



RU:RBAN, Urban agriculture for resilient cities



A European inspiration for a planning in Caen



Ayuntamiento de A Coruña
Concello da Coruña



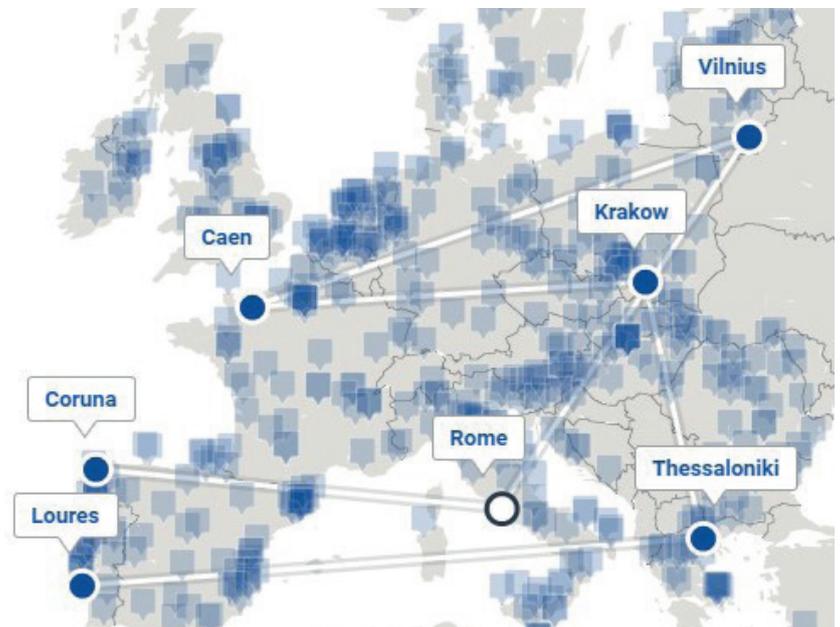
When Rome City proposed Caen City to join an urban agriculture European network in 2018, who could imagine that this would lead to the creation of a Sustainable Food House on Caen Peninsula in 2021 and the consideration of food issues in urban planning ?

This could be achieved thanks to the URBACT European program that, from 2002 onwards, works according to a participative methodology based on a double source: a network of European cities and a group of local actors that adapt and innovate according to their territory stakes and constraints. This is the analysis of their success in Caen.

As early as 1995, in its conservation plan, Rome city council reserved more space for nature (54,000 hectares of parks) than for built-up area. This art of gardens as a warrant for urban harmony seems to go back to Antiquity.

Rome nature is thus culturally closely linked to residential space, which led in the 2000's to a municipal policy of supporting the growing number of residents who wanted to set up collective vegetable gardens near their homes, regardless of the land status of the chosen space. The City of Rome has provided an occupation agreement, the supply of water and fences, and then local associations have taken care of the animation, regardless of whether they were shared or family gardens.

At the same time, school meals have integrated more and more organic products, making Rome a unique example in Europe: more than 80% organic food in the 150,000 meals served daily in Roman schools.



Ortonove veg gardens in Rome during the last European RU:RBAN meeting, Sept. 2021.

RU:RBAN, a network of the URBACT European program

URBACT is a European program co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the member States to promote cooperation between European cities. With a budget of 96 million euros, URBACT 3 (2014-2020) focuses on integrated and sustainable urban development.

Since the beginning in 2002, the managing authority of the program has been delegated to France (now the National Agency for Territorial Cohesion - ANCT) by the European Commission on behalf of the 27 member States and 2 partner States (Switzerland and Norway).

It is estimated that more than 500 cities have been involved in an URBACT network since its creation. These networks are open to cities of any size.

Networks of five to ten European cities form around a common theme and adopt one of the three methods of the program: planning, implementation or transfer of good practices.

The RU:RBAN network has followed this last orientation: Rome City is piloting the network to transfer its urban agricultural policy of public spaces and preservation of vegetable gardens.

The European Union provides each network with an expert and covers 80% of the costs (travel and communication, excluding planning), i.e. up to 66,000 Euros over two years. The methodology is highly structured, with numerous deliverables (written, audiovisual and digital).



<https://urbact.eu/l'agenda-urbain-en-france>

<https://urbact.eu/rurban>

From Rome to Caen

By awarding the European label for best practices in urban agriculture to Rome, the Brussels Commission has encouraged the Italian capital city to transfer its achievements to six European cities. The RU:RBAN network was prepared in 2018, first with Vilnius (Lithuania) and A Coruña (Spain), then with Krakow (Poland), Thessaloniki (Greece), Loures (Lisbon-North, Portugal), and Caen.

Transfer efforts focused on three elements:

- ▶ **E1/ Enhancing building capacity to organise** and improve knowledge of urban gardens,
- ▶ **E2/ Training animators** in charge of urban vegetable gardens as essential links of this policy,
- ▶ **E3/ Governance** (agreements and internal rules) to perpetuate the initiatives.



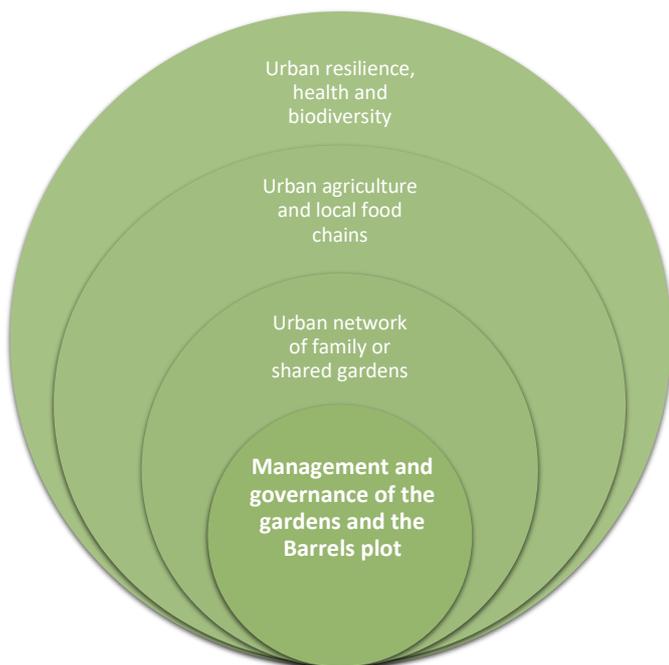
Joël Bruneau, mayor of Caen, welcomes RU:RBAN European partners at the City Hall, April 2019.

Feeding cities

From January 2019 to September 2021, project teams from 7 countries have worked both on local and European levels. Around 10 local meetings were held with the attendance of about 30 people (associations, researchers, farmers, inhabitants, elected representatives, technicians and economic actors). At the European level, meetings held in each partner country led to understand how cities invent to develop veg gardens in urban spaces (wasteland, schools, former military ground, housing estates, social housing surroundings, public spaces, business parks, monuments...).

The program met such a success that Rome City solicited and obtained a second round of URBACT transfer: by 2023, Roman good practices will reach Split, Carlow, Algeiras and Alexandroupolis. Moreover, elected representatives from Huancayo (Peru) and Barranquilla (Columbia) have visited Rome to learn more about the agri-urban dynamics.

The European success spreads worldwide...



From the plot on Caen Peninsula to the European urban resilience, a coherence on territory scales. Realisation: Aucame

A Peninsula plot

The place known as “the Barrels” plot on which RU:RBAN’s efforts in Caen were focused was chosen in 2016-2017, during another URBACT planning project, driven by the City, towards the regeneration of former industrial sites, on the topic of “waking up sleeping giants”. How about setting up an urban farm on these 1400 m²? Turning back the former use of the warehouse (concrete ground, 9-metre high metal frame in bad condition...) into an urban farm makes sense according to the Peninsula masterplan:

- ▶ Converting a wasteland while retaining remains of the past. This plot is adjacent to the Rail Park (26,000 m² of former railway tracks which nature has covered for the past 30 years), which legitimises this link with the urban setting.
- ▶ Creating a pioneer front with attractive activities for the future Peninsula residents and creating a place to share know-how on gardening and food for Caen population.

A soil-less urban garden

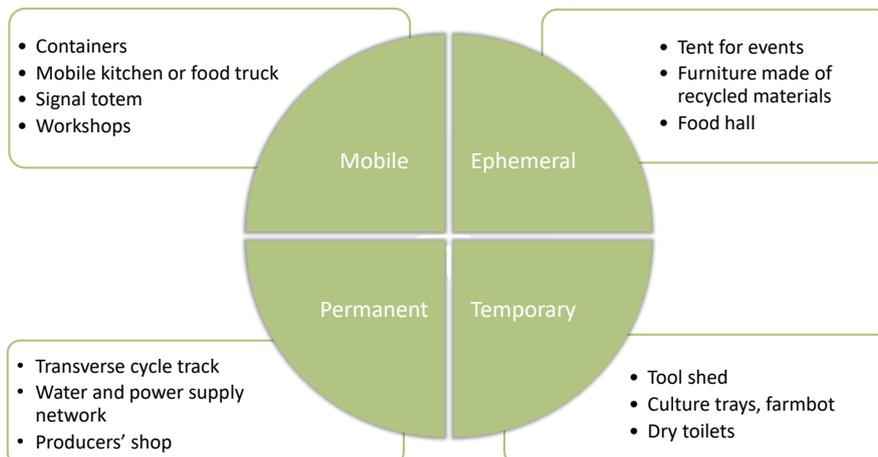
Unlike other countries in the URBACT network, this plot does not fit in the scope of the usual open-ground vegetable garden.

Nevertheless, this conversion of a former industrial wasteland is of interest for the network other cities as the experiment shows that vegetable gardens tend to become conviviality spaces (shared meals), a link with local farmers (producers’ shops), places to share the know-how (school days out, workshops...), waste collection points and composting sites (ongoing experiment on this Peninsula plot by Toutenvelo and Syvedac).

These functions need a public urban space and may be met with testing culture trays. As time goes by, the project evolved from an “urban farm” to a “sustainable food house”.



First ULG meeting on the plot around culture trays and the farmbot, October 2020.



Work on various anchoring levels of the urban functions of the plot with a view to an upgradable urban planning. Production: Aucame.

How to bring an industrial wasteland back to life?

The ULG, led by Caen Normandie Metropole urban agency (Aucame), has walked its own way, integrating external experiences at each step, in order to design a space meeting its residents’ needs.

- 1. January 2019**
Brainstorming on the future use of the plot and meeting between ULG members.
- 2. March 2019**
Visit on the Peninsula, assessment of stakes, identification of expected urban functions on the chosen plot.
- 3. June 2019**
The project gets a name. Work on the anchoring levels of the future facilities: mobile, ephemeral, temporary, permanent.
- 4. September 2019**
Choice of test activities to launch in 2020. Reception of project leaders (governance, agreement).
- 5. November 2019**
Setting up an animation schedule for 2020. Answering partnership requests (Fleury farm, Turfu festival).
- 6. February 2020**
Concrete work in 3 sub-groups on communication (video, signal posts), workshops open to the public, the local final event.
- 7. July 2020**
Visit at Arlette’s gardens in Mondville, as an example of collaboration between community and association. Thinking about the governance continuity after URBACT.
- 8. October 2020**
Visit of the first facilities on the plot. Outline of new uses: cooking, eating, preserving.
- 9. January 2021**
Receiving partners from Lille and introducing the Fives Cail project “Foretaste” and the “Shared kitchen”. Lille ideas may be transferred to Caen.
- 10. March 2021**
Introducing the Peninsula fore-project. Finalising the action plan. Flash review of the ULG’s 30-month life.
- 11. September 2021**
Final event on the plot with the elected representatives and partners involved in the success of the project.

A threefold challenge

In this project, Caen City faced a threefold challenge:

- ▶ **Create an activity in an isolated, even repulsive, space.** Next to the wholesale fruit and vegetable market, which moved in March 2021, the plot is quite remote: bringing visitors in requires a specific communication strategy and a strong attraction drive.
- ▶ **Find an association project leader** who shares the thematic objectives, the long-term vision and the necessarily very experimental methodology of this project.
- ▶ **Innovate by means of producing vegetables on an impervious or even polluted soil** (raised beds, permaculture layers, farmbot) and by hosting a food court with professional partners (shared kitchen or hosting of restaurant owners in season).



The farmbot (gardening robot) assembled and programmed by The House volunteers, September 2021.



Hands-on work, meeting of the local group over a shared meal.

The human success of the venture

One of the keys to success in this process is the meeting of the five project leaders of The House association in spring 2019. They were looking for a place to set up activities focusing on quality food. The local group in Caen (ULG) moved from a planning role to a role of guiding the activities of the new project leaders, which led to the implementation of concrete actions:

- ▶ **Setting up an agreement** so The House may use the plot for free (bearing in mind that Normandy Harbours own the land and Caen City holds a temporary authorisation to occupy the space).
- ▶ **Providing for the plot** (temporary water and electricity networks drawn for the composting experiment, two containers, three cultivation bins, a farmbot). Later on, this equipment donated by Caen City was completed with a truck (from a private donation), a permaculture plot (partnership with Lemonnier Institute), a mobile kitchen equipment...
- ▶ **Scheduling a series of events** entirely organised by The House: setting up dry toilets, building mobile hen houses for the Fleury agricultural plot, gardening workshops, assembling and testing the farmbot (in partnership with The Dome)...
- ▶ **Other projects are in the pipeline:** today, The House is working on launching a work integration project to provide a variety of professional activities: vegetable production (in Fleury-sur-Orne), delivery, cooking, etc. The place is being developed to host projects and will be able to expand once Caen City has strengthened the metal framework. As for now, facilities are temporary and mobile.



RU:RBAN final event, reception on the plot, September 2021.

Despite delays due to the pandemic and successive shutdowns, The House quickly acquired a public of volunteers, students and residents, allowing the activities to gain a certain influence. Today, the collective has nearly 300 members.

RU:RBAN ULG's partnerships work particularly well and are at the origin of the success of the project: the support of the Pavillon, Wednesday workshops at the Dome, the advice of the restaurant Sauvages sur un plateau for the kitchen, the methodological exchanges with the third-place Rive Droite, the setup of the SCOP Toutenvelo and the links with the economic actors and the real estate operators on the Peninsula.

Sharing views with French partners

The European trend of working based on inspiration from other territories also involves national contacts. This is how the Caen dynamic met two particularly inspiring French cities:

- **Mouans-Sartoux (South-East)**, with less than 10,000 inhabitants, is piloting an URBACT network on local supply for school canteens. With its 100% organic canteen and its agricultural management (six hectares on which 25 tonnes of vegetables are produced per year), this town is an example for both economy and health.

<https://mead-mouans-sartoux.fr/le-projet-bio-canteens/>

- **Lille (Nord)** has undertaken the conversion of its industrial district of Fives-Cail around food as a guarantee of social inclusion, training and economic accessibility. With its hotel school, its gourmet market, its communal kitchen and its many partnerships, Lille is about to achieve a major urban innovation.

<https://fivescail-lille-hellemmes.fr/presentation-du-projet/>



Sharing experiences with Lille project leaders during Caen ULG meeting, January 2021.

From Caen Peninsula to Fleury-sur-Orne eco-district

The Sustainable Food House (also called Yummy) is a resource and educational centre for gardening, market gardening and healthy eating on Caen Peninsula. This agri-urban meeting place will quickly meet with the wider interest of the inhabitants of Caen la mer.

This urban experiment needs a link with a production site. With the provision of a hectare on the Fleury-sur-Orne site that The House association benefits from a coherent food supply between production and cooking. Next to the Hauts-de-l'Orne eco-district, a non-constructible agricultural plateau (located on a former limestone quarry), owned by the Urban community Caen la mer, could become an urban farm covering about twenty hectares.

As an experiment, The House is about to try out flower and vegetable production on this small, enclosed plot of land, with henhouses and mobile greenhouses, in partnership with local actors and researchers. Without access to water on very permeable soil, the challenge is huge, but it has now been taken up by a professional gardener.

<https://www.normandie-amenagement.com/realisation/ecoquartier-hauts-de-lorne/>



The challenge for the Luzerniere farm in Fleury, growing vegetables without water.

A new urbanism

The European impulse on a former industrial-port wasteland in Caen has led to experimentation with **a new way of conceiving a site regeneration**. Locally, the actors' governance and the methods of a flexible urbanism seem to guarantee a project that can **be implemented over a long period of time and adapted to urban needs**, while **integrating new working approaches and a diversity of partners**.

The media have spoken of the «Berlin method» for this site, as it is an associative regeneration based on recycled materials, donations, participatory work and, more generally, very limited financial means, which in no way inhibits great ambitions.

Job creation and response to local social needs are indeed the main expectations from this project.

We can now refer to the «Caen method» which consists in creating a partnership between community and associations, together in shared strategy and action, with a complementary distribution of investment and operation means.

Today, **this Sustainable Food House is acknowledged by the Territorial Food Project (PAT) of Caen Normandie Métropole** and has been granted funding by the Recovery Plan.

Caen's multi-year investment plan allocates one million euros to this sustainable development experiment (due in 2026). With the end of the European project, **a new local governance will begin**, illustrating the quality of the collaboration between association and community. **Flexibility, creativity and public-private partnership** seem to be the three major ingredients of an urban planning of regeneration, now particularly challenged by **the national objective of climate and resilience**.



Find out more

- ▶ <https://id-territoriale.fr/a/lancien-entrepot-portuaire-devient-une-maison-de-lalimentation-durable>
- ▶ <https://caen-presquile.com/bienvenue-a-la-maison/>
- ▶ *Sur la Presqu'île de Caen, structurer des filières alimentaires urbaines*, p.162-167, in *Plus grand que la Seine*, coll., Ed. Parenthèses, 2021
- ▶ www.facebook.com/collectiflamaison



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