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**INTEGRATION OF
MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES**



The Utrecht Refugee Launchpad - U-RLP

The Utrecht Refugee Launchpad, locally known as Plan Einstein, seeks to develop a new way to deal with neighbourhood refugee reception facilities. The City of Utrecht is looking to apply an inclusive approach, in order to facilitate integration from day one by introducing a shared living concept in which local youth and asylum seekers can cohabitate. It aims to create an innovative reception facility, which is built upon social networks within the neighbourhood, developing resilient skill sets alongside asylum seekers. It will offer asylum seekers and neighbourhood (youth) alike an active and entrepreneurial environment. Although the core target group remains the refugee community, by mixing them with neighbourhood participants, or even potentially opposing groups, the thought is to build connections and experience mutual support, rather than increasing alienation. Neighbourhood residents are invited to follow international entrepreneurship or English classes together with the asylum seekers, followed by peer-to-peer coaching and introductions to local businesses.

A group of carefully selected young people with a strong connection to the neighbourhood and its improvement will create trendy living quarters in the same building where the refugee shelter is located. These youth are of mixed levels of education, occupation, gender, age, ethnicity, and background.

The lessons learned in the U-RLP project could be both used within the Netherlands or elsewhere. This way the approach ensures a strong investment in the participants' lives, which could be built further in Utrecht or elsewhere, if the asylum request is denied or when refugees may want to rebuild their home country.

Partnership:

- City of Utrecht
- Socius Wonen
- Utrecht Center for Entrepreneurship (University of Utrecht, School of Economics)
- Volksuniversiteit Utrecht
- Social Impact Factory
- Dutch Council for Refugees (Vluchtelingenwerk Midden-Nederland)
- University of Oxford - Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS)
- Roehampton University

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1. Executive Summary

In the context of rapidly rising numbers of asylum seekers in Europe and the Netherlands, U-RLP aims to radically re-think refugee accommodation and integration. Instead of isolating refugee accommodation in the outskirts of the city, the project proposes housing them in an inner city neighbourhood, together with young people from the area who are also in need for housing, and creating many activities that connect refugees with the neighbourhood. Contrary to the state's centrally steered integration programme, which only starts once refugee status is obtained, U-RLP starts integration from day one, by offering an international entrepreneurship training course, which refugees can attend together with neighbourhood residents, and which will be useful whatever the outcome of the asylum procedure. The training is attended by refugees together with neighbourhood residents and provides a possibility to start building a new life after its violent interruption through war.

In implementing a new local model for refugee reception, U-RLP faced practical contradictions between its ambition to do things differently and the established ways of working with refugees. Such challenges ranged from the most abstract level of its inclusive and empowering philosophy, to obstacles of getting the state reception facility ready to provide shelter to asylum seekers in time to start the project, down to details of how to contract partners in a flexible way in the context of an EU-funded project.

A second major challenge has been political, namely the fact of welcoming refugees in the context of a polarised national and local debate, and in a neighbourhood that has to already deal with different social complexities.

In addressing these challenges, it was important that the partnership demonstrated flexibility to turn some of the obstacles into assets, and that a common "story" about the project was developed early on, to convince potential resistance of the project's benefits. In building a strong and united partnership with a common understanding of the project, and highlighting the potential of the project not only for refugees, but also for established residents, it was possible to counter an initially sceptical position of some local actors and neighbourhood residents with a more positive perception of the centre.

The interest of the many citizens to support refugees, the activities of the young residents from the neighbourhood sharing the centre with refugees, and the rising level of participation at the trainings and activities are some of the most positive results so far. As to the impact of the overall project, and the training provided, it is still too early to tell, as the large majority of the refugees have only been living in the centre for a few months. At the same time, the project's goals seem to have materialised in terms of developing a new

model for refugee accommodation, adding value for refugees and neighbourhood residents, and providing meaningful training for the two groups. What is more, the centre generates new participants and new activities that were not part of the project's initial theory of change and that create additional bonds between the refugees and the neighbourhood.

The project has already raised significant attention at the national level and from other cities, bringing the new challenge of managing expectations and not starting knowledge transfer before there is clarity about the impact about the project's different components.

2. The project and its policy context

In the last years, Utrecht, as many other cities, faced an increased influx of asylum seekers in need of shelter. Asylum involves specific protection for which the EU defines procedural standards and reception conditions. At the same time, claiming asylum means going through a lengthy procedure with an uncertain outcome. In the Netherlands, like in many other EU member states, the integration measures are centrally steered and only start once refugee status has been obtained. This means that during a long phase, many refugees live amongst themselves in accommodations that are often situated at the margins of the cities, and suffer a violent interruption of their life trajectories before they can get started with their new lives.

One of the solutions U-RLP offers to this situation is to provide support measures geared towards capitalising on asylum seeker's entrepreneurial qualities. The support consists of international entrepreneurship training, business English courses (international language), peer to peer coaching by successful social entrepreneurs and corporations, and an international incubator space for new business startups. Given the uncertainty of the asylum procedure's outcomes, the training is designed to be useful regardless of which country the asylum seekers will live in in their near future. In addition to providing an economic opportunity, the training also aims to give new meaning to life and help to restore interrupted life trajectories, so as to provide the psychological foundation for refugees to participate in society.

The significant refugee inflow of the last years, known as "refugee crisis", has triggered political

debates across Europe. In the Netherlands and beyond, the refugee issue seems to polarise societies and represents a heavily contested topic in electoral campaigns, while at the same time triggering a lot of spontaneous citizen support. At city level, hosting refugee facilities can lead to citizens' resistance and "not-in-my-backyard" type of attitudes that have also manifested themselves in Utrecht.

In order to generate acceptance in this complicated political context, U-RLP takes a step forward rather than backward, and radically breaks with the traditional ideas of what accommodation for asylum seekers consists of, by opening it to the neighbourhood it is situated in and making it a part of the community. These accommodations offer a wide range of social activities that connect local citizens and asylum seekers, hosts asylum seekers and young people from the neighbourhood next to each other, and also opens the business courses to young neighbourhood residents. By learning and developing together, both refugees and local youth can increase their social capital and widen their horizons, while the refugee shelter transforms from an unwanted facility into a resource for the neighbourhood.



The U-RLP partnership combines partners who would not usually work together. It brings together the expertise of the Dutch Refugee

Council and of the City of Utrecht in the reception of asylum seekers, with innovative and inspiring young organisations such as SOCIUS Living and the Social Impact Factory to embed the asylum shelter within the neighbourhood and the Utrecht entrepreneurial ecosystem. The Utrecht School of Economics

and the Volksuniversiteit contribute with their experience in entrepreneurship and language training while Oxford and Roehampton Universities ensure that the partnership has also a strong capacity to measure the project's success in terms of innovating reception and integration of asylum seekers.

3. The project's implementation so far

Although it has welcomed the biggest part of its residents only recently, the centre has already demonstrated the potential of its co-habitation model between old and new residents, and of the connections created by entrepreneurship and English training. The changing spatial and social context in the beginning, however, demanded some flexibility in the design of the activities, compared to the way they were initially envisioned.

Populating the centre

According to the original project plan, 400 refugees were expected to arrive in summer 2016. However, due to factors that were out of the control and responsibility of the project (the state reception facility was not ready in time and faced many delays), the first 40 refugees only arrived in March 2017 and the majority (360) only came in the summer of 2017.

Neighbours were expecting the refugees' arrival for a long time and kept asking if they were still coming. The young people, the other group of residents of the centre, had arrived in November 2016, and were quite disappointed not to be able to start activities and engage with the refugees. This had an impact on their motivation and enthusiasm. The delay in the refugees moving in could not be directly solved in any way, and all partners recognised that the delay was a pity.

On the other hand, partners were able to dedicate more time to acclimate, think, and work on fine-tuning the approach and the process.

Another advantage of the delay was that the young people could settle in prior to welcoming the refugees. The three months in which youth cohabited with a smaller number of refugees (March to summer 2017) served as a pilot to redesign some aspects of the project, and brought innovative and unexpected outcomes (e.g. shared cooking leading to more interaction and relationship building, through which the delay was turned into an asset).



Starting off with a smaller amount of asylum seekers in the shelter also enabled the team to gauge the impact and possibilities that different numeric relations and combinations of co-living between groups of people in the asylum shelter have on community building processes.

Once all refugees had settled in, the interaction between them and the youth living in the centre was less frequent. This was a result of the fact that the refugee accommodation implied that refugees would have their own, separate entrance (relevant also for security issues) and kitchen, which reduced the natural opportunities for interaction with some of the less motivated young people.

Moreover, the arrival of many families with children (the first group consisted mainly of men) made relationship building and interaction more complex.

The training programme

The delay in the arrival of asylum seekers also affected the first training sessions. Refugee participants were living in other asylum shelters in Utrecht and had to cycle to the premises. This led to smaller numbers of participants in the courses, though with more intense support, which must be accounted for in the project's evaluation.

Some refugees decided to wait to sign up for a course until their family reunification processes would be completed, and the fact that the day-care facility was not immediately ready also limited the involvement of parents.

To facilitate refugees' participation in the trainings, the Council for Refugees aims for an individual diagnosis for each refugee, identifying their situations, interests, experience, expectations and dreams, and providing advice on opportunities offered by the project and other volunteer activities. A formal, culture-sensitive, three hour assessment specifically developed for application with refugees by Amsterdam University (Vrije Universiteit) is now conducted by all who are digitally able to do so.

It is a promising sign that some refugees who received a positive decision on their status, thus moving to new housing, have shown interest in continuing their courses in the centre. The team is analysing if they can guarantee their participation, which seems possible as long as this does not interfere with their duty to participate in official newcomer programmes (language courses, etc.).

As for the participation of established neighbourhood residents, this was initially low, but has been rising since, and now involves a wide range of different profiles. The proportion of NEETS (young people who are not in education, employment, or training) in the strict sense of the term is lower than expected, which is probably due to the fact that there are already many support services available to this group. At the same time, participants include many that are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, in precarious jobs, at risk of unemployment or with a lower formal education. Most importantly, with every training that is completed successfully, the team sees more interest from people in precarious situations to participate. Once further training cycles have been completed, it will be possible to provide more precise information on the profile of neighbourhood participants.

The district advisor and SOCIUS-youngsters play a key role to attract neighbours to the trainings. There is also information on many local centres and newspapers, where personal stories of people who have participated in the training are being shared.

First course outcomes and challenges of linguistic and social diversity

In the entrepreneurship trainings attended by both refugees and local neighbours, the need

for translation of some of the English course content into Arabic and Tigrinya represented a problem, as it implied losing time and hampering the smooth flow of the sessions. The training team first decided to separate the courses so the neighbourhood members did not have to wait for the translation. However, some Dutch speaking neighbourhood members decided to follow the course in English together with the asylum seekers, and in the next course they were once again combined as the two groups started “missing the other”. As a result, now there is a course in English (including translation) and in Dutch. The participants do get to know each other during the joint events, which are organised by the Utrecht Centre for Entrepreneurship and the Social Impact Factory.

Regarding the English courses, seven people who finished the most advanced level course have been registered for the formal exams for the prestigious Cambridge English Certificate. This was not expected, and represents a very exciting and stimulating result, which has inspired others. Another unexpected outcome of the mixed teaching is that it questions established hierarchies in refugee integration

between host and newcomer. As one neighbourhood participant explained, learning English together can change the pattern in which the “natives” always have the upper hand because of their superior linguistic skills in the host country’s language, while in the project’s environment refugees may gently take neighbourhood folk through uncertainties or learning problems.

Designing new actions for promoting positive interaction between refugees and neighbours

At present, the project team is designing new actions to recover the higher level of the interaction and connections from the initial project phase. The fact that neighbours that are not in a vulnerable situation have also shown interest in the centre increases the diversity of profiles, and the chances to find similarities with refugee’s professional experiences and common interests.

Organising an Open Day in September 2017 was a success, in terms of fostering interaction and stimulating curiosity and interest among the neighbours: 600 people attended, among which were many refugees and local neighbours.



4. Implementation challenges

Challenge 1. Leadership for implementation

The diversity of the partnership represents both a key asset and a challenge in terms of leadership. Having both a solid managerial approach to the project and enough space for injecting new ideas in the course of the project is key to allowing the project to develop its full potential, in particular in a context of political contestation. Not unexpectedly, it took the partners some time to find the right balance and align their approaches in terms of day-to-day management and communication, as will be developed further below.

Dealing with the challenge

The strong political leadership and commitment from the side of the deputy mayor has certainly been an indispensable premise for the project managing to work together with all partners involved. U-RLP itself is embedded in a wider participatory approach of the city of Utrecht in

the sensitive areas of reception and integration of refugees, where a growing number of volunteers and professionals are involved and regular consultations with key stakeholders take place.

For the overall functioning and impact of the project, it has also been essential to cooperate closely with the COA, the central agency for refugee reception, which organises and coordinates reception at national level in cooperation with municipalities.

Building on this general political framework of U-RLP, coordination and participation within the partnership relies on differentiated tools including biannual progress interviews with project partners, monthly meetings for taking strategic decisions, and bi-weekly meetings for the day-to-day management of the project.

Challenge 2. Smart public procurement - contradictions between procurement and contracting rules and the project's working structure

In some cases there were tensions between the project's innovative partners working with entrepreneurs and flexible collaborators, and the more formal (and strict) criteria of the EU programmes, which require staff assignment forms and classical contracts in line with the existing EU-legislation.

For instance, some partners have very flexible structures with external collaborators and entrepreneurs, who are not permanent employees of the organisations, which has led to some difficulties regarding the project funding rules. This means that some essential project partners (who would otherwise be

flexible cooperation partners) had to become members of staff – which is somewhat in contradiction to their identity as an independent entrepreneur and the subject of their classes. In other words, there is a contradiction when a teacher, coach, or role model promotes new and more flexible ways to work within the project, but the strictness of the funding rules makes it difficult for the project itself to lead by example.

Dealing with the challenge

The project partners have managed to find a solution, after various open conversations between with the UIA Secretariat. In order to

ensure the eligibility of costs, the organisations contracted their experts/entrepreneurs as permanent employees. This remains, however, a concern which should be resolved in future

programmes in which the EU would like to support innovative actions and cooperation with new type of SME's in new labour market.

Challenge 3. Organisational arrangements within the urban authority to deliver integrated innovative projects - overcoming resistances linked to the project's approach and philosophy

The project's approach of tackling refugee inclusion in a radically different way has, quite naturally, triggered some sceptical reactions from different actors.

For instance, there are marked differences between the project's approach and the dominant way of conducting these policies at the national level, which is more focused on control and security, and does not address the dimension of local inclusion.

Another way in which the project is different is that refugee shelters in the Netherlands are often located on the periphery and not in the centre of cities and villages. Plan Einstein, however, aims to be embedded within more central neighbourhoods.

Finally, the unconventional approach of mixing youth and refugees was considered complex and risky by some. Empowering asylum seekers that are not allowed to work, and who are still waiting for a decision on their status, was also a challenging idea for many.

Dealing with the challenge

The powerful notion of "future free" working was developed throughout the project, to stress the positive difference that the project makes in comparison to conventional approaches, providing skills that are useful regardless of the context in which the course participants will live in their future.

Criticism was also reduced by explaining how successful refugees may want to help rebuild their home country once the strife there has ended. Offering "global" training empowers all interested groups, be it recognised refugees, rejected asylum seekers, or remigration candidates in a future that cannot yet be anticipated.

Factors such as the political commitment to the project and the collaboration with a diverse group of strong partners also helped to overcome objections, together with highlighting that U-RLP represents a pilot project financed by a prestigious EU programme to test innovative and positive ways of dealing with refugees.

Challenge 4. Developing a participative approach for co-implementation

The project has a very diverse group of partners. Some of them are long-established organisations with experience in collaboration with the municipality on other projects. Others are younger and more innovative, but have less experience in European projects. In the

beginning of the implementation phase, partners were working more from their individual and unique perspective, with no much collaboration or sharing with the others. When there were external visits to the centre, each partner explained their own specific role, as if

they were disconnected from the others. This also reflects the way everyone was fitting into their new role and responsibilities.

Dealing with the challenge

After working together for a couple of months, partners developed a positive attitude of working together and sharing their experience and knowledge. Those partners that were more involved in the daily activities of the centre decided to meet every two weeks to promote this collaboration, which has proved to be very effective. All of them have links with participants and it was necessary to build a more intensive and qualitative relationship, enabling them to fine-tune their support for the participants.

The partnership has managed to create one single story about the project and building: a

common and shared identity that all of them can feel and communicate.

All partners are working in the same space and have seen the benefits of working together and collaborating more intensively. A good example of this change is that the end of the latest modules of the English and entrepreneurship trainings in October 2017 were celebrated for the first time with a joint graduation ceremony where participants would get their certificate from the Deputy Mayor. Before there was no link between the dynamics of the two courses, but now it is clear they are part of a common, global project. At this last graduation ceremony it was now impossible to distinguish refugees from neighbourhood participants by 'grouping', showing a naturally mixed population of 'graduates'.

Challenge 5. Monitoring and evaluation: trade-offs between the need to evaluate the impact and the need for flexibility and adaptability

It is a complex task to evaluate the impact of an experimental project dealing with short-term and long-term goals, and involving many different actors. The project is a dynamic process in which changes are necessary and many unexpected outcomes and impacts may appear, making it difficult to evaluate. This is why an overly rigid evaluation framework could hamper some of the impact that often results from a more flexible and dynamic process. At the same time, it is important to grasp the impact of the project and its individual components.

Dealing with the challenge

The theory of change approach that is being developed by the Roehampton evaluation expert team seems to fit very well with the characteristics of the project, as it focuses on

the process and all the conditions that may contribute to reaching the desired goals.

Some gaps in the initial proposal were identified and addressed to strengthen the project implementation and ultimately the monitoring and evaluation-process. Overall, the evaluation approach has sought to combine rigour with a dose of necessary flexibility to achieve many different and qualitative impacts.

A dedicated workshop on U-RLP's theory of change was very positive to develop a common understanding of the evaluation approach.

The contribution of COMPAS is of great value due to the centre's strong experience in policy evaluation and particularly through the interdisciplinary Oxford Advisory Board, which

can provide a more holistic and transversal perspective about the project development and its impact.

The evaluation team is conducting on-going research accompanying the implementation of the project, with both quantitative and qualitative information, and has committed itself to provide feedback on their findings as they proceed, to better adjust the activities,

instead of just providing a final evaluation. This is particularly appropriate for the dynamic and experimental character of the project.

The research group have started conducting surveys with the (randomly selected) neighbours who seem to be participating actively in interviews, a good sign both for the evaluation and for the project.

Challenge 6. Communicating a complex project in a politicised context

It was clear from the outset that an innovative project dealing with such a sensitive issue needs to be very careful about its communication strategy, as it may have an important impact on the result of the project. The fact that the project attracted a lot of attention early on made it difficult to find the necessary space to set up the project and develop. This attention also made it clear that there was a need that all partners share a common vision in communicating the project.

For example, even the kind of questions that are put to the neighbours in interviews as part of the research process may contribute to putting too much emphasis on the project as a “special” project, and stigmatise the neighbourhood.

Another practical communication challenge is that the protected status of an asylum seeker implies many restrictions on disseminating information or images of them.

Dealing with the challenge

The project managers and initiatives invest significant energy in spreading the right

narrative among professionals in their field. Visits to Plan Einstein are organised only on occasion, and preferably consist of talking to participants and not fostering a “sightseeing” character. It was suggested by young designers to call the principles of a project like this the “DNA” of the project in order to avoid giving the impression of a too simple or superficial copy and paste transfer.

Involving the young residents in communication was another fruitful way of strengthening communication and avoiding an “us against them” logic. Quite naturally, the young neighbourhood residents stopped using the word “refugees”, to stress the fact that they were essentially neighbours.



Challenge 7. Dealing with an early interest in knowledge transfer

The project has had an early impact in terms of attracting the interest of many actors, both institutional and social organisations, which is surely a good indicator of its innovativeness and initial impact.

Other cities and organisations want to adapt and implement the project's approach in their contexts, and there are a lot of demands from many different actors to know more about the project and its methodology.

However, the project still has to be fully implemented to identify what works best and what doesn't. It definitely shows very positive developments, but trying to roll it out or

transfer it without taking into account the lessons learned might backfire.

Dealing with the challenge

The project managers and initiatives spend much time on spreading the right narrative among professionals in their field. Visits to Plan Einstein are organised occasionally only, and preferably consist of talking to participants and not fostering a "sightseeing" character.

It was suggested by young designers to call the principles of a project like this the DNA of the project in order to avoid giving the impression of a too simple or superficial copy and paste transfer.

5. Policy-specific challenges

Challenge 8. U-RLP within a polarised public debate on refugees

U-RLP was born in a context of a polarised debate and great media and political attention on the issue of welcoming refugees. Therefore, when the city of Utrecht announced that there would be a new centre for 600 asylum seekers this caused strong reactions among citizens: on the one hand, it triggered citizens to voice anger, fear and upset. On the other hand, it also triggered numerous citizens to form volunteer initiatives to welcome the asylum seekers in the city.

With decreasing numbers of new refugee arrivals, the intensity of the debate has lowered. However, the topic remains high on the political agenda, for instance in the campaign for the national elections in March 2017, and probably also for local elections in March 2018.

Dealing with the challenge

In the given political climate, the City Council decided to lower the number of refugee accommodation in the area from 600 to 400. In 2016, the city organised "city dialogues" where the Deputy Mayor and the policy advisors could listen and develop a constructive dialogue with neighbours about their concerns.

The fact that the project also provides services and other opportunities that benefit the whole neighbourhood helped to address citizens' concerns.

The project has also been very careful with the communication to prevent putting too much attention on the centre and emphasising its wider, inclusive dimension.

Challenge 9. Housing refugees in a neighbourhood with scarce resources

One of the main local concerns is the lack of affordable housing (prices are high and the market is tight) and the scarcity of services, facilities, and spaces for social interaction. In this situation, building a centre for refugees provoked backlash in the form of arguments such as “our children have to live in our houses because they cannot afford/access social housing and you are providing housing to newcomers?”

In addition, some concerns related to noise, the fear of increasing criminality, and other irregular activities (“The neighbourhood is already quite poor and you bring in here 400 people who don’t work”) were raised.

Already before the project started, negative narratives about the neighbourhood existed among many people, including among some professionals working there.



Dealing with the challenge

At the heart of the project is the philosophy to “open up” the centre to neighbours, and engage them by offering free courses and stimulating

activities as an incubator to create new opportunities for both refugees and residents.

The project involves and provides housing for young people with a strong connection to the neighbourhood, and thereby tackles one of the neighbourhood’s problems.

The project’s overall approach is to provide additional resources to the neighbourhood and to contribute to de-stigmatisation through the “inclusive innovation” approach and doing a lot of pedagogical work within the municipality and many local stakeholders.

The latest example for collaboration between the centre and the neighbourhood is a “Social Impact Challenge” implemented by Social Impact Factory, together with asylum seekers and neighbourhood members, who jointly mapped the greatest concerns in the neighbourhood and are now developing a social project to meet these now-identified needs. The theme for the first social impact challenge is ‘bullying’ and solutions to it.

The project partners keep “listening” to perceptions of the neighbours through the neighbourhood district advisor, research interviews, and organised activities and events, for all residents to promote better knowledge about the project and positive interaction. The Open Day on 23rd of September was a great success in this sense. According to evidence that is, for now, still anecdotal (e.g. an exchange with a local policeman) initial fears among the neighbours seem to have ebbed.

Challenge 10. Managing citizen solidarity

The arrival of refugees also triggered new volunteer initiatives of citizens who wanted to welcome and help the asylum seekers. There was a need to properly coordinate all such positive efforts, in order to have a positive impact and avoid the risk of many activities being conducted in an uncoordinated way, or some of them pursuing a “paternalistic” approach that runs counter to the project’s philosophy. This could have a potentially negative impact, due to a lack of rigour and of knowledge about the asylum procedures that can result in false expectations and uncomfortable situations.

Dealing with the challenge

The project was carefully appointed the local team of the Dutch Council for Refugees - an expert organisation in dealing with refugees’ wellbeing - for managing volunteer Initiatives. For this, a collaboration protocol between the City of Utrecht, the Dutch Council for Refugees

and one of the initiatives’ key stakeholders named ‘Welcome in Utrecht’ was adopted.

As a result, the Dutch Council for Refugees has become known as a central actor in making refugees aware the activities and volunteer support available to them. The Council now provides specific training sessions for all volunteers connected to the project so they can develop their knowledge of the asylum process and of intercultural approaches, and in how to deal appropriately and tactfully with cases of traumatised refugees.

Volunteers are also encouraged to pursue a more inclusive and broader perspective taking into account the neighbourhood dimension. Existing volunteers are encouraged to broaden their scope and to help local neighbourhood members. At the same time, new asylum seekers are also encouraged to become volunteers themselves!

6. Next steps

Given that most of the refugee participants have been involved in the project for less than half a year, consolidating the project’s approach in terms of co-living and training, and assessing its outcomes is among the most important next steps to take in the project. A first business registered at the Chamber of Commerce is encouragement to give the project the time to reach maturity and unfold its full potential.

In parallel though, the partnership has already started to think about the transferability of the project, as it has raised a lot of attention. The general director of the national reception agency COA has already labelled the project’s approach as reception 2.0, replacing the current reception model that has been in place for 30 years; and a new centre inspired by U-RLP is

expected to open in Nijmegen soon. At the same time, there are new activities and projects generated by and around the centre. For instance, a local folk theatre company located nearby proposed a regular radio blog to be broadcasted from the centre, with and about asylum seekers and other neighbourhood residents. Also, a local collective of young designers, craftsmen, and artisans have started to work with refugees about fusion in art.

Meanwhile, a brand new national government keeps influencing the project’s political context and will demand the project to adapt with flexibility where possible, while standing its ground in defending its original approach where necessary, encouraged by the project’s successes so far.

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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