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Cooperative in Belgian village makes trail for Green Tourism

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Martin Banks

24 August 2020

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An innovative social cooperative is flying the flag for sustainability – from a tiny village in the Belgian Ardennes. *Projet Now* – New Walloon Opportunities – was started about five years ago by Adelin Olivier and his wife Diane. It is a cooperative which now comprises about 60 members and seeks to promote a more sustainable way of living.



This is evidenced in all the many activities – there are over 25 of them – that they couple oversee from their home in the pretty little village of Waulsort, a few kilometres from Dinant (famous as the birthplace of the saxophone). The general idea behind *Projet Now* is to




promote “green”, or sustainable tourism, the concept of visiting somewhere as a tourist and trying to make a positive impact on the environment, society, and economy.



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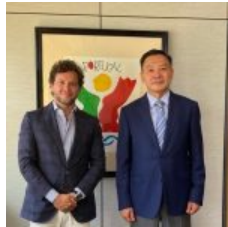
That is what the couple do, for instance, in relying only on local producers and ingredients to stock the small shop and restaurant they operate. That extends to their products and the food they serve – often biological and grown in the most environmental-friendly ways possible – and even the 60 beers available here, mostly sourced from local, small macro-brewers.

The couple and the cooperative they help run also has a “social” dimension: people working for *Projet Now* are quite often local young people who face economic hardship and/or might otherwise experience difficulties finding work in the area.

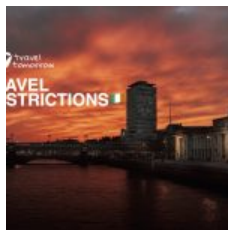




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As Adelin says, "You'll certainly notice that we are not "only" a restaurant. Villa 1900 is a not-for-profit cooperative company and our restaurant is "a part" of the whole thing."


On the restaurant, he says, "Our main goal is to "relocate" the economy as much as possible. Therefore, we promote and sell the products of our local producers in our shop as well as in our restaurant. We also do this for ethical reasons, in other words, what you eat in our restaurant is local food only. Industrially prepared food is banned from our minds and we certainly don't use a microwave oven. Our "real" food is prepared and cooked as it should be."





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But you might come here not just to eat but for a whole range of other things such as hiring an e-bike, staying overnight in the guest room, having fun in the escape room, buying organically grown bread at the shop, visiting the small but well stocked on-site museum (with tours included) or maybe enjoying a piano concert by Adelin, who is a talented pianist and well known professional piano tuner. There's even a repair shop on site for all manner of broken objects.

All this takes place in a house called Villa 1900, appropriately named as the building dates from that period. When the couple purchased it a few years back, they decided the best way of paying homage to its heritage was to furnish it in the style of that period. Here you will find all manner of artefacts from that golden age. Indeed, any visit here, however brief, really does take you on a trip down Memory Lane.





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sonneke0811
Villa 1900

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Last souper in Waulsort, at this lovely place. #vegetarian #food #biologic #whitewine #cremebrulee #tea #earlgrey #beautifulplace #flashback #intime #villa1900 #waulsort #staycation #solotravel #travelling #pictures #huaweipic #selfie #redlips #redtop #relaxing #metime #selfcare #summertime #porch #sittingoutside #pianomusic

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The 60-year-old adds, "We also help to sustain and support our local producers and, hereby, help to reduce the unnecessary transport and pollution which goes with that. Most of our producers, for example, are within a 30 km range of where we are. We are also very much zero waste-minded and act accordingly."

Of course, the health crisis and its impact has not escaped life in this idyllic part of the country and, like others, they have had to take certain measures. But Adelin says this comes as second nature to them, adding, "We've always been a step ahead of "normal" even in normal times. This means we now are again a step higher than many others. No-one is supposed to get infected at our place (neither should we) and we care more than anything about that."

The cooperative, since its launch, has gone from strength to strength and its members, mostly local, are free to contribute as much (or as little) and they are able. Adelin himself ran a



highly successful piano tuning business in Brussels for many years and has built up a notable reputation as a jazz pianist.

But, tired of the negative aspects of modern life he and his wife decided to try something else, hence their decision to launch *Projet Now*. The success they have had has also had a useful spinoff for the area which. In its heyday, the village was well known as a holiday destination for the rich and famous in Belgium. It then fell into relative decline but is now undergoing something of a renaissance.

Diane, aged 51, says, "You could summarise our philosophy as being to want to help the local economy in the most sustainable and environmentally friendly way possible. Everyone in the cooperative shares the same ethos."



francois_ducobu
Waulsort, Namur, Belgium

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