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The Urban Lab of Europe !

The CURANT project Journal N° 6

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**INTEGRATION OF
MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES**



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The CURANT project

The CURANT project seeks to provide integrated services for unaccompanied young refugees once they reach adulthood and are no longer entitled to benefit from social protection as an unaccompanied minor. It will combine co-housing and social integration schemes with volunteer buddies (young local residents aged 20-30 years old) for 1-1 integration and circular integrated individual trajectories. 75 affordable co-housing units for both unaccompanied young adults and buddies will be made available in the city. The trajectories of the young refugees involved will be treated in all their complexity instead of focusing separately on different components. A guaranteed, safe, affordable and quality place to live will pivot around a circular set of social services including language courses, training and health care. Different city departments, regional and local agencies for health services and education as well as NGOs will be actively involved in the implementation of the project.

The project is composed of the following partners:

- Stad Antwerpen:
- Solentra (Solidarity and Trauma) - unit of the psychiatric division of UZ Brussel
- JES vzw - 'urban lab' for children and youngsters in Antwerp, Ghent and Brussels
- Vormingplus - NGO
- Atlas integratie & inburgering Antwerpen - NGO
- University of Antwerp

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This journal has been written 10 months after the end of the original three-year-long project.

A new phase guided by the city of Antwerp is now about to begin. 7 new buddy/newcomers pairs will shortly start a co-living experience, with access to some of the support services envisioned by the original CURANT project.

While foreseeing the involvement of new participants, procedures and methodologies, this new stage maintains an important continuity proof to what CURANT has generated. This particularly concerns the impact on the beneficiaries of the project, but also on the municipality itself, as well as the citizens who had the chance to be engaged with the project on various grounds.

CURANT is one of the first European projects devoted to one of the most urgent and important challenges that the whole of Europe has to face, immigration and integration policies. Tackling this challenge is both a necessary and a difficult task: the topic polarizes public opinion and engages all political sides, which vigorously express their vision on the issue of immigration.

The project concerns many different actions - reception, integration, support, integration, etc. - that are already happening or are about to. Boundaries get blurred, mixed up, reduced to propaganda. Moving within these boundaries is definitely not an easy task: risks may arise not only during the project itself, but also in the following dissemination phase, which represents an essential step to ensure that what has been discovered, experimented and learned can be inherited by future projects on integration policies and related areas, thus creating a continuity of objectives and actions.

This journal describes how the city of Antwerp is tackling the challenge of a new CURANT phase, and what are the main lessons that can be learnt from this great experience. As already explained in the past journals, one of the main lessons learnt is that single interventions, no matter how powerful, are limited in their effectiveness if they are not part of a larger supportive ecosystem. At the same time, it is necessary to promote new interventions, including independent ones, in order for their roots to go deeper in the soil and prepare the ground for the next step.

2. PROJECT'S PROGRESS

2.1 What has happened with the project since its end date

In September 2020, that is, 10 months after the end of the project, 7 new duos of refugees and buddies will participate in the new phase of CURANT project, getting the chance to live together and access some of the support services envisioned by the original CURANT project. The city of Antwerp has chosen to give continuity to the project by supporting and financing a new step, albeit on a reduced scale.

The choice to renew cooperation with the Antwerp municipality aims to allow the CURANT experimentation to fully integrate into mainstream administrative procedures. Indeed, the Antwerp municipality for the entire duration of the project has proved fully cooperative in that it allowed internal departments to leave the silos structure and collaborate across the various departments. Nevertheless, the last 10 months was needed to follow up on a significant amount of work to close the project and further assist the people involved. The project team has carried out a series of activities related to the finalisation of the project, such as dismissing the building, re-allocating the team, following up the refugees' exit from the project and their first independent steps. In addition, they set the basis for the new phase the city of Antwerp is entering. This implies establishing new procedures, such as selecting new partners (some of the old partners such as Vormingplus have been already confirmed through public procurement), arranging new contracts for the housing, and preparing the proposal for the city board. Clearly, the kickstarting steps are to be reiterated and adjusted to a new project configuration and sustainability model.

The new phase of the project presents some different features from the original project.

BREM 16, the modular housing units built within the project to host duos since the

beginning of October 2018, is going to be converted into a hosting facility for other vulnerable target groups. The modules were designed in such a way as to make it easier to disassemble and reassemble them rapidly and affordably. Moreover, they were produced in compliance with the highest standards of environmental sustainability. Even though the building will not be used within the new stage of the project, its features as well as the realization of the housing unit itself make it an asset for the City of Antwerp, as it can be used to house up to 32 vulnerable people.

One of the main novelties lies within the selection criteria of the project participants. Only refugees who already live in Antwerp, both in a normal housing situation or in a shelter, can now participate. Besides, the partners who took care with the newcomers' trajectories in original CURANT project have internalized knowledge on how to deal with young refugees and will thus invest costless on them, by offering regular services within their organizations, without an extra budget allocated for these initiatives. Finally, even if in original CURANT project the main focus was on adults, youngsters who would turn 18 within the following 6 months could access the program. In this new phase of the project, the focus will still be on adults, without this small exception. One of the findings of the

project, already discussed in Journal n. 5¹, consists in the difficulties encountered to a trajectory of support that may have been perceived as too dense, perhaps as a burden; in the same way, it can be noted that, even at this stage, the need for such support is not always acknowledged, especially in light of the young and immature age

of the target group. These factors are increasing the difficulty to recruit new participants for the project. There is a risk that, faced with the efforts it sustains in terms of investments and resources, the municipality will terminate the project in a couple of years if the results will not be as expected.

2.2 What is the project's plan for long-term sustainability

One of the major challenges any EU-funded project faces is the future sustainability of the action. For projects like CURANT, which experiment with innovation in policy-making, economic sustainability and the effects on policy changes in the future are a very relevant aspect. Even if the project model already includes some revenue streams, the sustainability challenge will require the development of a service and funding model ensuring the continuation of the CURANT support programme, and perhaps its scaling. As the city of Antwerp is giving continuity to the project, the effectiveness of CURANT actions have been established along with the convenience of such an investment in the long run. Every project, which includes costs, must bring along some revenue streams to make it sustainable without depending on EU funds. Over the last few years, the European Union has devoted much effort to social innovation and similar areas of interest (e.g. social and inclusive entrepreneurship, social enterprises, social economy, social cohesion), in the belief that in order to tackle complex societal challenges, innovation cannot solely come from top-down approaches, but has to be co-created together with all those affected by, and working to solve, the very same challenges. This also means that collaboration among those who want to solve a problem, those who are affected by the problem, and those who

become engaged in the course of the project, could lead to the development of a new model that is capable of generating revenue streams. In addition, such collaboration could raise general sensitivity on the topic, produce results for a strong storytelling, widen dissemination after the end of the project, thus guaranteeing future sustainability and continuity.

In the case of CURANT, a big amount of the total fund was invested in designing and building the BREM unit; as already mentioned in the above paragraph, such a cost can become an investment, if planned with a forward-looking attitude.

¹ The CURANT project, Journal n°5 – November 2019. You can access it here <https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/antwerp>

3. GENERATED KNOWLEDGE

3.1 Lessons learned

What are the lessons learnt at the end of this 3-year programme?

Insights on how to navigate the changing political landscape, or communicate effectively on sensitive issues against the backdrop of a negative public opinion, are important aspects when dealing with migration and integration challenges. Also, the project demonstrated that key success factors for interventions on the target group include high-intensity integrated support and case management, including personalised individual trajectories and co-housing schemes. Finally, the experience highlighted the need for flexible project management, capable of continuous adjustment in the execution phase, given the unpredictable individual trajectories of those involved.

About dissemination and impact measurement

CURANT is undoubtedly a project that addresses one of the most urgent and important challenges to which the whole of Europe is subjected, and on which public opinion is strongly divided and polarized. A project addressing a topic of this magnitude therefore brings along the need for action on dissemination of the results achieved. In particular, since the experimentation took place in the area of Antwerp, it has been necessary and important to involve the local population and bring them to visit the project spaces, through initiatives such as the neighborhood parties around the BREM building, so that the tangible effects of the project can be

experienced in person. As explained in the previous journals, CURANT has strived to define assets and a methodology easy enough to be shared and told, in order to spread good practices and their results, but at the same time sufficiently well-structured to capture the complexity of the project. CURANT project's impact measurement is based on the "Theory of Change (TOC)", which is essentially a comprehensive description of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It focuses on mapping out or "filling in" what has been described as the "missing part" between what a program or change initiative does and how this lead to desired goals being achieved.

Specifically, the measurements in CURANT have been carried on termly basis, at the beginning, at the middle and towards the end of the project, by combining qualitative and quantitative methods and therefore facing issues from different perspectives.

As Rilke Mathieu from the CeMis - University of Antwerp – explained these are the main focuses that have been set:

- Supportive networks: how the relationship among the newcomers can influence them and can how the networks can change along the time, grow, diversify, be replaced.
- Newcomers aspirations: to what extent the project has helped the newcomers to have a better and clearer idea of the future and had guided them into the right direction.

- Change of perspectives in the “buddies” The buddies co-living with the newcomers have been subject to measurement on shifts in attitude and on development of intercultural skills, according to the existing scale “multi-cultural personality”, as fundamental target of a holistic approach towards the measurement of integration.
- Personal skills: this measurement is addressed to both the buddies and to the newcomers, and is particularly relevant as, for host countries citizens, the respect of civic rules very often represents the only metric they have to measure integration of newcomers from their point of view.
- Skills of integration in the context: these are what might consider as the most spread data to collect and measure, and refer for example to language improvement

This approach, although it might not be enough to change legislation, is nevertheless successful in raising awareness in the general public on a sensitive topic, to give tips for a strong storytelling, to help a future wider dissemination after the project has ended, and so, to guarantee as much as possible a future sustainability and continuation.

In this view, the new step the municipality of Antwerp is willing to take forward represents a first success in the measurement and dissemination of what the project has produced.

About individual case management support

Surely another lesson comes from the attention paid to individual, customised case management support. Standard social assistance services cannot afford to provide a similar level of attention to each individual, and this has proven to be one

of the biggest shortcomings of the current integration system. Beside questions about the sustainability of such an intense support service delivery, there is no doubt that CURANT proved true the underlying hypothesis that more intense care, greater attention to individual and customised trajectories achieve the best results in terms of individual impact. In this respect, the evaluation report² edited by the university of Antwerp stresses the important point that since intensive professional support in various domains is readily available (training, language learning, psychotherapy, etc.), this approach risks to become overambitious. As a result, some young refugees have felt overburdened by the high number of activities they were expected to attend. Moreover, questions were raised about what would have happened after the project end: the supportive social infrastructure created by the project will not be there anymore, so refugees run the risk of finding themselves missing important points of reference in their lives. Besides, due to their limited Dutch language skills and previous education, their opportunities are limited, and educational and professional trajectories tend to take long time, a possible barrier in the scalability of the project. Probably one important lesson out of CURANT is that there must be a balance between the range of available support services, on the one hand, and the freedom for refugees to benefit from some, but not necessarily all of them, on the other hand. Perhaps, the best approach could be a menu of available services and a combination of mandatory and facultative services.

² CURANT 2ND EVALUATION REPORT, JUNE 2019 You can access it here <https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/antwerp>

About co-housing innovative schemes

Individual case management support and an innovative co-housing approach, where young newcomers and young Belgians were paired to share a co-living experience represent the two main challenges of CURANT project. The hypothesis to be proved, according the above seen Theory of Change, is the following “If social integration and inclusion in the host society is the end goal, cohabitation is the vehicle to get there, the volunteer buddy is the copilot and circular integrated support services provide the fuel to finish the road.’

To integrate this hypothesis, it must be underlined that the communal living is concept is based on the principle of decent and affordable housing.

To understand better what the coliving experience has generated, we will consider the valuable source of information generated in the final assessments of all matched duos done by Vormingplus and the case managers of OCMW, afterwards edited by the University of Antwerp in their final evaluation report. [2] Over the course of the project, the partners have spent a considerable amount of time with the duos, and by the end of the co-living have asked them for a self-assessment and have generated one themselves.

According to their assessment, and to the consequent analysis, in the cases where regular positive interactions happened among the buddies and the newcomers, we can also observe more positive interactions in the society.

Firstly, let’s talk about informal support. Newcomers have experienced an almost

permanent informal support, made of small gestures, such as assistance in tasks related to the knowledge of Dutch language, doing sports together, having someone to talk to, or to ask help to. Even though this kind support strongly depends on the needs of the newcomer and on the availability, also in terms of time, of the buddy, for sure having someone close by can accelerate the chances to receive help “What I used to do [before], when I did not understand something: I took a picture of it, and showed it to my teacher or social worker when I saw her. But the people here [in this house], they support you on the spot... I can go downstairs if I have a question or so, it is perfect.” (Syrian newcomer)³

Secondly, both the participants of the duos have experienced informal mutual learning. Newcomers have had the chance to learn a language and to live from the inside the culture they need to co-live with, and sometimes they struggle to reach and understand. At the same time, buddies have learnt much about an other culture and habits, having then a chance also to better understand their own culture. “It is almost impossible to not learn a lot after living together with people from a completely different culture. My way of discussing sensitive topics with people that have another opinion and frame of reference has changed a lot.” (male buddy living together with different newcomers).³

On the other hand, the evaluation’s results also underline that not all experiences were positive, some dropouts happened along the project, some relationships were not either negative or positive, but rather superficial and that this kind of social interaction might not last longer than the co-living experiences. Many causes influenced the results of the cohousing: from conflicting

³ CURANT Evaluation Reporto, October 2019. Rilke Mahieu & Laura Van Raemdonck – Centre for Migration and Intercultural Studies (Ce-MIS) & Noel Clycq (Edubron) You can access it here <https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/antwerp>

expectations and different motivations, due to culture and context of life, to different and busy daily life schedules, from language barriers to incompatibility.

It is almost impossible to predict these factors or to avoid them, being part of the nature of social interactions; what we can learn is that small gestures and informal learning and support should not be considered as positive side effects of such a project, but should be integrated into an aware process to facilitate social inclusion and integration.

About cooperation

The tension between the functional specialisation of departments and offices within municipalities, on the one hand, and the cross-department cooperation and coordination needed for the projects' implementation, on the other hand, has represented one of the main challenges at the management level. The CURANT team has managed to work across the organisational silos by establishing cooperative relationships with key people from each department - housing, safety, legal service - succeeding in each case in finding a common ground. This was also possible because of

3.2 Challenges

According to the UIA framework for challenges in implementation of complex innovative projects in cities, there are seven dimensions that cities must take into account when planning and

the cooperative culture in the Antwerp's municipality. But much is also due to the strong leadership skills of the two female leaders of the project, Marianne De Canne, Project Coordinator, and Jolien De Crom, Project Manager.

Beside the municipality, the relationship with the project partners has been a key factor for the success of the project implementation. A wide range of organisations with complementary competences have been involved from the very beginning, starting with the project design and the application phase. Regular meetings were organised to maintain partners aligned on the common goals and keep alive a shared sense of responsibility.

A well planned, but at the same time flexible partner engagement, adaptable project management, good skills of leadership to keep everyone on the same track and motivated even in the most difficult times, are not to be underestimated when planning or assessing the success of a project. All in all, cooperation is one of the biggest lessons to learn, together with the fact that at the end of the day innovation is about making new things come to life, and for that human capital is the most essential ingredients of all.

delivering change. In this Journal, we look back at the past three years of the CURANT project and try an honest assessment on how the team dealt with these seven dimensions (table 1).

MAPPING ANTWERP CIRCULAR SOUTH AGAINST THE ESTABLISHED UIA CHALLENGES

Challenge	Level	Observation
1. Leadership for implementation	Low	The success of CURANT lies for a big part in the leadership qualities of these two female leaders of the project. Both have contributed significantly in driving the team and managing complexity, complementing each other by taking up different roles, one more geared towards managing the political landscape, the other more dedicated to managing the project implementation.
2. Public procurement	Low	The project successfully overcome this challenge by building a unique set of modular co-housing units that can be easily moved and re-utilised and that are built on environmentally friendly criteria.
3. Integrated cross-departmental working	Low	The CURANT team has managed to work across the organisational silos by establishing cooperative relationships with the key people needed from each department. This was also possible because of the cooperative nature of the culture in the Antwerp's municipality.
4. Adopting a participative approach	Medium	The municipality has managed to pull into the delivery partnership a wide range of organisations possessing complementary competences for the delivery of a very rich spectrum of tailor-made services to the project beneficiaries.
5. Monitoring and evaluation	Medium	CURANT has put a particular effort in defining an original methodology for the evaluation of the project's impact on beneficiaries, the most difficult impact to measure of all, the one on human beings. Lead by CeMis (University of Antwerp), the project evaluation has been carried out throughout the project life time and has managed to measure and show important results that can also help with an overall reflection on the effectiveness of such interventions on such a complex topic.
6. Financial sustainability	Medium	There have been no indications of financial concerns throughout the project. Elaborated plans to mainstream the key elements of the project have produced the result hoped for to continue part of the original service.
7. Communicating with target beneficiaries	Medium	CURANT has managed to keep visibility and interest high on the project through the ability to portray it in the media, and to engage the neighbourhood communities where the housing units of the duos were located by organising events and meet ups.
8. Upscaling	Low	CURANT has managed to work on its continuation notwithstanding the complexity and sensitivity of the topic in a controversial political context all over Europe on the necessity and ability of the old continent to integrate the massive waves of immigration it receives.

3.3 Recommendations to other urban authorities who wish to implement similar innovative projects

The lessons learned from the project have proven to be of great benefit to all the people involved in the project: the project management team, the partners, the buddy / newcomer duos, as well as the local citizens. At the same time, these insights represent vital recommendations to other urban authorities who wish to implement similar innovative projects on such a crucial and sensitive topic.

Project Manager Jolien De Crom's suggestion to other project promoters is firstly to look deeply into policy recommendations, i.e. written policy advice addressed to decision makers. Policy recommendations are in many ways the main product of the ongoing work of project managers, addressed to policy makers, to design and manage public policy.

When starting such a demanding and innovative project such as a UIA one, the management team usually starts off with an idealistic outlook, an enthusiasm-driven approach that sooner or later needs to be confronted with the challenges that implementation brings along. When practical obstacles appear, different decisions have to be made. Project managers may find it useful to gain information on past experiences, bad and good practices, case studies, researches that may prove helpful during the development of the action. Solid knowledge of past experiences will help the team to adapt to the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of our times, especially in view of innovative experimental projects.

4. CONCLUSIONS

CURANT has left an important legacy on several levels.

First of all, it significantly impacted on the life of the people who participated in the project at all levels. For some of them, the project was a life changing experience. Veerle Van Looveren, social worker, tells how fundamental for her it was to experiment a completely different approach to social care. Being accustomed to meeting the people in her care for short periods of time and at long time intervals, she was able to appreciate a different way of assistance, consisting not only in giving advice but also in practical small actions, such as accompanying young refugees going to school or to the bank, and spending time together with her beneficiary. This led Veerle to develop a

much deeper and more conscious understanding of the living conditions of the beneficiaries of her work, which triggered also real relationships. Anneloes Van Osselaer, from the project team, claims that she will remember the "grandeur of the project", especially in some moments of it; one example is when she met some of the beneficiaries of the project around the city of Antwerp: on that occasion, she saw that they had become adult men or women, were accompanied by friends and, most important of all, had a plan for their future. By putting themselves at stake in projects that are so far removed from their daily work routines, social workers and operators were able to increase their empathy and reflect on their role as well as on the innovative ways of carrying out their work.



For Bente Peeters and Jens Fruytier, two Belgian young men who participated in the project as buddies co-living with two newcomers, the project has completely changed their perspective on what it means to be a refugee in Belgium, especially in terms of the difficulties they encounter and the daily challenges they face. The reflection on the conditions of the newcomers also led to reflections on their own way of life and beliefs. Raising attention to a topic that had probably never touched them so closely has also led to increased awareness among their families, their friends and people who are close to them. Although it is difficult to measure this kind of impact in people, it is thanks to projects like CURANT that every year, citizens with growing knowledge of certain situations and processes start fighting for human rights, social inclusion and better life quality, increasingly asking the authorities and governments to hear them out.

Some project partners, as well as some members of the project staff, will not take part in the new phase of CURANT promoted by the city of Antwerp. Nevertheless, they will have the chance to transfer part of their experience to other projects on other issues: their skills are relevant to all areas, from the project injection to managerial tasks, from findings and lessons learned to social impact measurements. This transfer of skills, methods and approaches is fundamental to the long-term legacy of a project that is based on experimental and innovative practices such as a UIA project. At the same time, this approach makes it possible to contribute in an active and diversified manner to dissemination actions, concerning not only the results, but also the methodology of the project, in order to reach a wider audience and exert longer-lasting impact.

One of the most complex and interesting aspects of the project is the effort to change the approach to city legislation. Although in three years the CURANT project has not led to important changes in housing policies for refugees, its outcome represent a decisive step towards demonstrating the potential of similar actions. On the one hand, it showed the city itself that results can be achieved and public interest can be raised. On the other hand, the results may prove inspiring for those citizens who can imagine that the rules, the laws, what has been given as unquestionable, can be changed.

Finally, from the point of view of the integration of refugees, especially unaccompanied minors, CURANT has paved the way for new possibilities of planning and policy. Since CURANT is one of the first projects with this scope, it is not possible to evaluate the impact generated in the immediate future: instead, one should focus on the specific knowledge generated and disseminated on the topic. Given the need for knowledge and information when dealing with new, innovative projects, it can be argued that CURANT will be an important and richly documented case study for anyone who wants to continue the path of experimentation towards new models of integration and assistance of newcomers.

The CURANT team will continue to work on the dissemination of the project, following the new phase promoted by the city of Antwerp. Work will aim to make sure that the lessons learned really serve to enhance integration processes and promote inclusion, perhaps and hopefully more widely all across Europe.

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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