

## e-Square: a multi-service community hub in rural Wallonia, Belgium

### SUMMARY

e-Square is a multi-service community hub located in the rural town of Marche-en-Famenne, in Wallonia, Belgium. It brings together under one roof a wide range of services that respond to the digital, social and economic needs of the local rural community.

The hub's core services include a co-working space, meeting rooms, a digital fabrication laboratory (FabLab), entrepreneurship support, a public digital space, game-based learning and coding activities, vocational training and municipal services.



### CONTEXT

Services are disappearing in rural towns like Marche-en-Famenne, in the Famenne-Ardenne area of Belgium's Luxembourg province. Yet the digital, social and economic transitions require multiple services in parallel: places to work remotely, tools to create prototypes and develop products, support for new entrepreneurs, help for residents to access and use digital technologies, and cultural and educational activities for young people.

The e-Square hub offers a solution using the 'third place' model. Backed by public co-financing, it hosts several services under one roof, which makes them more viable.



### OBJECTIVES

- > Consolidate digital, social and economic services in one accessible rural community hub;
- > Support local entrepreneurs and project leaders with co-working spaces, a digital fabrication laboratory (FabLab) for prototyping and other services, and advance digital inclusion for all residents;
- > Host selected municipal services in a welcoming, non-administrative environment.



**Themes:** Digital infrastructure; smart and start-up villages; entrepreneurship; social economy; access to services; nature and environment

**Country:** Belgium

#### Organisations:

- > e-Square ASBL, civil society organisation
- > City of Marche-en-Famenne, public authority
- > Local Development Agency ADL Marche, public authority
- > GAL Pays de Famenne, Local Action Group
- > Service Public de Wallonie, public authority
- > Wallonie Entreprendre, public authority
- > IDELUX, public authority
- > IFAPME Walloon training institute, public authority
- > Province of Luxembourg, public authority
- > EPN de Wallonie network, public authority

**Start & end date:** 01/2018 - ongoing

**Budget:** Around EUR 2.1 million for the transition to a multi-service hub

#### Funding sources:

- > European Regional Development Fund
- > Walloon regional funding (Plan de Relance de la Wallonie and En Mieux programme)

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## ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The e-Square site grew from a co-working space in 2018 into a **full multi-service community hub**, which was formally inaugurated in May 2024. It **developed step by step** with the establishment of a non-profit operator and the successive addition of a digital fabrication laboratory (FabLab), a public digital space, hosting of municipal services, on-site vocational training and entrepreneurship support.

The initiative is supported by a **partnership of local, intermunicipal, provincial and regional actors**. Together, the partners secured around EUR 2.1 million in European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Walloon regional grant funding for the transition into a full multi-service hub.

e-Square now **offers several services under one roof**. These include a co-working space with about 10 workstations, the FabLab for prototyping, with equipment including 3D printers and laser cutters, the e-Cube entrepreneurship support programme, a public digital space providing access to and support with digital technologies, and game-based learning and coding activities. It also rents out meeting rooms and hosts several municipal services (covering social cohesion, local development, youth outreach and mediation).



## RESULTS

- > Some EUR 2.1 million in ERDF and Walloon regional grant funding secured for the **transition into a multi-service hub**;
- > Around **40 entrepreneurs and project leaders have used e-Square** since 2023, with additional entrepreneurship support provided through the néo-Hub co-piloted with IDELUX, the intermunicipal economic development agency for Luxembourg province;
- > **Municipal services** (social cohesion, local development, youth outreach and mediation) **relocated to the site**, providing a single accessible entry point for residents;
- > Three **vocational training programmes** – digital marketing, interior decoration and image consultancy – are delivered on site by the Walloon training institute IFAPME.



## SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

e-Square's **individual services would not be viable on their own** in a rural town but, **when brought together**, they attract a wide range of users and reinforce one another.

**Sustained political commitment** from the City of Marche-en-Famenne, across different mayors, has been key: e-Square has been treated as a **priority of the municipal mandate** and the non-profit organisation is co-run with the municipality.

Combining ERDF and Walloon funding with municipal operational financing and partner contributions from IDELUX and IFAPME helps sustain the range of services provided through the hub.



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