruction was celebrated with a press conference on the 19th of September. Innovative reuse and circular construction techniques were hallmarks of the process. The building now combines housing, culture, social economy and solidarity activities. There is housing for students on the first two floors and for mothers and babies facing complex situations on the third. There is a Public Service Centre, a greenhouse, a restaurant, co-working, social economy, and cultural spaces. A block of housing for social ownership called *L'Autre Toit* and a 1,000-place concert hall and cultural centre called *La Rayonne* will open their doors in November to residents, artists and the public. Further social housing, including supported housing and 8 flats to be used for Housing First, will be delivered by 2025.

Long Term Sustainability

The fact that *Home Silk Road* was a transitional occupation means that inevitably some of the activities will not be sustained. However, the project partners aim to continue the dynamics generated by the partnership and to maintain the commitment to an inclusive city where culture plays a critical role. The site is becoming a mixed neighbourhood where culture, housing, inclusion, and social economy complement each other. The aim of *Home Silk Road* was to contribute to this process by experimenting an inclusive neighbourhood with vulnerable people and culture at its heart from the outset of the redevelopment process.

It is important to note that the project has failed to sustain some of its achievements and activities, notably:

- The improved living situation of most of the families. As discussed in previous journals, this proved to be a critical weakness of the project. The families' situation improved notably during the project, which had a positive impact on their lives. However, this has not been sustained. The overwhelming majority continue to need emergency accommodation and no sustainable solution to their homelessness has been secured. The project has failed to address their administrative status, which means they are stuck in a very vulnerable and excluded situation with no route of homelessness. They experienced considerable disruption and disappointment at the end of the project.
- During the first phase of the temporary occupation, the site provided a home to 23 social economy actors. By nature, this was a short-lived situation. However, for many of the actors, it provided an important boost to their development. The commitment to the social economy on the site will be sustained over the long term through a social economy incubator led by CCO.

Most other project results will be sustained in one way or another:

- *BakLAAVA* will continue in its new location. The relationships developed between partners during the project have contributed to its success. CCO is one of the main customers of the workshop and its future activities on the site present plenty of scope for further cooperation.
- The modular housing units will continue to be used to provide temporary accommodation to people facing homelessness. The units belong to project partner *Est Metropole Habitat*. As described above, they have already

been deployed to provide accommodation to young asylum seekers. As *Home Silk Road* covered 40% of the investment, their continued use to provide short-term accommodation is a sustainable effect of the project. The project clearly demonstrated that individual units, with private bathrooms and kitchens, were better for the occupants than communal facilities in an unsuitable building. A limitation of the modules is that they can only really provide temporary solutions. They will be deployed for temporary shelter, rather than for housing with security of tenure. The situation that occurred in this project – that the availability of the site ended before the occupants' homelessness, is likely to reoccur.

- *L'Eventail* building, which will be completed in 2025, will ensure that inclusive housing remains an important feature of the site. This building was the starting point for the project back in November 2016, when 150 migrants from the dismantled camps of the Calais jungle came to stay in a Reception and Orientation Centre (CAO) created specifically for that purpose in a disused building. In July 2018, this centre was transformed into a Center for Emergency Accommodation (CHU), managed by *Alynea*. It accommodated 21 families, mostly from the Balkans. These were the homeless families that moved into the modular units during the project. Whilst those people will no longer live on the site, *L'Eventail* will provide housing for people moving on from homelessness, for elderly people, and those with disabilities. It will include a participatory housing project with a shared garden.
- The practices for inclusive and circular construction deployed during the project can be applied to future urban development schemes by the partners. 19% of the material from the 10,000 tonnes of demolished building were reused.
- The partners hope to build on the experience of *Home Silk Road* to create welcoming, inclusive, non-speculative neighbourhoods at a large scale. Other experiments of this type are underway, including at the nearby *Le Château* site in Villeurbanne. Partners are looking for new opportunities to deploy the lessons learned in *Home Silk Road* on other sites. As mentioned in previous articles, temporary and transitional occupations have already been developed in several locations in Villeurbanne and the Metropole of Lyon.
- The partners have plans to further deploy a participatory approach on the site. Residents and users have been involved in planning and managing the 1.5-hectare park. Going forward, the park will continue to be community managed. An initiative to facilitate debate and reflection will be initiated from Autumn 2023. The aim is to inform and consult on the ongoing transition of the site and to discuss with users, managers, and partners about their expectations for the years to come.

Generated Knowledge

The main lessons learned from this project were:

- **Renovation of the heritage building**
The project demonstrated that an iconic building symbolizing the industrial heritage of the site could be turned into an attractive, efficient, and functional space for social housing, social services, workspace, leisure, culture, and social economy. At the end of the project, the building's transformation was successfully completed but it was not yet being used for its new purposes. It was therefore too early to judge how well it will function. Nonetheless, the testing and pre-figuring that occurred during the temporary occupation have contributed to creating positive relationships and demonstrating the potential for this to become a vibrant, co-created, mixed-use hub.
- **Creation of an innovative form of mobile and modular temporary housing**
The project showed that innovative modular construction techniques could be applied to the provision of temporary housing and provide better living conditions than the status quo of an emergency shelter in an ill-adapted building. The families that moved into the modular housing experienced better living conditions, notably because they had private bathrooms and kitchens. Nonetheless, overcrowding remained an issue for many of them. In the future, the modular units will continue to be used to provide temporary accommodation. The mobile nature of the modules means that they can be deployed on other available sites. However, the project demonstrated very clearly that providing temporary housing does not address long-term housing need. The temporary housing was accompanied by social support and access to the cultural life of the site. These had a positive impact on the lives of the families, but this was not sustained. Indeed, it ended abruptly. Ultimately, the mobile and modular units provided better quality temporary housing than was otherwise available to the families. However, it did not provide a structural solution to homelessness or the situation of incomplete rights faced by people without legally recognized residency.
- **Circular and inclusive construction techniques**

The project was exemplary in the reuse of construction materials, from both on and off site. This level of reuse should be rolled out to other urban redevelopment projects to make construction more environmentally sustainable. The project made extensive use of work integration clauses in construction work. This is a good

practice that is well established in public procurement in the Metropole of Lyon, and which other urban authorities can definitely learn from. The COVID19 pandemic made the use of integration clauses more challenging but the partners managed to overcome this.

- **Consultation and participation of stakeholders, namely residents and future users**

The project was designed to be highly participatory. In many ways, it was. However, the COVID19 pandemic disrupted this. There were also some inherent challenges in that the previously industrial neighborhood had few residents. This had important implications in terms of defining who the target for engagement in the participatory approach was. This was perhaps not sufficiently considered in the initial project design. The final evaluation found lower levels of awareness of the project amongst residents than expected. It also found that many people coming to enjoy the cultural life of the site were coming from other parts of the city. Urban authorities should try to be clear about who they want to participate in designing and implementing urban innovation and why.

- **Role of social and solidarity economy in temporary occupation**

The project showed that temporary occupation by social and solidarity economy actors brings a huge range of beneficial synergies in a complex urban renovation project. The initial temporary occupation was so successful that it was extended and managed in a second phase from an Information Center and Guidance whilst the heritage building was reconstructed.

- **Activation of the site through culture**

The project demonstrated the power of culture to support inclusion and to connect people. However, the links that were created with the families were undermined by their departure from the site. The long-term test of the premise that culture will bring people together and support genuine social mix on the site is still to come.

- **Adaptation to Active Life Workshop (AAVA)**

The AAVA was not part of the initial project proposal. The initial plan was to develop a concierge service. However, it became apparent during implementation that this was not workable. managed by Alynea allowing us to work on the professional integration of the Center's audiences Emergency Accommodation through the creation of a catering activity.

5 Recommendations For Urban Authorities

Other urban authorities who wish to undertake similar projects could learn the following from this project:

1. A solid partnership has been a vital ingredient in the *Home Silk Road* project. Other urban authorities who wish to implement similar innovation projects should build a partnership based on trust and a strong shared vision.
2. Urban authorities who want to innovate on homelessness should seek to provide sustainable exits into permanent housing. Where this proves impossible, they should design projects so that improvements in beneficiaries' living situations are sustained beyond the lifespan of the project.
3. In designing innovation, urban authorities should be attentive to multi-level governance and the extent to which they can control the policy levers required to achieve the impact that they are pursuing. The *Home Silk Road* project struggled to achieve some of its objectives because it ran into the limits of migration policy decisions made at State-level.
4. Many cities are experimenting with temporary architecture and planning. These projects are much more impactful and transformative if they are designed to have a long-term impact on the site rather than just to "fill in" a period of vacancy.
5. Inclusive housing policy in dynamic urban areas requires long-term commitment and strategy with a proper legal, funding, and institutional framework. A one-off innovative project can add to but cannot substitute ambitious public policy.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the *Home Silk Road* was a transformative project on the theme of housing. It sought to create an inclusive neighbourhood with culture at its core. While the project achieved several notable successes, it also faced challenges and limitations that offer important lessons for future urban initiatives.

One of the key achievements of the project was the successful renovation of the heritage building into a multifunctional space for housing, culture, social economy, and solidarity activities. This transformation demonstrates the potential for repurposing iconic structures in urban development.

The project also introduced innovative mobile and modular temporary housing, offering improved living conditions for families experiencing homelessness. However, it became evident that this temporary housing did not provide a long-term solution to the families' problems.

Circular and inclusive construction techniques employed in the project showcased the potential for environmentally sustainable construction practices. The use of work integration clauses in construction work was another valuable lesson, emphasizing the importance of such practices in public procurement.

The project's participatory approach was a significant aspect, although it faced disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and challenges in engaging residents effectively. Future projects should carefully consider the precise target audience for engagement, and exactly what they want to engage them for.

The two phases of temporary occupation showed that this can play a pivotal role in revitalizing urban areas.

The project underscored the power of culture in supporting inclusion and connecting people. However, it also revealed the challenges of sustained engagement and inclusion in the case of displacement.

Overall, the Home Silk Road project provides valuable recommendations for other urban authorities looking to embark on innovative projects. These include building strong partnerships based on trust and shared vision, focusing on housing inclusion, considering multi-level governance, designing projects with a long-term impact, and recognizing the importance of ambitious, long-term public policy for inclusive housing in dynamic urban areas. While the project had its successes and challenges, its legacy offers valuable insights for future sustainable urban development initiatives, reinforcing the importance of holistic, sustainable, and inclusive approaches to building better cities for all.

[Affordable housing](#)

[See on UIA website](#)

