



D 9.2 Final Recommendations

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Authors: Jamal Shahin, Trisha Meyer, Lisanne Groen, Ólöf Soebeck

Submitted to: Jamal Shahin

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The PARENT Project's final recommendations build on all activities carried out in the project's lifetime. The reports that have been published as part of this project all reveal specific findings, conclusions and recommendations that have emerged from the project activities. It is not the objective of this, separate, report to simply replicate those conclusions, although we shall draw very heavily on the following research activities that took place in the project:

1. The user analysis, which comprised the post-installation survey.
2. Our strategies for stakeholder engagement and behavioural change.
3. Our experiences gained in running the pilots.
4. Our final conference.

The objective of this report is to provide higher-level recommendations to three specific groups of actors:

1. Project funders and other projects.
2. Policymakers wishing to engage in project-based initiatives.
3. Civil society and citizen groups that have a desire to co-own projects and initiatives in this domain.

This concise document does not do justice to the amount of work that has been put into the development, implementation and evaluation exercises that have taken place. Rather than repeat ourselves in this document, we will ensure to point the reader to specific elaborations in our other studies, all of which are openly available from our project website: <http://www.parent-project.eu/about/results/>.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
WP	Work Package
Partner Abb.	Description
VUB-IES	Vrije Universiteit Brussel – Institute for European Studies
BLP	Blue Planet AC
UU	Universiteit Utrecht
RES	Resourcefully
SVT	University of Bergen, Centre for the Study of the Sciences and the Humanities

1 Introduction

After forty months of activity, the PARENT project has engaged with a very large number of individuals, civil society groups, political actors and project researchers. Moreover, the project team have engaged actively across all three cities with a large number of stakeholders from each of the abovementioned groups. The recommendations presented here are thus a culmination of the ideas and interests of a large number of individuals and organisations. We do not claim to represent these actors, but we hope to have assimilated many of their comments and feedback into our work, especially as a result of the PARENT Final Conference, which brought together a large number of actors in the field of urban sustainable development.

During the past three years, we have come to the (obvious) realisation that many of the calls, recommendations, issues, etc. we find necessary to raise, are also called for by a whole host of other actors (in our experience, this is particularly noticeable in the Brussels Region). We are looking for better ways to move toward fair and collaborative sustainable futures that our cities deserve and need. It is with this in mind that we have built a list of important messages that we believe could be put out and embraced by a large group of actors in Brussels, Bergen, and Amsterdam.

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2 Recommendations for project funders and other projects

1. Many answers already exist.

We don't always need 'new' technological or institutional solutions to bridge the gap between where we are and where we want to be. There are a plethora of initiatives providing sustainable, socially responsible, urban solutions in Brussels, Bergen, and Amsterdam. In Brussels, we have developed the [Brussels SEAM](#) (Sustainable Energy Actor Map) as a follow up on the PARENT project that highlights the numerous excellent activities that exist. However, there are missed opportunities to collaborate, exchange practices and advance knowledge. Networking is central, as well as perhaps opportunities to further experiment with and bring to scale existing solutions. [See specifically our 'state of the art' elaborations, and a range of sister projects, managed by JPI Urban Europe.]

2. Embedding of societal perspectives and RRI is challenging.

Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) remains a challenge in European projects, since they cut across national cultures, sectorial domains and very different research disciplines. Here, a straightforward 'overcoming of barriers' to collaboration is illusory, and should rather be counted amongst the basic conditions of research aimed at addressing society's problems. In many cases, increased networking and collaboration are the lucky outcomes of carefully orchestrated process, not a default starting point. We need to make more efforts to work together. [See our deliverables D7.6 and D3.1 on Responsible Research and Innovation.]

3. 'Them' should be 'we'.

People who live in the city are also experts, politicians, civil society. Global problems like climate change can only be solved if we all work together. We should not reinforce the dialogue of 'antagonistic politics', but rather get together and learn from each other. It is imperative to engage in 'real and deep' citizen engagement and co-development, including at the problem definition phases, rather than to rely on paternalistic habits of partially including people, after a project has been designed, in order to collect feedback or confirmation of previously held hypothesis. [This message emerged most strongly from our discussions at our final conference. See our final conference report for more details.]

4. Engagement takes different forms.

Community leads to participation, which generates engagement. And it can manifest itself at different levels. Do not expect to change the world with one project, but 'let a thousand flowers bloom'. (Behavioural) change takes time to seep into the fabric of society. In other words, set realistic expectations. Both in terms of the nature of involvement of the various stakeholders in the project(s), and with what can and should be the goal. Persistence and being just one of the many pebbles in the river bed changing the flow of the river is key. [See our strategies for stakeholder engagement (D8.3), our User Analysis (D4.3), and refer to our final conference report.]

5. Information and education for all age groups are paramount.

This is especially true when behavioral change is a necessary part of the goal, which is what we need to make the energy transition work. But disseminating information only is not sufficient: some form of interaction with that information is necessary, and this requires resources, effort, and a willingness to share ownership of all aspects of a project. [This recommendation emerged most strongly from our final conference, see our report detailing the discussions, and also see our User Analysis, D4.3.]

6. Technology can help to engage participants, but needs serious engagement

Our project reveals that technical tools, such as sub-metering technology, do help to increase awareness about individual behaviour, but alone cannot make a bigger impact on societal change. Most active participants in our project did often refer to the technology to allow themselves to monitor their 'progress' in achieving their goal of household energy reduction and to serve as a basis to help them understand their consumption patterns. But, as identified in the pilots, the interest in the technology can easily wane if no interaction is required with a pilot moderator or other community members: physical and individual interaction is required. Also, the technology itself does not reduce energy consumption, the participants had to take active steps themselves to reduce consumption- and that is where other engagement, involvement, facilitation and awareness raising tools are needed to accompany the technology. [See our Pilot and Living Lab Reports, especially D7.5.]

3 Recommendations for policymakers wishing to engage in project-based initiatives

1. Policy needs to be integrated and holistic.

Silos need to be eliminated. Efforts should be pursued according to policy objectives, not institutional barriers. With the broad focus on environmental awareness at both the political and individual level now (Covenant of the Mayors, Paris Accords, et cetera.), there is an opportunity to rethink the way that policies in this field are designed, to think about crossing from Energy and Environment, to Public Housing, Civic Engagement and other policy fields. This need to rethink 'ownership' of policies cannot be repeated enough. [See our final conference report.]

2. Continue to engage in hyper-local initiatives.

Change is made one person at a time. But this can soon become a snowball. Focus on small districts, where individuals know each other and will interact on a regular basis: give these smaller districts the resources to develop, build up their own 'best practices' and share them with neighbouring districts. [See our Brussels SEAM, described above.]

3. Start with those 'in the know', and swiftly build up.

People who tend to get most engaged (as 'early adopters') in open, exploratory, participative initiatives are generally those who are the most aware in any case. Public authorities can provide the gateway to allow these people to help open up these public engagement initiatives to more targeted audiences. In the Brussels cases, approximately one third of the participants also reported that they had learned something as part of their participation in the project, which is probably due to the Brussels pilots collaborating with Homegrade (an organization that informs households on energy efficiency. [This emerged from our final conference, as well as our final survey.]

4. Learning is not a one-way street

Strikingly, although 85% of our pilot participants claimed to minimize their household consumption prior to starting our project, they were still able to reduce their household consumption (on average) even further during the project lifetime. Sharing ownership of an initiative across all stakeholders allows all stakeholders to learn. [See our user analysis, D4.3.]

5. Display real commitment through real strong policies and investing in developing the solutions.

Indeed - make the most out of already engaged people and initiatives and see them flower and grow - but sustainability, democracy and fairness should be at the heart of ALL and ANY policy development. That should be the starting point - it should be integrated into economic and industrial and city planning. Take it seriously!

4 Recommendations for civil society and citizen groups

1. Radical change is necessary

We are way past piecemeal efforts, which are now 'plateauing' in any case. We need to work on both baby steps and big changes at the same time, creating a 'new normal'. Without wholesale transformation, designed at the infrastructural level, we will not make the shifts required. But individual and community actions can and will work towards acclimatising people to transformation, leading to acceptance of broader changes in society. [See our final conference report.]

2. While respecting the need for radical change, start by focusing on what can be changed.

Our analysis of the energy consumption data showed that many of our participants helped reduce (in Brussels) their average energy consumption year-on-year by 13.9%. The majority of these participants, as well as the participants in Bergen and Amsterdam, highlighted their efforts in behavioural changes, such as unplugging devices on standby, using "eco" programmes on dishwashers and washing machines, et cetera. [See our user analysis report, D4.3]

3. People want to do more, but need the tools

An overwhelming 85% of our participants across all three cities want to "do more to support the environment". There is a huge amount of information 'out there' on how people can make small and big changes to their household or their behaviour. The challenge is – as it has always been – to provide an interface between the knowledge and the people who need the knowledge. Thinking actively across sectoral boundaries and framing the issue of household energy reduction from a 'sustainability' and 'urban community' angle may allow for this interaction to take place.

5 Conclusions and next steps

As a concluding word, it should be mentioned that these recommendations are worth very little without political, economic and research ‘buy-in’. They are written in a fashion designed to stimulate the creativity of the audience.

The PARENT team will continue to follow up on these recommendations, by developing and implementing interactions with other stakeholders as identified in this report, and in our Exploitation Report. We hope that others will join in this conversation about how best to create impact around sustainability in our cities, by commenting on, striking up a dialogue, elaborating on and making use of our recommendations.