

Pilots SELF! – structure – City of Kortrijk

1. Challenge – problem

The city of Kortrijk (75.000 inhabitants) is often referred to as *an urban village*: it is big enough to provide all the services a (big) city can offer. It is small enough to perform a very qualitative and quite effective communication. Kortrijk has always well taken care of its' community-life. The city took many measures like building community houses and sports- and cultural infrastructures for everyone. A lot of organizations and people felt comfortable with that situation and there was a strong link between the citizens and the city-services. Since the Eighties, the city was able to communicate through these organizations and partners. Nowadays, a lot of organizations lose their active (older) members. Society changes and citizens launch interesting initiatives themselves. As a consequence, the City of Kortrijk has to re-think it's ways of communicating to and with citizens. It is time to take measures to give back the city to the citizens themselves. This becomes an interesting story of bottom up working and co-creation ...

In the years to come, the city will suffer from a demographic change from young(er) to far more old(er) citizens. Many problems will rise, such as more poverty, more people suffering from loneliness,... There will be more financial issues and gradually there is a leaner government. Nowadays, we see that people are in search of ways to get out of these rather negative perspectives. Luckily , we discover *a twist* into a more participative society (*Wisdom of the Crowd*).

The city sets up lots of new communication tools and models (including the use of social media, events, etc.). There is still a lot of follow up after the questionnaires have been launched by the tool of "*Kortrijk Spreekt*" (Kortrijk Speaks: on Sunday morning sessions people of all the districts in the city are being visited by social district-workers and politicians in order to gather information on their neighborhood and on their direct needs and questions. Only four districts have been visited so far). The rather low involvement of the citizens after that participation round (although there is a very good average response of +/- 32 %), still needs efforts from the side of the city services in order to get the people actively involved.

It is the aim to activate citizens, make them stronger and more co-operative in participative projects (bottom up changes). Therefore, we want to create new long-term innovative public services that support initiatives sustainably run by citizens. Next to the common citizens, we also want to activate more vulnerable individuals, who sometimes have a lot of skills, and whose potential we did not use until now (win-win). We also strongly believe in the very witty and bright ideas of children.

2. Solution: activities

Kortrijk set up new models for strong empowerment:

- *Kortrijk spreekt* (Kortrijk speaks up) is a method to let policy makers listen actively to the citizens by visiting the citizens literally in their homes.

- *Budget Games* are still to be held in several environments on different themes (e.g. let the local residents from the city district Heule decide themselves on what kind of urban changes the available investment money of the city will be spent; kids from 3 schools in a deprived

neighborhood decided themselves about the money they got from the city. They decided to spend it to improve the neighborhood and they made sustainable choices themselves).

- *Kortrijk doet mee* (Kortrijk participates) is an interactive web platform on which citizens can post their initiatives or express their wishes. They could actively solve the problems/ work out the ideas themselves. www.kortrijkdoetmee.be

The social district-workers of the city co-operate with De Stuyverij (an independent Citizen Lab) to use these innovative methods in a more efficient way. They have a substantial potential to get the outcome that SELF! wants: the increase of participation and sustainable self-reliance of the citizens on behalf of societal matters. www.destuyverij.be

3. Stakeholders involved, local partners

Policy makers, citizens of Kortrijk/local residents, district social workers, the Program Management Kortrijk Speaks up, “De Stuyverij” (= a Citizen Lab in Kortrijk, that -so far- has been working independently with residents of different districts in the city).

4. Activities, local outputs and outcomes planned

- Sustainable *Budget Games*, held in different districts of the city of Kortrijk. Citizens think for themselves, discuss priorities and the allocation of budgets (co-learning). Local authorities do not take part of the game, they only support. Citizens are the key players in this game. Local authorities gain experience in choosing priorities with a financial impact.
- An interactive web platform “*Kortrijk spreekt én doet mee*” (i.e. “Kortrijk participates”).. www.kortrijkdoetmee.be. It is an easily accessible on-line tool, which stimulates positive citizens’ actions, social cohesion and responsibility. It also provides a communication tool for the different activities. It is a way to visualize the social, dynamic and creative side of the city and puts it into the spotlight.
- Innovative methods to change the mindset of the citizens (adults and kids): take responsibilities and create new and sustainable initiatives;
- Reach full potential and quality of facilitation (legally, logistically, socially, communication, ...)
- Social workers experiment and integrate new methods in their daily practice in different neighbourhoods and districts for different situations, goals, themes, target groups,
- *De Stuyverij* works together with the city-social workers in several neighbourhoods integrating workable methods & tools in order to make their local work durable and effective for a large group of citizens in that neighbourhood. The main goal of these tools and methods is empowering citizens in taking action, connecting with each other on a physical basis. A result is a more liveable, integrated and social cohesive neighbourhood. The results of these co-operations are sustainable as they are being continuously followed up by the local residents themselves (www.destuyverij.be).

This way of working results in a smart, sustainable and inclusive and stronger community covered by local self-governance, strategically connected and facilitated both on- and offline.

It will also be a learning process for local governments on how to adapt to transition and to change their policy, taking into account that change is not creating chaos, but new and very

interesting sustainable outcomes: cf. <https://decorrespondent.nl/2898/Hoe-duurzaamheid-een-duurzame-samenleving-in-de-weg-staat-en-wat-eraan-te-doen/163688875812-8c761e48>

5. Innovative and transnational aspects

- Make citizens stronger by empowering them, as a result of a bottom up strategy. In these integrated models we show that they can be innovative and sustainable.
- Also involve children in innovative ways to build on sustainable initiatives concerning concrete themes, e.g. bike safety, use of public domain, education, health, ...
- Integrating of a social business model on sustainable citizens' involvement by means of new methods like *Budget Games*, web platform-based engagements, peer to peer transition movements, exchange of skills, ...

6. Barriers

- Exchange of knowhow and return should be in a perfect balance. Therefore it is important that the people involved are taken seriously: not only do they work for improving the city, they also get a good feeling out of it. It must be a real win-win situation.
- Who is going to check and keep a finger on the pulse? What means do you use to get guaranteed sustainable results?
- Exchange of knowhow and return should be in a perfect balance. Therefore it is important that the people involved are taken seriously: not only do they work for improving the city, they also get a good feeling out of it. Taking "ownership" of their own neighbourhood empowers people and gives them more value in life. Therefore the right balance must lead to a real win-win situation.
- Who is going to check and keep a finger on the pulse? What means do you use to get guaranteed sustainable results? These are important questions to hold an eye on. "De Stuyverij" (a Citizen Lab in the form of an innovative community house) develops social impact concepts and tools that groups the topics, focuses on experiments and monitor results. Eventually this leads to a reproducible monitoring system.
- Another challenge is also to be able to pick the right ideas without judging the lesser ideas.
- Keeping the power with the people involves a "newer" attitude from the local city workers, in which a big structure has its challenges.

7. (Transferable) models and tools applied

- "Kortrijk doet mee" is an interactive web platform that is used successfully but will be upgraded and function as user-centred as possible.
- "Budget Games" is a tool to activate citizens to make independent decisions on city budgets.
- Innovative methods to keep people motivated and involved, generated by co-operating with De Stuyverij.
- Peer groups will not only involve adults, but also children, which is also quite new for city-governments.