

October 2019

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The Urban Lab of Europe !

The U-RLP project Journal N° 5

Project led by the City of Utrecht



**INTEGRATION OF
MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES**



The U-RLP Project

The U-RLP project seeks to capitalise asylum seeker's entrepreneurial skills. Starting before asylum status is granted, the activities of the "launch pad" will enhance the entrepreneurial skills of the refugees who will remain in the Netherlands but also of those who will return to their country of origin. Within an existing emergency shelter, the project will combine community housing, learning activities as well as incubator and work spaces. Targeting the asylum seekers but also local young NEETs (not in Education, Employment or Training), who represent 20% of the neighbourhood population, the project's ambition is to establish solid bridges within the community. International entrepreneurship training, business language courses, peer to peer coaching and internships in local businesses will be offered to target groups. Special attention will be given to post traumatic stress with the experimentation of innovative tools to reframe refugees broken narratives, encouraging resilience, and building confidence for entrepreneurship.

Partnership:

- Gemeente Utrecht
- Socius Wonen – SME
- Universiteit Utrecht-School of Economics (U.S.E.) and Centre for Entrepreneurship (UtrechtCE).
- Stichting Volksuniversiteit Utrecht- Division of English courses
- Social Impact Factory – NGO
- Vluchtelingenwerk Midden-Nederland – NGO
- University of Oxford- Centre on Migration, Policy and Society
- Roehampton University

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1. Executive Summary

The final months of the project have focused on completing the actions and outputs foreseen in the work plan. From now on, the project will continue but without the financing of the UIA Initiative, although some dissemination and capitalisation actions will still have to be carried out.

The open space at the attic has been decorated with the active participation of some residents and local artists, and during the summer many cultural activities have been promoted to increase participation and create a stimulating and welcoming atmosphere, open to the neighbourhood. The training courses are being consolidated in the Haydn centre and the model is being adapted to a very different context from that of Overvecht.

One of the biggest challenges today is how to manage the transition between the project, which had UIA funding and criteria, and its continuation with its own funds and without the European frame of reference. But the adaptation to the new context is going well at the moment, although there are still many questions that will depend on the negotiations with the COA (Central

Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers in the Netherlands) because unlike the centre in Overvecht, the Haydn centre is owned by the COA and new agreements have to be reached on the responsibilities of the different actors and partners involved in the project.

It will also be important to focus on the process of expanding the model to other centres, and this requires the definition of the key aspects of the model's approach and some tools to facilitate the dissemination of the know-how and at the same time guarantee the rigour of the interventions.

Finally, there are many lessons learned over the last years. Some have already been mentioned in previous journals, and others will be available for consultation on the different manuals that have been developed by different partners and also in the final evaluation report. In this journal we highlight few more lessons related to the adaptation and flexibility of the project approach, the importance of contributing to creating alternative narratives on refugee reception and also identify some criteria for the successful sustainability of the project.



2. Progress made over the last months

The implementation period of the main actions of the project financed with funds from the UIA Initiative ended on October 31, although for a year there will be actions focused on capitalization and dissemination. However, the Plan Einstein project will continue to be implemented at the Haydn centre, and this is certainly very good news. For this reason, the last six months have focused, on the one hand, on complying with the activities and the elaboration of products and materials foreseen in the work plan of the European project and, on the other hand, on working to facilitate the continuity of the project.

During these months the priority has been to continue adapting the project to the context in Haydn. The decoration of the open space of the attic, where most of the activities take place, has been done collaboratively between residents of the centre and designer artists of the city. The adaptation and decoration has created a very stimulating and welcoming atmosphere. Former residents and neighbours of Overvecht also participated, and some of the furniture, sofas and objects that were in the previous centre were also brought. This “emotional” link with the previous stage has been important, as well as the location of Radio Einstein in the attic. This process has allowed residents who have participated in the decoration to generate a sense of ownership and recognition of their contribution and cultures of origin. The result has been very positive and the space transmits that vital, creative and welcoming energy so characteristic of the identity of the Plan Einstein.



The reform of the attic was very important to attract more residents to the English and entrepreneurship courses and other activities. It was also decided to draw inspiration from former residents of the Overvecht centre to come and talk to asylum seekers about their experience. This initiative has been assessed as very positive and the number of students is increasing.

In addition to attracting asylum seekers to the courses, it is also very important to attract neighbours, and to this end various activities have been promoted to generate interest and dynamize the community environment of the centre. A decision was taken to bring the picnic tables from the center of Overvecht and place them in the square in front of the Haydn building, to create a new atmosphere. It's been very important to adapt to the reality of the new neighbourhood, very different from Overvecht, and to find common interests and generate opportunities for encounters.

During the summer many activities were organized, most of them of a cultural nature and related to theatre, museums, music, etc., which

reinforced a stimulating atmosphere and more people to be interested in the courses and other activities.



It is also important to point out that although there are no SOCIUS youngsters living in this centre, some youth who were in the Overvecht centre are still involved as volunteers and some have even begun to collaborate as volunteers in some of the entities linked to the project, such as the Refugee Council. The link with young people is also facilitated by the fact that the SOCIUS building, in which some young people live, is very close to the Haydn centre.

Finally, apart from the work aimed at adapting and promoting the activities, the project partners have also focused on generating the products, materials or resources that were foreseen in the results of the European project.

In this sense, we can highlight the three manuals that contain information that can undoubtedly be very valuable for other cities and organizations that work in this field and that are interested in learning more about the approach, methodology and lessons learned over the years:

- THE ADVENTURES OF SOCIUS AT PLAN EINSTEIN - LESSONS LEARNED
- MANUAL FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP TRAINING
- MANUAL FOR TRAINING VOLUNTEERS

In addition to these manuals, it is also important to highlight the evaluation work of the research team. The final evaluation report will soon be available, as well as some academic articles that have been published on the project.

The content of these manuals, together with the key ideas of the results of the evaluation carried out by the team of researchers, were shared in the final event of the project “A taste of Plan Einstein” held on 17 October with the presence of all partners and actors involved. In addition to the presentations and the sharing of lessons learned, various working groups were also organized and it was possible to reflect on the continuity and future of the project. The following day, 18 October, the last meeting of partners took

place, to review the outstanding issues that remained to finish within this period, but always with a view to the evolution and future challenges

of the implementation of the project in this new stage that begins now.



3. Analysis of the seven main challenges

3.1 Leadership for implementation

In previous journals we have discussed some of the challenges related to leadership and the implementation of a complex and innovative project that also involves very diverse partners and actors. Management has invested in developing more decision-making solutions, based on a principle of cooperation and a fairly horizontal approach to management. The sudden withdrawal by the national authorities of asylum seekers from the Overvecht place, three months ahead of schedule, left staff with feelings well known from processes of loss and mourning. First there is a reaction of denial (this cannot happen to me/you/us), which may also take a form of a certain numbness and inertia. Then, typically, anger sets in before acceptance and dealing with the new reality can take a place. The partnership as a whole and each individual had to deal with this. Late spring and early summer were spent on this, with the influx of new personnel who took initiative to bonding and organising meetings to refuel team bonding and a shared perspective.

The project manager saw the vulnerability of the team and the people. More specifically so in this field which is called the 'headache file' in the Netherlands. It was decided to continue with an ESF SITS project together with the municipality of Antwerp and Fedasil Belgium, to invest the next years in courses on moral psychology. These courses aim to equip people better to cope with moral dilemmas and core convictions in labour situations. Specialists in this line of work were aligned.

The implementation at the Haydn centre has also meant a most concrete need to adapt project management to the new context. The competency framework is different in this centre and it was also found that it was necessary to speed up the taking of more operational decisions with respect to the more strategic ones.

In this sense, it was agreed that there should be a person who could low-pressure communicate with the different partners and actors and make decisions quickly on a day-to-day basis. It was also agreed that it did not make sense for that person to be part of the more strategic management team, as management would be more top-down and less operational. It was important to have a person with a mediator and executive profile, and who would be the reference for all the partners and actors involved in day-to-day management. In the end, this person, with experience in the Overvecht project and with many years of experience also in the municipality, joined the project. It was thought that by bringing former routines back into the daily interactions, some of the attitudes characteristics of the 'good old times' would be more easily picked up and would help the teams to feel comfortable again. This was also seen when Radio Einstein, a truly Overvecht initiative from the folk theatre there, offered to come along to the new ASC (Asylum Seekers Centre). This allowed some management tensions to be reduced and daily decision-making to be improved, while the project leader team was able to focus on the more complex and strategic aspects of management.

3.2 Public procurement

From now on, the project will continue but without the funding and criteria set by the UIA Initiative. Although the municipality will provide its own resources, the budget will be smaller, and in recent months the project team has been working to facilitate as smooth a transition as possible.

One of the important challenges to guarantee the continuity of the project in this new context, is to be able to maintain professionals who have accumulated an important knowhow during this time. Many contracts with different professionals involved in the project, such as teachers, end now, and work is underway to analyse the best options for continuing to count on them. At the beginning of the project, complexities were

detected in combining the contracting criteria of the European initiative with the more 'autonomous' and entrepreneurial profile of some professionals. These criteria may be adapted now to tailor additional possibilities and profile of the professionals. With a very different ASC population adding more and new ways to activation seem required and with the new neighbourhood with very different demographic features, new common denominators with the asylum population have to be identified. The team is already working hard on this although the solutions will not always be easy. However, promising new ways are this autumn seen arising, giving the whole partnership a new drive and energy.

3.3 Cross-department working

In the previous journal, we commented that over the last two years there had been a positive evolution with respect to coordination with other municipal departments. Now there is another factor that requires further deepening of this necessary collaboration. A new law is expected to enter into force in 2021 that puts cities back in prime position when it comes to integration of newcomers. This may be seen as a decentralization process, with Plan Einstein as a forerunner in positioning the city. The city is already preparing for this change in the competency framework

that will require a greater effort in cross-cooperation. Currently, the welfare department is already working with various actors linked to the project and collaboration between departments is being strengthened. Another example of the need for this collaboration is the study they have begun together with project partner the Centre for Entrepreneurship at Utrecht University, to analyse the possible impact of the Einstein Plan on for example reducing the time refugees are dependent on benefits before they enter the labour market.

3.4 Participatory approach

In this new phase of the project it is not yet possible for some young people to live in the same building with asylum seekers. We already commented in the previous journal that the negotiations with the COA were complex and there are currently few places in the centres. Asylum seekers have to wait up till 9 months now before their first formal

interview by the Immigration Office is scheduled, let alone the time needed to get the first answer. National authorities are now 5.000 places short in their centres and new asylum seekers are once more seen packed in sports halls and emergency bedding. This precludes the possibility of having space for youngsters right now.

However, the commitment to promote participation and the creation of spaces for asylum seekers and neighbours to meet is very strong, and new opportunities are proposed at Haydn, taking into account the social and cultural dynamism of the neighbourhood. The role of volunteers and local entities is being key, as is the involvement of former residents at Overvecht, neighbours and professionals. Participation in training courses is increasing, as well as participation in various activities such as theatre. The important thing is to continue adapting to the environment and to find common interests that allow to adapt the activities and to continue

3.5 Monitoring & Evaluation

We have already commented on the complexity of evaluating the results of a project such as this, in which some of the impacts require more time to analyse them.

In the absence of the final evaluation report of the project, it is evident that in the short term some very positive results have already been detected. But we also know that in order to guarantee the sustainability of the project in the medium and long term, it is important to continue working on the evaluation and to obtain indicators that demonstrate the impact of the project in different areas. In this sense, the study we have mentioned above on how the refugees who have participated in the project evolve in the medium term compared to the rest, with respect to the time it takes them to access the labour market

3.6 Communication

In previous journals we already commented that at the beginning it was not easy to define a communication strategy and a shared discourse among all the partners. However, over time the coordination improved and a common discourse

promoting the participation and the spaces of encounter. Finally, it will also be important to find new opportunities for asylum seekers to participate in the design and content of activities. Two churches actively offered themselves as candidates for that in the neighbourhood, where their elderly congregation very much wants contact with young people, while among the refugees there are not many older people. This is sometimes seen as a sad loss for people used to live in collectivist societies, so the project may have found an opportunity to promote intergenerational contacts.

and stop depending on social aid, will be key. To be able to analyse this evolution takes time, since changes are not identified until 2-3 years. At the moment everything indicates that the project's commitment to invest in promoting inclusion from day one and developing entrepreneurial skills has positive results in different areas of life (not necessarily or 'only in the creation of a business project) and should be translated in the medium term into better integration into the labour market. To continue dedicating energies and some resources to this work is one of the important challenges and needs of the project. The project aims to further investigate the possibilities of asylum seekers allowing their by law allowed 24 weeks of work a year in profession where there is a labour shortage.

was consolidated with some clear messages that have served to communicate the project.

Precisely in the last [zoom-in](#) was analysed the capacity of the project to contribute to build an alternative narrative on the reception of asylum

seekers and refugees. We start from the idea that the management of perceptions, the way people interpret happenings and things, is a very important aspect of the success of reception and integration policies. Projects must incorporate the variable of communication and narratives to overcome the most hostile and negative prejudices, fears and discourses about diversity. In the zoom-in analysis, it is shown that the

3.7 Upscaling

From the beginning of the project, it became evident that its approach generated interest in other cities as well as in state-level policies. But the upscaling process has its complexities. The responsible team and the actors directly involved in its implementation are the ones who have the accumulated knowhow, and above all have identified the lessons learned.

This implies the development of a very intense link with the model and at the same time a responsibility for how it is implemented in other sites and by other actors. For this reason, it is necessary to dedicate some time and energy to identify the key aspects of the approach and to

project meets most of the criteria necessary to generate these narratives. In this new stage it is still very important to take care of communication, both internally and externally, to counteract the most negative political narratives and discourses and to be able to create more positive frameworks of reference that are not only reactive and critical of negative ones.

develop materials and tools that facilitate the sharing of this knowhow. This is important both to facilitate access to information and to avoid distortion or partial use of the model, or repetition of errors that have already been overcome. For this reason, in the coming months it will be important to define a strategy and some resources to facilitate the upscaling process, ensuring that the lessons learned and the most relevant criteria are taken into account to guarantee the rigour and success of the approach. It is not a question of copying the model but of being able to adapt it to each context, in the most effective way possible.

4. Lessons learnt

In the last journal, we already analysed some of the most relevant lessons learned from the project. In this one we focus on few others that have appeared in debates or meetings with actors involved in the project. However, it is important to note that in the different manuals that have been published on entrepreneurship training, volunteer training or the experience of

SOCIUS youngsters, there are many more ideas, lessons and recommendations that are very useful for people interested in the methodology and approach of the Einstein Plan. Finally, the final evaluation report will be completed shortly, which will undoubtedly provide more useful and relevant information.

4.1 Adaptation, flexibility and common interests

Although planned, the closure of the Overvecht centre was somewhat 'traumatic' in the sense that it ended a little abruptly with a two-year job that had managed to generate a very special and positive atmosphere. Surely if the project had continued in that centre, perhaps now some deeper results could have been consolidated. But at the same time, the opportunity to adapt the model in another centre with a very different context, is allowing to review some questions from the lessons learned, and above all to adapt the methodology to the new context.

Like all projects that deal with inclusion in a broad sense (which includes aspects such as capacity-building, networking and social capital, bearing in mind the psychological and emotional dimension, living together and the sense of belonging, or the management of perceptions among others...), there is not a very detailed and defined methodology that can be copied and transferred with just an instruction booklet to any context.

The social, cultural, associative or economic reality of the neighbourhood, as well as the profiles of the residents and the different actors involved, greatly influence the concretion of the model in everyday life. There are principles that

define the model and methodological guidelines that have been identified as more effective. But from here it is necessary to adapt to the characteristics and opportunities that are appearing. For this it is very important to maintain an open and creative attitude that allows to find opportunities, even from unexpected or unforeseen situations. This is an important part of the Plan Einstein approach: to maintain this creative and open-minded attitude that allows to take advantage of the opportunities provided by a specific social environment. And finally, in order to achieve this, it is essential that the diagnosis of this environment, which is carried out in-progress throughout the project, identifies elements, interests, expectations and even common concerns shared by both neighbours and asylum seekers. This ability to identify common elements is the basis for much of the success of inclusion processes.

An example of the differences with Overvecht is that in Haydn there are more cultural activities and organizations. There are also more activities promoted by different actors such as churches, and in the same area there is a housing center for elderly. The activities of the project must take this reality into account and consider it as part of

the project opportunities. Precisely the team is already thinking about how to generate an opportunity for relationship or encounter between asylum seekers and the elderly. Instead of “avoiding” contact for concerns of possible

problems or prejudices, the approach is just the opposite: what common interests can we find that would translate this closeness into an opportunity for all.

4.2 The project’s ability to contribute to creating alternative narratives

In the challenge related to participation, we have mentioned the analysis carried out in the second [zoom-in](#) of the project, in which we try to assess whether the project has been able to contribute to the creation of alternative narratives (to the most negative and based on prejudice and fear) on the reception of refugees.

One of the lessons learned is that public policies and projects such as Plan Einstein have a responsibility to counteract the most negative narratives by creating alternative and more proactive ones, starting from a different and more positive frame of reference. Plan Einstein has shown that even without a very clear strategy from the outset, it is actually possible to contribute to generating alternative narratives that also increase the impact of the project in different areas.

To help us in the process of creating these narratives, ten criteria have been identified to ensure effectiveness and increase the chances of success:

- Start from a new frame of reference
- The importance of listening
- Proactive attitude and shared responsibility
- Engagement, cooperation and flexibility
- From prejudices to critical thinking and positive interaction

- Adaptation to the context and to different audiences
- Beyond data and rational arguments: visibility and the power of stories
- Inclusive, positive and honest approach
- The difficulty of counteracting the simple from the complex
- Repeat, repeat and... repeat

In the analysis of the second zoom-in it is clear that the Plan Einstein has fulfilled, to a greater or lesser extent, all of these criteria. The interest the project has generated have to do also with its narrative and ability to communicate some concrete and powerful messages. Often from the field of reception and integration policies, the media are blamed for offering a negative, distorted and stereotyped view of reality. Although in many cases this may happen, it is also true that when different, innovative and positive content is “offered” and that breaks down many preconceived ideas, it is possible to have a more positive coverage in the media. The message of living together, learning together and working together is engaging and attractive, although not everyone can agree. But the project has shown that these positive concepts, which set a certain frame of reference, have been disseminated and repeated through many media, reaching thousands of people.

4.3 Some tips for project sustainability

Finally, we can identify some aspects and criteria that seem important in order to facilitate the sustainability of projects like Plan Einstein, after the end of EU funding.

- Create a network of actors and allies who feel the project as their own

When diverse actors in society actively contribute to the success of a project and develop a sense of pride and ownership, the sustainability of the project is easier than when everything falls to a single actor. The great majority of project partners will continue in this new stage, and new allies will be added to them... and this is very good news, because the project is getting richer and connected to many diverse fields (political, academic, social, cultural...).

- Keeping the flame of innovation and motivation alive

After the initial impulse, when a project is consolidated, there is the risk of entering into a dynamic very marked by day-to-day management. This can be detrimental to its ability to innovate and also the motivation level of work teams. The Plan Einstein is based on a strong commitment in this need to keep alive the flame of creativity and engagement, and to continue to seek out new opportunities and 'unexpected' allies.

- Critical spirit

Related to the previous point, it is also very important to maintain an attitude of critical analysis on the development of the project and to generate spaces for reflection and dialogue between the different actors involved. Learning from mistakes and successes, sharing experiences

and seeking shared solutions... If these dynamics are generated, it is more likely that the different actors will want to continue working together and there will be greater motivation and better results.

- Recognize the work of all the people involved and maintain the accumulated knowhow

We have commented previously on the importance of being able to maintain key people who accumulate experience and knowhow so as not to lose the investment of the first years. To this end, it is important to recognize and value the work of all professionals and volunteers. At the same time, it is also necessary to continue adding other actors and allies that bring new energies and perspectives.

- Show and communicate results and impacts

Without a doubt, the main reason why it is worthwhile to continue working on a project is because it achieves results that are considered relevant. But sometimes it might be tricky to identify short and mid-term results and being able to communicate them well. Some are easier to assess than others, but for this it is necessary to invest in specifying some clear indicators that can be easily explained.

- Political commitment... and budget.

All the above aspects are very important, but if there is not a strong political commitment that also translates into providing resources to the project, sustainability is very difficult. But it is precisely the above elements that are necessary in order to maintain this commitment and guarantee more resources.

5. Conclusion

The Einstein Plan project has undoubtedly been a very innovative and stimulating initiative that with its strengths and weaknesses is having a positive impact on quite a few people but is also influencing the design of reception policies for asylum seekers at state level. The results of the evaluation of the project have yet to be fully understood and there is still a long way to go before a more in-depth assessment of its impact can be made. The challenge now is to consolidate the model in the Haydn centre and to ensure that the lessons learned allow for the proactive design of welcoming policies by the city. Experience has served to highlight the fundamental role that cities play in the processes of reception and integration, and the need for their voices and experiences to be taken more into account. It is precisely in the Netherlands that cities will have concrete competences in integration policies from 2021 onwards with the entry into force of a new law. The approach of Plan Einstein, based on the need to work for inclusion from day one

and on the idea of future free, among others, must be taken into account. Considering and treating asylum-seekers and refugees as neighbours and citizens, who, in addition to their needs, also have much to contribute to the host society, is another fundamental element which must be emphasised.

The proactive reception policy to be defined by the municipality must take into account criteria that allow it to adapt to emergency situations, without having to renounce the principles and methodology of the model. We will see how the negotiations with the state level evolve and if the model is started and implemented in other centres in the coming years. At the moment there is still a lot of work to be done at the Haydn centre and to be able to analyse the results and impact of the project. But it is also necessary to define criteria and a protocol to adapt the model to other contexts and to ensure that the lessons learned really serve to improve reception processes and promote inclusion.

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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