

BRUSSELS, Belgium.

Science Spotting in the Park

LEADING ORGANIZATION:
Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (Natural History Museum)

Partner organizations:
Regional Ministry of research, Municipality of Brussels, ULB, VUB (Universities), Petits Débrouillards (Science communicators), Probio (Biology teachers' association), EGEB, City mine(d), AQL (Citizens' association).

Setting the scene:

Getting to know numerous and strongly determined citizens associations has helped the RBINS match one of its main core business: "biodiversity protection and awareness" with the citizens current main concern: "water management", leading to the development of a common project for several districts of Brussels with the local authorities support.



Local Action Plan

What is your Local Action Plan trying to achieve?

• Brussels has chosen to establish a strategy to create sustainable districts, whether it is a matter of old districts or wasteland to be transformed, renovating buildings or initiating new ways of living together. Our Local Action Plan objective is to address the current challenges faced by the City and the Region in terms of sustainability but also water management. The partnership that has been created was initially a request from the citizens' association to take part to this positive political trend regarding the two above mentioned topics. The role of the RBINS and Universities is to add their scientific focus and expertise so as to create better argued common projects in the vast fields of sustainability and biodiversity.

What are the significant highlights in your LAP development (past and future)?

• The LAP has grown little by little from citizens events and workshops at the RBINS in 2011, to common projects drafting involving meetings with the Municipality and Region representatives and the obtention of their financial support. Today, the LAP actors are research institutions, citizens' associations and political representatives which have together as first step developed a biodiversity trail in a large designated Historic Monument of the European Capital city: the Leopold Park. The goal is to extend in the coming years common projects of the same kind to other

districts, according to the specific needs of their inhabitants and environment.

Citizen consultation

How did you/will you consult with citizens?

• Citizens are at the origin of the LAP and PA on water management and sustainability. They have been involved in the framework of the « Water Plan » for Brussels requested by the Region in 2011, forming the *Etats Généraux de l'Eau à Bruxelles (EGEB)* and performed events, consultations and researches to feed the Water Plan. The RBINS took part and supported this initiative by organizing workshops and the EGEB Closure Forum attended by other citizens associations as well as Region and City representatives. This collaboration led to other partnerships with Universities and debates organisers on Water Management and to the PA. Citizens consultations are taking place in various contexts and forums: Citizens associations are involved in the common projects (PA and its replications). During the PA, some interviews were performed to collect impressions and opinions on the PA itself: a biodiversity trail in a historical and protected Park, *is it relevant and what you expect it to be?*; the upcoming projects are planning consultations through large meetings in the districts in order to develop activities tailored to the citizens needs and wishes.

Pilot Activity

Main objective

- Enable the citizens, with scientists' support, to have their say on the rehabilitation of their urban and public areas through debates and dialogues with the local authorities;
- Create some long term collaborations between the local authorities, the citizens and scientists through direct contacts and joint rehabilitation projects, and improve Brussels' quality of life.

Description

The Leopold Park presents a hill and is at the top of the valley of the Maalbeek stream. The stream has been covered as has been the case for many water courses in Brussels. At the top of the Park lies the RBINS and the European Parliament and at its bottom a pond, a playfield, a medieval tower and a wild land ("Eggevoort") currently derelict. Taking the opportunity of a rehabilitation project, the citizens wish to have their voice heard notably because the current water flow does not take into account the use of natural rain water flow. Instead, the pond is currently filled with drinkable water (tap water!) and the artificially built rills transport drinkable water from the top of the hill, while they could be rainwater carriers instead. The citizen's association (*NRU-New Urban Rivers*) together with other similar citizens groups (*Etats Généraux de l'Eau à Bruxelles, PUM, etc.*) submitted a project to the authorities responsible for the Park rehabilitation at the Region and

Municipality level. They have written down their suggestions based on scientific studies to improve the water flow and management in the Park and proposed related sustainable activities. In this framework, the RBINS has developed its PA to be included in the *NRU* proposal to the local authorities. The PA focuses on the feasibility and implementation of a "biodiversity path" in the Park and its related area of wild land "Eggevoort" through notably the following actions: "Nature spots" of observation around the pond, local fauna and flora in the Park, pond banks vegetalization. The scientists from the RBINS, the Universities (ULB, VUB) and the citizens association have identified remarkable spots in the Park: The "wild land" Eggevoort is exploited as a biodiversity test area, an interesting humid zone, allowing citizens to examine the local flora and fauna and their evolution; Some trees have peculiar characteristics and are identified and spotted as remarkable. Several birds and plants are exotic species – a study of their influence on the local biodiversity and of the history of the zone could be made. The scientific content and scientific tests are developed jointly by the researchers of the RBINS, the biology teachers and the people competent among the citizens association and the Brussels Municipality. In collaboration with local agronomists and explainers/botanists from the research institutes, the citizens create a flowerbed in the park and along the pond by planting local species. The City gardeners are helping the citizens with the maintenance of these spots, and the

scientists (entomologists, botanists, etc.) are developing content on the fauna related to these habitats. These activities are to be replicated according to the seasons in other districts. Other activities such as butterflies / birds inventories performed by citizens can take place.

How does the Pilot Activity promote social dialogue?

The PA promotes social dialogue in several ways:

- The PA deals with various topics in the Park: The history and water flow managed by the citizens; the remarkable trees managed by biology teachers; the wild bees, flowered meadow and vegetalized pond banks (this point still under discussion with local authorities) by the RBINS. This led to a dialogue between the citizens, the RBINS and the Municipality and Institution protecting the Park to develop this trail and ensure its maintenance.
- The PA is aimed at being replicated in other districts, and thus to lead to discussions and activities involving new situations and new actors.

How does the Pilot Activity integrate with the Local Action Plan?

- Brussels PA partners are the main actors of the LAP
- Brussels PA is replicable to other districts, the whole projects will form Brussels LAP
- Brussels PA addresses the LAP concerns.