

## **Final Conference of the PARENT Project Report**

**4-5 June 2019**

**Les Halles Saint-Géry, Brussels**



## Tuesday 4 June Afternoon Session – Exchange of Practices among Urban Community Initiatives and Research Projects (and citizens) – 13.00-17.00h

*In this interactive session, civil society and researchers met to discuss results and experiences of their urban initiatives and projects.*

### Table 1 Post-it session summary:

At table one, researchers, representatives of urban community initiatives, of a project funding agency, of a citizens' platform, of a small business, etc. got together to share their aim and approach to solving urban problems, to identify common challenges and successes, and to formulate lessons learned. Common challenges they identified, as part of their efforts to create a more sustainable Brussels, were: how to move citizens out of their locked-in behavioural patterns; how to keep the masses engaged continuously, once you have convinced them to implement change; how to find resources as a small organisation and fit your needs within funders' templates; and, how to deal with misinformation. Successes shared were: “breaking with the past”; creating software platforms that stimulate citizen interaction; raising awareness amongst citizens (“creating a movement”); laws put in place to guide implementation of climate friendly measures, etc. Lessons learned included: education of all age groups; stay motivated to realise change (it is a long-term process and impact is not always directly visible); make space for failure in society.

### Table 2 Post-it session summary:

Amongst the participants of table two, there were many that had used an array of approaches to reach their goals. A wide variety of methods were described: information sharing, capacity building, re-education/adult education and expertise sharing being key elements. Others had used deep democracy tools, collective intelligence creations, bottom up creations and opening up closed areas/groups (cocoon). We, as actors who want to influence change and be a part of it, need

to be careful of the us/them mentality or imposing our approaches, support and views. There are many opportunities for many solutions and changes, many of which are not



**Figure 1.** Groups used post-it notes to display the successes and challenges of building a sustainable Brussels.

solely about household energy consumption. Furthermore, those on the margins and those who may need the most support are usually not the ones getting the required support. In this light, we identified the need to be aware of cultural transferability of any action or activity, particularly within such a diverse city. There are also a lot of invisible side effects and snowballing of initiatives and actions. Making an impact in one area can lead to changes in others as well and influencing one person may influence their entire networks. So there is an invisible impact of projects and actions. Complexity is a barrier and may heighten fear, but complexity is also positive and gives space for creativity. Trust and risk sharing are key. Belgians are not known to be high risk takers and therefore getting a critical mass to share the risk, investment and changing together is needed.

Table 3 Post-it session summary:

At table three, the discussion centered around how organizations interact with the public. The group asserted that, regarding energy savings, Brussels inhabitants “are all experts.” However, knowledge does not necessarily align with ability to take action and make change, whether it be for economic, physical, and/or other reasons. According to this state of being, group members find it important to cultivate a collective community and build spaces of negotiation among various actors. This requires “pairing knowledge with people” and working toward increased bottom-up governance. A challenge identified by the group was the lack of affordable housing in the Brussels-Capital Region. Additionally, there is a problem with the replicability of energy saving projects, as often projects must be managed on a case-by-case basis. Successes included the use of green certificates to lower interest rates for homeowners, tenants, etc., and a rise in organizations which are “one-stop shops.” These one-stop shops provide community members with a centralized source of technological, financial, and legal support on subjects of community sustainability. The group’s “lessons learned” were to utilize a holistic, inter-disciplinary approach to bring community actors together, and to cultivate collective tools to be used for both individual and community needs.

Table 4 Post-it session summary:

At table four, one of the participants provided a fable to launch our discussion on the challenges to building better initiatives across Brussels. The image was of the penguins running around on a melting iceberg; completely unable to understand that the challenges they were individually facing were, in fact, the very same, singular challenge. This stimulated a discussion on how to increase and enhance awareness, through collective learning and more inclusive attitudes towards sharing experiences. How do we engage with different stakeholders and disciplines? These challenges were also considered to be fundamental to the growth of initiatives in the field. As at table 2, we recognised that there is a perception of antagonism amongst different actors, with a fear that things may sound condescending or conspiratorial. We also acknowledged that urban initiatives require physical meetings, and that most politics should be carried out in small piecemeal steps:

feedback loops and mutual questioning and exchange are key to success. We concluded by saying that most answers to our questions do exist, we just have to be open enough to look for them. In this respect, we all recognised that is OK not to know everything, and that we should all approach such initiatives with a sense of curiosity and inquisitiveness.

## Tuesday 4 June Evening Session – Reception and dinner on energy transitions and policy developments at local level – 18.00-20.00h

*Over champagne and dinner, an inspiring keynote speaker and local authority representatives in the Brussels region shared their vision for a sustainable future.*

Several échevins, representatives of Brussels communes and PARENT project participants joined this reception, as well as researchers and representatives of urban community initiatives. IES-VUB professor/researcher Jamal Shahin kicked off the reception with an introductory speech, in which he highlighted some key elements of the PARENT project, such as the successful collaboration with the Brussels communes of Watermael-Boitsfort and Forest and their citizens, who installed smart meters in their homes to monitor their electricity consumption. He noted the importance of bringing together organisations in Brussels working on urban sustainability, technology and participation to discuss and share efforts, which the PARENT project final conference aimed to do. He also pointed at a large illustration made by illustrator [Nick Payne](#), which was hanging in the Halles Saint-Géry during the conference.



**Figure 2.** A graphic map of Brussels communes' efforts to increase sustainability was displayed at the final conference of the PARENT project.

The PARENT Project developed a graphic 'map' of sustainability actions carried out by the local municipalities in the Brussels region. The map tries to understand how the various

municipalities identify the framing for their activities, whether it be Regional, National, European, International or Global, and also tries to show what specific actions are promoted by the municipalities in their own region. A larger version of this image can be found [here](#).



**Figure 3.** Program participants discuss the [PARENT project](#) outcomes.

Shahin then gave the floor to [Chris Roorda](#), senior researcher and advisor at DRIFT, the Dutch Research Institute for Transitions. Roorda shared best practice examples from among others, Rotterdam, Ghent and Paris, about how the energy transition can be rolled out in practice and how citizens can be engaged. In Rotterdam, for example, citizens who do not own a house can pay to become co-owners of a

roof of a public building with solar panels on it. Other initiatives he mentioned were competitions for the most climate friendly street in a city/town, creating a “green oasis” around each school in a city, or streets closed to cars in certain areas of the city on which citizens can get together. He finished by highlighting that a lot is possible when we agree on a shared vision and join efforts towards a common goal (linking agendas and creating new coalitions), and that waiting is not an option.

After some networking accompanied by food and drinks, representatives from PARENT commune partners Watermael-Boitsfort and Forest took the floor to summarise their work in the area of climate and energy and their involvement in the PARENT project. For [Watermael-Boitsfort](#), Cathy Clerbaux gave a presentation and Manon Viérin assisted her to answer specific questions with regard to the commune’s involvement in the PARENT project. Christian Pollok (replacing Alain Mugabo) spoke for [Forest](#).

### Wednesday 5 June morning session - Open knowledge space and citizen workshops - 10.00-13.30h

*In these co-creation workshops, we, citizens of Brussels, learned, explored and discussed two new initiatives striving for a sustainable, collaborative and smart city.*

Two co-creation workshops filled the final morning session of the conference. The first co-creation workshop was organised by BrusselAVenir. [BrusselAVenir](#) was founded in February 2019, with support from the Lunt Foundation. It emerged from the [Civic Innovation Network](#), which was founded in 2016 and works on tackling urban challenges (with a focus on Brussels) by connecting various actors. Khushboo Balwani and Ellen Anthoni are the coordinators of BrusselAVenir. They facilitated the workshop (supported by Michiel Vansteenkiste). They first explained more about BrusselAVenir: it aims to share future narratives for Brussels, with a focus on human interaction. It makes use of a six-months process to explore a question with citizens on future uncertainties. They call this the LabAVenir. The first question of 2019 they are currently exploring is: How will everyone thrive in a climate-friendly Brussels in 2030? Ellen Anthoni presented a short summary of facts on climate change in Belgium. Climate risks in Brussels are, among others: heavy rainfall, flooding and heatwaves. Solutions and transition pathways are being developed. Citizens protest, asking for more and faster climate action. Climate action can have social and economic benefits too, next to environmental benefits. The workshop was led by Khushboo Balwani. She gave four groups of 4-6 participants pages with stories about certain persons on them. These persons are existing inhabitants of Brussels, such as a young low-skilled jobseeker, a middle-aged woman with her own hair saloon, a single mother in her late fifties who is unemployed, a male dancer, etc. The workshop participants had to imagine a climate-friendly Brussels in 2030 through the eyes of one of these persons. How can these persons thrive in this future society, and how can their hopes and fears be addressed and combined into a shared vision? And what are missing links? Each group worked with a slightly different sub-theme of the 2030 scenario, such as a



**Figure 4.** [BRAL](#) discuss their work with a program participant.

focus on jobs or on social connections. Workshop participants enjoyed the refreshing interactive exercise.

After a coffee break, the second co-creation workshop started. Laura Temmerman, Jan Waeben and Willemien Laenens, from [imec-SMIT-VUB](#), presented the ‘[Brussels by us](#)’ project. The focus of their workshop was participation in the smart city. The ‘Brussels by us’ project is a citizen platform to voice your opinion about the Brussels-Capital region. The aim is to create a more liveable city. It is a one-year project that started in January 2019. The project works with an app via which citizens can share their opinion about projects in certain zones in Brussels, namely the area around Brussels North station, the city centre, and the university area around the VUB and ULB. For the workshop, Temmerman, Waeben and Laenens posed to the participants two questions, which focused on the technology used in the project: 1) how can we make the app more participatory; and 2) how can we increase the usability of the app? The workshop participants tried out the app on their phones and, based on their experience, came up with answers to the questions. After this workshop, the conference ended with some closing words of thanks by Jamal Shahin and a lunch during which participants enjoyed a final opportunity to network with each other.

## 7 Stands

At the conference we had seven different information and activity stands where participants could find out what is going on in Brussels and at the European level for support.

- [Homegrade](#) – Brussels support for renovating and insulating homes
- [Buildup.eu](#) – European network and portal on energy efficiency in buildings
- [Bral](#) – a city movement striving to make Brussels sustainable
- [Citymine\(d\)](#) – urban sustainability projects and citizen actions
- [JPI Urban Europe](#) – European funding agency focusing on urban projects
- [Brussels by us](#) (SMIT- VUB) – research project on smart city applications
- [PARENT project](#) results – including a newly developed Brussels sustainability energy actor map ([Brussels SEAM](#)).