

Romans Sur Isère. What city centre for tomorrow?



The place Perrot de Verdun before works



The place Perrot de Verdun after works

1. The project context

Romans-sur-Isère is a town of 33,000 inhabitants located in the South-east of France, situated in the Department of Drôme, in the Auvergne Rhône-Alpes region.

Romans owes its international reputation to the leather and footwear industries. Its craft history based on the know-how of tanners dates back to the 15th century and industrialized in the second half of the 19th century with the arrival of the railway. Mechanization then allowed mass production and the exportation of manufactured products. The leather industry represented more than 6,000 jobs by the middle of the 20th century. These were mainly luxury shoes sold in France and exported worldwide.

The International Shoe Museum, housed in a former convent, today holds more than 20,000 pieces and invites you to discover the passionate history of footwear across the world and through the centuries.

Marques Avenue

Since 1999 Romans has had its very own outlet shopping mall at 5 min walk from the International Shoe Museum and only 10min from the historic centre of the city. This retail village offers 88 outlet stores of well-known brands and serves a catchment area of 100 km around the city. In 2017 Marques Avenue attracted 1.7M visitors. At the end of 2017 an expansion brought 13 new stores to the site. Another expansion is planned for 2019 with the objective to exceed 2M visitors by the end of the year.

Romans also has its own culinary specialties, sports teams, social and cultural associations, as well as a varied economic tapestry of industries, including the presence of plastic, precision tools and components for nuclear industry. However, this does not mean that our city has escaped from the devitalizing of the city centre, which results in:

- A lower retail offer.
- Decreased footfall.
- A constant increase in vacant commercial premises.
- Population migration (impoverishment of the existing population).
- Increased feelings of insecurity.
- A sense of pessimism.

In 2015, the new municipal team decided to face this reality and tackle this issue head-on by making it a principal axis of the city's project.

Meetings, visits and literature showed us this is a national problem, a problem shared by almost all medium-sized cities, like ours. Joining the RetailLink transnational program also made us aware that the problem of urban vitality decline also exists at the European level.

2. The plan

Romans' strategic revitalization plan integrates 3 main objectives:

Objective 1. Define the city centre area, delimit a perimeter: short term (early 2018)

The city runs lengthwise, leading from the train station to the Isère River. To cross the city one passes through several streets with shops, squares, monuments, churches, to arrive to the

historic centre. Some questions helped in the process of reflection: Where is Romans city centre really located? How big it is, and where are its limits?

The retail project team will define the term "city centre" in consultation with the area users, in order to speak the same language.

Objective 2. Make the city centre more attractive: medium term (2018-2019)

To act on the attractiveness of the city centre, but especially to quantify its results, the City plans to work along several axes:

- A. Increase of footfall: to generate higher flows of visitors.

Today only 2% of Marques Avenue visitors go to the city centre. The objective is that this figure reaches:

- 5% by 2018
- 7% by 2019
- 10% by 2020.

- B. Bring activity back to the city reducing the number of vacant commercial premises

This is not a new axis, because the trend towards closures was already reversed in 2017, with the opening of 8 new stores, 5 currently being installed and 42 ephemeral shops during special events. However, the municipality will work towards strengthening these initiatives. Currently the vacancy rate is 16% and the objective is to reach:

- 14% by 2018.
- 12% by 2019.
- 10% by 2020.

- C. Create an identity for our commercial offer.

The goal here is to not simply refill the empty retail units, but to do so with activities that also contribute to offer a strong identity, matching the expectations of the users.

Work in this sense began in 2017 on a pedestrian street with the project "Créativ' Jacquemart", a start-up accelerator allowing the diversification of flows and uses.

The goal here is to create 3 new zones with a strong commercial identity in the city centre in 2018:

- A street: Créativ' Jacquemart project.
- A site: place Maurice Faure, where the municipality is working to define a theme for the activity.
- A building: Fanal, where a commercial activity with a complementary offer to that available in Marques Avenue will be developed.

Objective 3. Stabilize and perpetuate attractiveness (long term 2020 and after)

The retail team will address the revitalization project with a view of sustaining the dynamism for the long-term. A set of key indicators will be carefully monitored yearly to and corrective actions taken ensure the trends are in the right direction.

To achieve the above objective, the city will implement a wide variety of measures since attractiveness is a global concept requiring action along several fronts. The defined areas of action have been enhanced by transferring some of the steps learnt and exemplified in Bassano del Grappa revitalisation strategy in Italy, namely:

- Constantly position the user-consumer-customer at the heart of the strategy and reflections. Note - the project defines 'user' as the inhabitant, the shopkeeper, the owner, the small business manager, the tourist...
- Working group integrating various users: We will continue and further strengthen our collaborative work with users and project leaders in the form of working groups.
- Use of vacant premises (ephemeral shops): The experience of ephemeral shops has been successful and the initiative will be renewed.
- Initiatives on taxation: The municipality will work on reducing the tax burden for new city centre economic activities.
- Dedicated management team: A team is working specifically on the subject led by a city centre manager.
- Improvements to the urban environment: The structural quality of the city is in transition; new developments are planned for 2018 and 2019.
- Signage: In order to facilitate the flow and access to information the municipal department is developing a signage that reflects an identity for Romans-sur-Isere.
- Transport, mobility and accessibilities: Facilitate easier access and movement between Marques Avenue and the city centre for all users.
- Ephemeral furnishings: Positioning of ephemeral furniture in the disused areas which are awaiting urban renewal.
- A "no empty spaces" commercial policy: Prioritize filling in adjoining premises to active businesses in order to create continuity and so avoid visual fractures in the landscape.
- Varied and repeated events: The events are and will be mainly organised downtown and built around and for traders.
- New activities in the outskirts: The installation of business activities in the city outskirts of the city can only be studied if all other options of setting up in the city centre have been discarded.
- Markets or halls with local products: These options will be examined to help perpetuate the attractiveness of the Sunday market, which is currently an important added value to the city centre.

Resources used in carrying out the plan

User questionnaires: In order to understand the city centre user and put it at the heart of the retail strategy, the municipality will distribute questionnaires to around 400 carefully targeted individuals. These questionnaires integrate the concepts, proposals and initiatives outlined above.

Financing: In order to implement the project actions, the City is working on achieving funding at departmental, regional, national, and European levels. A common thread is to always financially commit the municipality to create a leverage effect with other support.

The Council submitted an application for the "Action Coeur de Ville" program in France, put in place by the current government. This program will distribute EUR 3 billion to 20 pilot cities in 2018. At the end of February 2018, the government will officially announce the selected cities.

The project team is also working on public-private partnerships through sponsorship. These funds come from businesses or individuals and are intended for projects targeted for the city centre.

Urban planning: The Local Urban Plan of Romans (PLU) is being completely revised in 2018 to allow initiatives to be carried out and facilitate the opening of new commercial activities in the city centre.

Internal organization: The community works in project mode. A technical pilot and a political pilot are identified for each project. A team is then formed around this pair, allowing a global contribution of skills. This organization allows better project identification & better project management.

For city centre revitalization issues, these pilots work in close collaboration with the Mayor and the General Director of Services. For this reason, they schedule a one and a half hour-long workshop session every Monday to accelerate approvals and oversee implementations.

Cabinet Lestoux: A private company specialising in the revitalization of city centres has been working with Romans since January 2018 to complete the strategy, organise the presentation event, and then to deploy the initiatives. This company is recognised nationally and has a solid reputation.

RetailLink: The RetailLink experience, the exchange of good practices, the quality of its participants, confirms this is the way forward. This program is also for Romans a guarantee of trust for all partners who already accompany us or will do so in the future. Romans also expects to continue linked to URBACT in the future.

3. Conclusion

Romans wishes to thank URBACT for organising and implementing RetailLink which has really helped move forward and has allowed to better structure the approaches and define the city retail challenges.

The project team has participated in transnational meetings with retailers, specialists and politicians of the city. Today, they all recognise the importance of the mobilisation of all to be able to move in the same direction. It saves us so much time!

The closure of the RetailLink project is not the end but the beginning of the implementation of a structured strategy. The launch of this new challenge begins for Romans on 23 April 2018 with the presentation event to a wide range of users.

4. Contact information

Mrs Marie-Hélène THORAVAL, Mayor

Contact information-

Cabinet du Maire – 04 75 05 51 51 – cabinet@ville-romans26.fr

Project coordinator

Ludivine ROSIER,
City Centre Manager- 04 75 05 55 25 – Irosier@ville-romans26.fr

Emmanuel DUBREUCQ,
Innovation and Territorial Expert – 04 75 05 51 21 – edubreucq@ville-romans26.fr

Thomas SERVIEN
Sponsorship Co-ordinator- 04 75 05 51 56 – tservien@ville-romans26.fr

Communication

Mrs Véronique AUROUX,
Head of the communication department- 04 75 05 51 40- vauroux@ville-romans26.fr