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The Urban Lab of Europe !

# The URBAN SOIL 4 FOOD project Journal N° 4

*Project led by the City of Maribor*



**CIRCULAR  
ECONOMY**



# The Urban Soil 4 Food project

The **URBAN SOIL 4 FOOD** will test a model of urban soil-based economy circle in order to increase local food self-sufficiency and to minimize the city's environmental footprint. The aim is to use cities' internal waste – particularly excavated materials from construction sector – as input material to produce recycled, standardized and certified soil for meeting cities' needs, and notably to be reintroduced to the ground in order to improve soil quality and increase food production. A pilot system for urban soil production including wastes from different sectors will be tested, and urban community gardens will be developed using the standardized soil produced. In parallel, food distribution will be structured around the creation of an urban food chain and local urban food labels, and an Agri Living Lab will be set up where different experiments relating to social innovation, urban environment and agriculture will take place.

## **Partnership:**

- City of Maribor
- Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship
- E-institute for comprehensive development solutions
- AKTIVIRAJ SE Development of social projects and promotion of active life association
- Snaga
- Wcycle Institute Maribor
- Deltaplan
- Slovenian National Building and Civil Engineering Institute (ZAG)

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# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted globally the functioning of our cities, obviously Maribor and the Urban Soil 4 Food project have been greatly impacted too. Within the drama of the current crisis, the US4F project has shed a light on how cities should organise their food production and distribution systems to respond resiliently to such external shocks.

The current journal can give a picture of what happened as planned in the project up until the end of February and provides insights on the reaction and stall within the city during the pandemic, yet what will be the short and long term effects is still unknown to all the protagonists on the ground.

We hereby look into what has happened to the urban gardens, mainly focusing on the possibilities of the future regulations to be put in place; on the trainings provided to entrepreneurs and stakeholders, as part of the Innovation Cycle; and on the Short Food distribution platform. An interview was carried out with Igor Kos from the

Wcycle Institute to discuss about the reaction of the city and the project to the COVID-19 crisis within the webinar series Cooperative City in Quarantine.

As we are heading towards the end of the project, the results are becoming evident and tangible, reason why during the Cities Forum 2020 in Porto, Portugal, the City of Maribor was awarded for the work carried out in circular economy also through the US4F project and within the Circular Economy Urban Agenda Partnership.

We have very challenging months ahead of us, not only to hopefully recover from the sanitary effects of the pandemic, which fortunately in Slovenia was not severe, but also to face the social and economic crisis, which is hitting the world and Europe as a result of the coronavirus. At this stage, we can only pose many questions, which will be hopefully addressed positively in the next journal.

All will be fine if we work on it together!

## 2 WHAT HAPPENED

When I last visited Maribor to meet the partners and discuss about the development of the project at the end of February 2020 the discussion on the coronavirus still felt as a distant menace but only a few weeks later the sanitary emergency outbreaked harshly. It is not easy to tell what has happened in the US4F project without asking oneself what will happen after this crisis, but we can only raise questions which cannot yet be answered. So this journal attempts to describe the activities up until the end of February and concludes with open questions on what the effects will be on the US4F project but also on Maribor and all cities in Europe and globally.

During the Cities Forum 2020, I had a very interesting conversation with the Vice Mayor of Maribor, Dr. Samo Peter Medved, who explained to me why the city makes such a large investment towards circular economy, through the US4F project and many others. In history, many cities collapsed economically and demographically, just as Maribor did in the early '90ies, so circular economy is an opportunity to develop a sustainable economic system that will be resilient to shocks. The city of Maribor is working on getting people involved and understanding the potential, for instance the urban gardens of the US4F project are used by over 60 people.

The Vice Mayor also highlighted how important it was to increase the exchange with other European cities, as there are many new ideas and potential for cooperation.



CITIES Forum 2020 Award Certificate - URBAN SOIL 4 FOOD

Connected to this, during the same Cities Forum, Igor Kos from the WCycle Institute in Maribor, explained how they developed the circular economy strategy<sup>1</sup> of the city, integrating all the opportunities available within a comprehensive strategy for the city. This work was also the result of a constant dialogue and exchange within the [European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform](#), a joint initiative by the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee. Particularly insightful in the diagram below is the distinction between implementation and governance, which highlights the approach carried out in Maribor.

<sup>1</sup> <https://circulareconomy.europa.eu/platform/en/strategies>

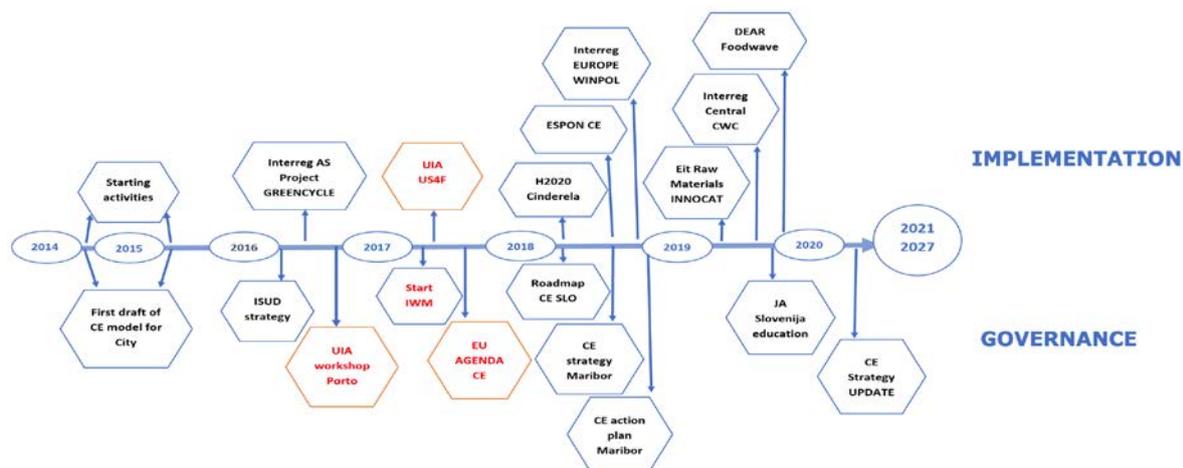


Diagram on Timeline of circular economy development in Maribor.  
Source: Wcycle Institute

## 2.1 Open Innovation Trainings

The e-Zavod institute is responsible for the development of the innovation trainings and workshops within the project. Due to the great interest in these activities, more workshops than planned were carried out and the partners are now thinking about how to prolong these activities beyond the planned period. For instance, there were five planned workshops for exchange of experiences in innovative urban gardening but instead six took place due to the high demand. The topics of interest identified were many, some lately selected for the workshops for exchange of experiences in innovative urban gardening:

- Organic gardening
- Sustainable gardening without digging
- Composting
- Planting through the season, crop rotation, good neighbors
- Growing seeds on our own
- Fruit trees
- Biologically dynamic was of gardening

The workshops firstly made poster sessions to identify needs and obstacles. On 12th February 2019 was the first one, “do it yourself – urban gardening for everyone”, which was an open public event with 64 participants. There was speaker Ms. Miša Pušenjak, who is a well known and established agricultural consultant and vegetable specialist at the Agricultural and Forestry Institute Maribor. The US4F project was also presented in the show. The second event had the same speakers with 33 people but was different from the previous one because it was held in a retirement home – the active people interested in having a garden. The third workshop was held on 17th April 2019 for schools, with 30 people with teachers, parents and some students aged 13-14 years. In fact, there used to be tradition in Slovenia to have gardens in schools, which is now starting up again.

Concerning the innovation in urban gardening workshops, during the first meetings participants selected 50 topics and from there the top 6 were selected depending on needs:

- *Why grow organic in your community gardens.* Speaker Martina Bavec was the responsible

person for organic labelling in Slovenia. Participants were people with urban gardens and there was a buffet by a social company preparing local food products.

- *Sustainable gardening without digging soil.* There were 42 participants, which were potential tenants of the urban gardens. This was a practical workshop in the urban garden Maribor Culture Capital, with whom there is a good cooperation.
- *Composting – key steps.* The speaker was the president of permaculture in Slovenia, there were 30 participants and again it was very practical by using worms in the UIA garden.
- *Planting through the season – importance of crop rotation.* It had 30 participants, and due to the rain it was held in the pavilion of the Capital Culture garden.
- *What seeds can we grow on our own* took place on 5th September 2019 in the UIA garden and 22 participants attended.
- *Planting food trees in biological dynamic way,* was an extra workshop with 22 participants who planted apple trees.

Overall, participants were 60% women of different ages, who attended mainly for hobby and to get healthy food.

The workshops for social innovation actions of urban gardening were 3 workshops held in the City Maribor hotel and a local farm, where participants were focusing on procedures of permits, business models on how to put products on the market. There were 58 participants, mainly farmers and students from agriculture faculty, predominantly young people. There was a presentation by a best practice, a honey producer, and then participants brainstormed in smaller groups and developed together an idea.

It was originally planned to have 200 people participating to the workshops but there were over 350 instead. There were 12 workshops in 2019 and as they are now over, there are requests for more, which could be possibly carried out in cooperation with Aktiviraj.se and possibly arranging more budget by shifting some expenses within the US4F project.



Photos from workshops.  
Source © E-Zavod

E-Zavod project developed an Urban Crops competition with an open call promoted by all project partners, especially ZIP, so that selected projects will be supported with a crowd-funding campaign and to build up idea through business and market plans. Ten participants will be selected through a simple form focusing on: what the idea is, how it is connected to circular economy, if compost can be used, what the market potential is, if one is willing to participate in crowdfunding activities.

Currently the activity is paused due to the COVID-19 emergency.

Based on this experience, the learnings from E Zavod are:

- There is a growing interest in local agriculture, this was lost over the past decades but is returning;
- It will be very interesting what will happen in the next modules with SMEs. In the crowdfunding campaign it will be very important to identify the most important aspects, this will be determining the role and recognition of importance of local food production;
- In the first workshop, there was very wide audience with a very specific questions on their specific needs as well as broad questions.

Partners can handle this audience if they are well prepared to answer questions and needs;

- The second slot of workshops was appreciated by the audience, as it focused on how the EU is supporting concrete local projects. Although it is hard for people to understand non-infrastructure projects funded by EU, it is good against EU-skepticism;
- The activities were “food” for politicians, as they can show they can impact on quality of life of people;
- Finally, the US4F Project was awarded a certification and presented to the EU Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms during Porto Cities Forum, which was very important to ensure political support.

## 2.2 Urban gardens

Given the winter season, there was not much action within the urban gardens, aside of preparing the ground and plants for the next spring. For this reason, it was an opportunity for Akriviraj.se to focus on more organisational and governance issues, such as the preparation of the

long term sustainability plan of the gardens after the end of the US4F project. All of this is still under discussion, reason why an overview of some of the urban garden agreements (from Rome, Paris and Brussels) was provided in order to inspire the stakeholders.



Community gardens.  
Source © Eutropian

## Rome, Italy

As a reaction to the spontaneous appearance of urban gardening initiatives in the city of Rome<sup>2</sup>, in 2015 the municipality has decided to draft an official regulation, recognising the social and environmental benefits deriving from similar initiatives and allowing for non-for-profit formed groups to be allocated urban farming areas. Following the passing of the regulation, Rome is today the lead partner in the Urbact Transfer Network RU:RBAN on the “Management model of urban gardens in Rome”.

**The Roman regulation: the actors involved**

- a. *The Department of Environmental Protection – Social Protection*: responsible for checking the availability of the greenfields targeted by the associations and formed groups, for allocating the greenfields and monitoring the use.
- b. *The Municipality of Rome*: responsible for drafting an annual report assessing the functioning of the management model.
- c. *Local associations of formed groups*: responsible for allocating batches to the community members and monitoring and managing the activities carried out in the urban garden.

<sup>2</sup> <https://urbact.eu/rurban>  
<https://urbact.eu/are-urban-gardens-place-modern-community-hubs>  
[https://www.comune.roma.it/PCR/resources/cms/documents/Delib\\_N\\_38\\_17.07.2015.pdf](https://www.comune.roma.it/PCR/resources/cms/documents/Delib_N_38_17.07.2015.pdf)  
<https://urbact.eu/gli-orti-urbani-che-mettono-al-centro-le-persone-roma-viaggio-tra-le-esperienze-di-rurban>

## General principles for the allocation and the management of an urban farming area work.

The Department of Environmental Protection – Social Protection publishes an open call. Non-for profit formed groups are eligible to apply by suggesting a potential targeted area in their municipality of residence. After making sure that the suggested area is consistent with the objectives and sustainability principles, the Department in question will decide whether to allocate or not the area. The selection of successful projects depends on the role given to the following thematic: (1) environmental protection, (2) educational and social value, (3) the activity's operational character. The farming area is generally allocated as loan to use (comodato d'uso): this is to say that the formed group can use the allocated area for free, for a maximum duration of 6 year, with the possibility to renew the contract only once more. At the end of the contract, the area will be allocated to a new formed group. Any expense regarding the management of the activities to be carried out needs to be covered by the formed group in charge (tools to farm the land, activities, water and electricity, maintenance). The formed group and the people in charge of batches are the only actors to be held responsible for any occurrence resulting in legal sanctions.

## Paris, France

The Parisian regulation "*Main Verte*"<sup>3</sup>, the actors involved:

a. *Association of inhabitants*: a group of inhabitants forms an association and targets

the urban farming area in their neighbourhood and contacts the "Main Verte" department.

b. "*Main verte*" department at the Resource Centre for Urban Gardeners: is responsible for accompanying the association of inhabitants in the filing process for the urban farming project. It assists the association with counselling services.

c. *The municipality of Paris*: together with the association of inhabitants and the "Main verte" department, the municipality is in charge of facilitating the implementation of the project in the targeted area.

The three actors are all responsible for the monitoring of the activities carried out, making sure they are compliant with the regulation.

## General principles for the allocation and the management of an urban farming area work.

In Paris, community associations who wish to establish a community garden can ask for free access to one of the urban farming lands available in the area. The Main Verte regulation provides a solid contractual framework. Both parties, the association on the one hand and the municipality on the other, are entitled to both rights and obligations.

The contract signed between the association and the Parisian municipality includes the provision of a set of basic tools for the farming activity to take off with ease, namely: a drainage layer covered with a layer of topsoil and containers. Moreover, the municipality is responsible for ensuring that the batch is in good conditions when allocated, if not, the municipality is responsible for any major infrastructural work.

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<sup>3</sup> Article in EN: <http://commoning.city/project/paris-jardins-partages-main-verte-program/>  
General info: <https://www.paris.fr/pages/les-jardins-partages-203>  
The chart Main Verte: <https://cdn.paris.fr/paris/2020/01/20/a55a1ba81ca219f117ebee5f34e2fd93.pdf>  
The regulation: <https://cdn.paris.fr/paris/2020/01/20/420f5aa797f120b75d2fb472172609e8.pdf>

Water supply is provided by the municipality, although water consumption expenses have to be covered by the association.

It is the association's responsibility to ensure the appropriate upkeep of the space. Moreover, the association must ensure that any action carried out in the space aims at enhancing environmental sustainability, conviviality and transparency. To this end, the association in charge is requested to carry out farming activities that are protective of the natural environment, avoiding the use of pesticides and similar. Furthermore, it is mandatory to organize at least one public event per year. Finally, no lucrative activity can be organized in the urban garden.

When presenting an urban garden project at the municipality, associations have access to a training and counselling program through which they are given further instruments to strengthen the intended action to be carried out in the space.

Any association who's been allocated a batch is entitled to a six years contract that can be renewed at the end of the term through the signing of a new agreement, if the municipality agrees to proceed with it. Such decision can be highly influenced by the annual activity report the association must submit. Any agreement can be terminated by any of the partners with a three months notification. In case of a serious breach of the regulation, the municipality can ask to vacate the space in the following fifteen days.

## Brussels, Belgium

In Brussels, the start of urban gardens initiatives<sup>4</sup> mainly concern **three actors**:

- a. *Brussels Environnement*: The Environment and Energy Agency of the Brussels-Capital Region of Belgium, whose responsibility is to stipulate the agreement regulating the use of public land for urban gardening.
- b. *Associations or formed groups*: whose responsibility is to propose the gardening project, apply for a batch of public land and if successful take care and maintain the allocated parcels.
- c. *Associations such as le Début des Haricots asbl*: they provide training and support to groups who initiate or plan to initiate urban gardening activities.

### **General principles for the allocation and the management of an urban farming area work.**

The regulation for urban gardens in the city of Brussels stipulates that public spaces are available for community farming initiatives only if committed to a social and cultural purpose. No lucrative initiative is permitted.

The use of the space is allowed in return of a 0.20€/M2 annual rent. When the agreement is signed, Brussels Environnement demands a €60 deposit to cover any damage that might be caused to the space. The deposit will be returned once the agreement terminates.

Brussels Environnement is in charge of providing and maintaining the common infrastructure of

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<sup>4</sup> Further information following the link: <https://environnement.brussels/thematiques/alimentation/produire-mes-aliments/ou-produire-en-ville/le-cojardinage>  
Facebook page to share experiences and challenges encountered in urban farming in Brussels: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/437206787018007/>  
Online mapping initiative of community led actions in Brussels (among which urban gardens): <http://www.asblrcr.be/carto>  
Regulation from Brussels Department of Environment: [https://environnement.brussels/sites/default/files/user\\_files/20190625\\_regleslisteattentattributions\\_fr-nl.pdf](https://environnement.brussels/sites/default/files/user_files/20190625_regleslisteattentattributions_fr-nl.pdf)

the space such as shared facilities, lawns, hedges, fences, shared furniture and common paths.

The use of pesticides, chemical fertilizers and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is strictly prohibited.

Any intention to plan events must be communicated to Brussels Environnement at least 30 days in advance. Brussels Environnement can refuse the request.

If the responsible for the urban garden decides to end the agreement and stop farming the land,

the decision must be communicated within the following 30 days from the end of the activity.

**Interesting practice in Brussels:** the practice of co-gardening has recently spread in the Belgian capital. Brussels Environnement organizes meetings with community members interested in gardening underused private gardens. The training is addressed to individuals who want to participate in gardening initiatives happening in private backyards, with the permission of the owner.

## 2.3 Web platform to organise sustainable offer and demand

The main issue is that Slovenia is less than 40% food self-sufficient, therefore there is the ambition for US4F and other projects and initiatives to impact on increasing the local production. In fact, Slovenia produces much more milk than it consumes internally, up to 120%, but not enough vegetables, as these are produced approximately 40%, as opposed to the nearly 150,000 tonnes of imported vegetables in 2012.

At the same time, in Slovenia there are around 60,000 farms and half a million hectares of arable land, but many small local farmers have a vegetable production they struggle to sell because they are too small to access the large distribution systems.

Therefore, we have an evident mismatch between demand and supply.

US4F wants to improve the local food distribution chain through the development of an online platform and app that can support farmers and all sorts of consumers to get into direct contact.

A detailed description of the steps undertaken by the US4F partnership and especially ZIP is provided in the Zoom-In [guidebook on to setup a short food chain distribution platform](#).

# 3 ANALYSIS OF THE PROJECT CHALLENGES

## 3.1 Maribor and the US4F project during the coronavirus

In March 2020, the COVID-19 crisis outbreak and for this reason we setup an interview with Igor Kos to better understand what was happening in the city of Maribor<sup>5</sup>.

### What are the main challenges at the moment?

In Slovenia we are not in the situation of full lock down as in Italy or Belgium, we are still allowed to go out but self isolation measures are encouraged. We do not seem to face food shortage issues at the moment, there is enough food in the stores, but obviously there was an anxious race to the supermarkets to buy up food in the past week. In Slovenia, the government suggested specific times for people to go to do their shopping, especially for the elderly, in order to ensure that people don't all go at the same time.

### What is happening on the ground?

Here in Slovenia all not necessary shops have been closed down but food shops are still open, despite their opening times have been reduced. The number of people entering the shops at the time are limited, with a guard at the entrance, who ensures that people don't crowd especially at the counter. The farmers' markets are open, even though not all stalls and not for the whole time. Even the neighbouring municipality to Maribor announced just yesterday that the farmers' market will be open on a regular basis,

which was also added in the Inno-Rural app developed by the US4F project. This means that producers can sell their products and consumers can buy, according to the social distancing measures, even though these are more flexible in the market as this is in the open air. To my knowledge, there is no shortage of food at the moment, maybe some specific products.

### What is ahead of us?

In Slovenia, we have the problem that we are not self-sufficient in some areas of food production, for example for food and vegetables we are only 50% self-sufficient, which means we are dependent on imports. This might be a challenge in the near future because of the closing borders. Therefore, under current conditions, the local food producers are being supported and the city has published a list of the local farms so people can get in contact with them to buy the food directly or by using the Inno-Rural app<sup>6</sup> developed within the Urban Soil 4 Food project. So, something good is coming out, as this allows to reduce the damage for farmers. They, for the moment, are not facing problems for the labour, as in Slovenia we are less dependent on foreign workers than Italy, for example. Many people are relying on community gardens, which is not only a healthy option, but especially allows the less wealthy ones to access affordable and healthy food.

<sup>5</sup> The webinar was part of the Cooperative City in Quarantine webinar series: <https://youtu.be/eaWGzSZ9vj4>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.inno-rural.si/UrbanSoil4Foodweb/>

## 3.2 Opportunities and threats in the face of COVID-19

In this historical moment, the sanitary crisis due to COVID-19 has undoubtedly impacted also the Urban Soil 4 Food project. The coronavirus has brought dramatic effects on human lives on a global scale, furthermore a harsh economic and social crisis are expected to take place in the coming months, and to some extent we can already see it. At the same time, on a local scale we see in many places throughout the world, that the impacts of the COVID-19 have accelerated in good and bad some processes, which were already taking place.

In the case of the Urban Soil 4 Food project, this has meant that some parts of the project have been rapidly progressing whilst others have been slowed down if not even halted.

In respects to the platform for short food chain distribution, the process has been rapidly accelerated as it was used much more during the quarantine, as people contacted the farmers to get access to food or know which products would be available at the food market. This service was also extended to the market of a neighbouring municipality.

A rapid increase in use was also in relation to the community gardens, as the rising economic pressure has made it attractive, if not even necessary, for many people to grow their food instead of buying it. Despite it is still hard to assess what will the economic impacts of the COVID-19 in Maribor be, it is likely that unfortunately more and more people will be in the condition of needing access to community gardens.

Whilst these elements of the project have been accelerated, others have been slowed down due to the quarantine. For instance, any education activity has been postponed and similarly has

happened to the implementation of the innovative plant, which under the current situation has been obviously delayed.

Going back to the larger picture, what we learn from the Maribor experience can be of inspiration to other cities too. It's hard to imagine how COVID-19 will affect our food, waste and soil production systems in the long run, yet we can draw some learning points which are valid also to other cities who might want to start a similar project as the Urban Soil 4 Food.

1. We need to ensure **food sovereignty** and therefore that we are able to produce our own food, as much as possible. What we have seen in Maribor is that by having initiated efforts towards increasing self-sufficiency, the city was more resilient in its food production and distribution during the coronavirus crisis;
2. We must establish and innovate our **public policy**, connecting producers and consumers through a publicly owned infrastructure of farms, distribution firms, markets, etc. The fact that Maribor has an approved circular economy plan of the city is an essential element towards the development of the necessary policies to support projects and actions taking place on the ground;
3. We have to ensure access to healthy food also to poorer citizens, this can be supported through vouchers but also by establishing **public community gardens**. The number of people making use of community gardens will increase and therefore it is essential to provide such services and develop a city-wide network of spaces, as Maribor has started doing;
4. The rise of food delivery offers the opportunity for restaurants and delivery people, together

with consumers, to cluster their requests. In this respects the effort of the Inno-Rural app show what great potential is available from such platforms, and how new services may be

developed once the initial infrastructure connecting producers and consumers is in place.

### 3.3 Mapping the US4F project against UIA challenges

Up until the end of February, the project was not undergoing any major risk, aside of some delays in the implementation of the innovative plant due to procurement procedures. With the outbreak of the Coronavirus crisis it cannot be predicted what the effects will be, nevertheless it can be said that it is likely that some of the weaker aspects of the project will be further impacted.

The most impacted aspects throughout the project, as summarised by the table below, have been public procurement, as the administrative procedures for the implementation of the innovative plant have been delayed and there could be more delays in city procurement processes due to overburden of the civil servants. Obviously, the participative approach of the project has been impacted by the quarantine and social distancing, as gatherings for public events and presentations are no longer possible. As social distancing will be a measure in place for a long time, most likely, the project will have to

develop new means to engage with the project target groups, especially through digital means. In terms of monitoring, things appear to be running smoothly towards the soil certification, which is nevertheless not a completed process. Finally, in respect to the upscaling of the project, by entering the last year of the project, the entire partnership has made a big effort towards sharing the ongoing work. The fact of having more comprehensible results, as the actions are at this stage more tangible, is essential to be able to make understandable to other cities the shift which can be made towards circular economy and sustainability.

## MAPPING URBAN SOIL 4 FOOD AGAINST THE ESTABLISHED UIA CHALLENGES

Challenge	Level	Observations
<b>1. Leadership for implementation</b>	<b>Low</b>	Up until now the leadership within the project has been strong, with committed politicians even after the elections that saw a new Mayor, therefore there are no foreseeable risks related to leadership. However, the externalities due to the COVID-19 crisis could bring some changes in terms of political priorities and investments, yet this cannot be foreseen at the moment.
<b>2. Public procurement</b>	<b>Medium</b>	The public procurement of the innovative plant required a long time due to the very experimental nature of the project. In fact, the process was much longer than what was expected in the previous semester, with the official results not being published for many months and the implementation not having yet started. Due to the current sanitary crisis, it could be that there will be more delays in city procurement processes due to overburden of the civil servants.
<b>3. Integrated cross-departmental working</b>	<b>Low</b>	The very existence of the WCycle institute shows that there is a strong cooperation amongst departments, hence this is not to be seen as a risk at this stage.
<b>4. Adopting a participative approach</b>	<b>Medium</b>	Up until now, there were some difficulties in participation due to the difficulty of people to understand the meaning of circular economy as well as some specific conflictual issues, as the location of the waste plant. Under the present conditions, it is foreseeable that the participation will be affected and limited due to social distancing and fear that people might have in attending events and community gatherings, such as going to the urban gardens.
<b>5. Monitoring and evaluation</b>	<b>Low</b>	There are currently no risks seen in this direction as activities are being carried out as planned. It could be that there will be some delays in the implementation of some activities due to the COVID-19 crisis, but this cannot be foreseen at this stage. The soil certification, which currently does not exist, was not yet completed but is proceeding, which allows to identify a lower rate of risk.
<b>6. Financial Sustainability</b>	<b>Medium</b>	The long term sustainability of the urban gardens is something currently under discussion and will depend on the agreement with the city administration, the other community-gardens and the tenants of the gardens.

Challenge	Level	Observations
7. Communicating with target beneficiaries	Low	Communication activities are being carried out without challenges, it is foreseen though that still in the coming months the activities will be shifting to digital mainly.
8. Upscaling	Medium	<p>At this stage, the upscaling at city level but especially at international level have not been fully developed. Yet there are some starting materials, as the guidebook for the setup of a short chain food distribution system.</p> <p>The City of Maribor and the entire partnership have made a large effort in sharing their experiences within the US4F project with a large number of cities, for instance within the Porto Cities Forum, and they are working on a plan for the materials that could be produced to support the international exchange.</p>

## 4 TAKE-AWAYS

Firstly, the US4F project has proven that the preparation towards short chain food systems is most effective in times of crisis, as demonstrated under the present conditions. Having prepared the system and the actors (farmers, city council, consumers) over a long period of time meant that a rapid shift was possible due to the emergency.

Secondly, and connected to the first point, the creation of a short food chain distribution system is something that requires a clear methodology – this was developed by the project and could be further replicated<sup>7</sup>.

Finally, the workshops have demonstrated that people are willing to participate and contribute to common activities if these are designed in a way to take on board their needs and respond to them.

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<sup>7</sup> Guidebook for short food chain distribution: <https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/news/us4f-zoomin-2-how-setup-short-food-chain-distribution-platform>

## 5 COMING NEXT!

In September 2020, we will be able to better assess the response of the project to the current COVID-19 crisis. We will look into the community gardens and whether the users have been carrying out their activities, whether the response was higher due to the economic crisis or whether it was lower due to fear. This will also be the result of the US4F project actions to respond to the new conditions.

Similarly, it is expected that many activities will also take place in relation to the short food chain distribution system, which will probably continue having a rise in the number of producers and consumers taking part to the platform.

Finally, there will be interesting news in relation to the innovative soil production plant too.

The next journal will, in fact, be analysing the project activities throughout a very interesting and challenging time, as all cities and territories throughout Europe will be addressing the post-COVID-19 crisis. We will be looking back at the threats and opportunities identified in this journal and assess how reality developed.

Keep tuned and stay safe!

# 6 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Journal by Daniela Patti, Urban Soil 4 Food expert,  
Eutroplan

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Journal approval by Brina Lazar, Urban Soil 4 Food  
Project Manager

Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) is an Initiative of the European Union that provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges. Based on article 8 of ERDF, the Initiative has a total ERDF budget of EUR 372 million for 2014-2020.

UIA projects will produce a wealth of knowledge stemming from the implementation of the innovative solutions for sustainable urban development that are of interest for city practitioners and stakeholders across the EU. This journal is a paper written by a UIA Expert that captures and disseminates the lessons learnt from the project implementation and the good practices identified. The journals will be structured around the main challenges of implementation identified and faced at local level by UIA projects. They will be published on a regular basis on the UIA website.



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