

Graffiti,  
Greenery &  
Goal-getters

and other stories

A GUIDE TO  
SOCIAL COHESION

Foreword

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BARACK OBAMA:

‘Change will not come if we wait  
for some other person or some other time.  
We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.  
We are the change that we seek.’

▲ Antwerp: De wereld om je hoek, De Coninckplein (June 2013).



## Moving towards a 'DIY' society

Dear Reader,

**This is a tale of social inclusion, more specifically about the social fabric of deprived city neighbourhoods and how to restore it. This is a social issue, which, by definition, cannot be considered as an isolated issue. Nowadays the process of social inclusion is inextricably linked with the shifting relationships within our society. So this is also a tale about these new relationships and insights. About daring to let go and wanting to pick up again where you left off.**

Let us start with a brief quote by Jan Rotmans:

'Our society is on the verge of a *tipping point*, a period of great change. There was a similar period at the end of the nineteenth century, when we laid the foundation of modern Europe. Today we once again find ourselves in between two worlds, about to establish the foundation of a more sustainable society. This change is already ongoing. There is a bottom-up movement, as we evolve from exploitation to cooperation, from individual thinking to community thinking, from borrowing from the world to paying it forward. 'Society 3.0' or the DIY society. Hundreds of thousands of people are already engaged in sustainability. All you need to participate is a change of mindset. As Johan Cruijff once said: 'You will only see it when you understand it.'<sup>1</sup>

The European **Deprived Neighbourhood Approach (DNA)** partnership project perfectly matches the description of a society 3.0, in which people take the initiative themselves to make their world a better place. Voluntarily in some cases, forced in others because the governments' directive role has been significantly reduced. Can we believe in the participation of local residents through a bottom-up approach or is this casting pearls before swine? When the partner cities Antwerp (B), Kortrijk (B), Breda (NL) and Medway (UK) embarked on this project together three years ago the objectives had been defined but nobody knew exactly where this project would take us and what the results would ultimately be. '**Graffiti, Greenery & Goal-getters**' is a travelogue of this fascinating adventure.

ANTWERP, July 2014

▲ 1. Jan Rotmans, Professor Transition Science Erasmus University Rotterdam in Trouw, 16 January 2014



▲ Antwerp: Pub crawl, De Coninckplein (December 2013).

## An inspiring read

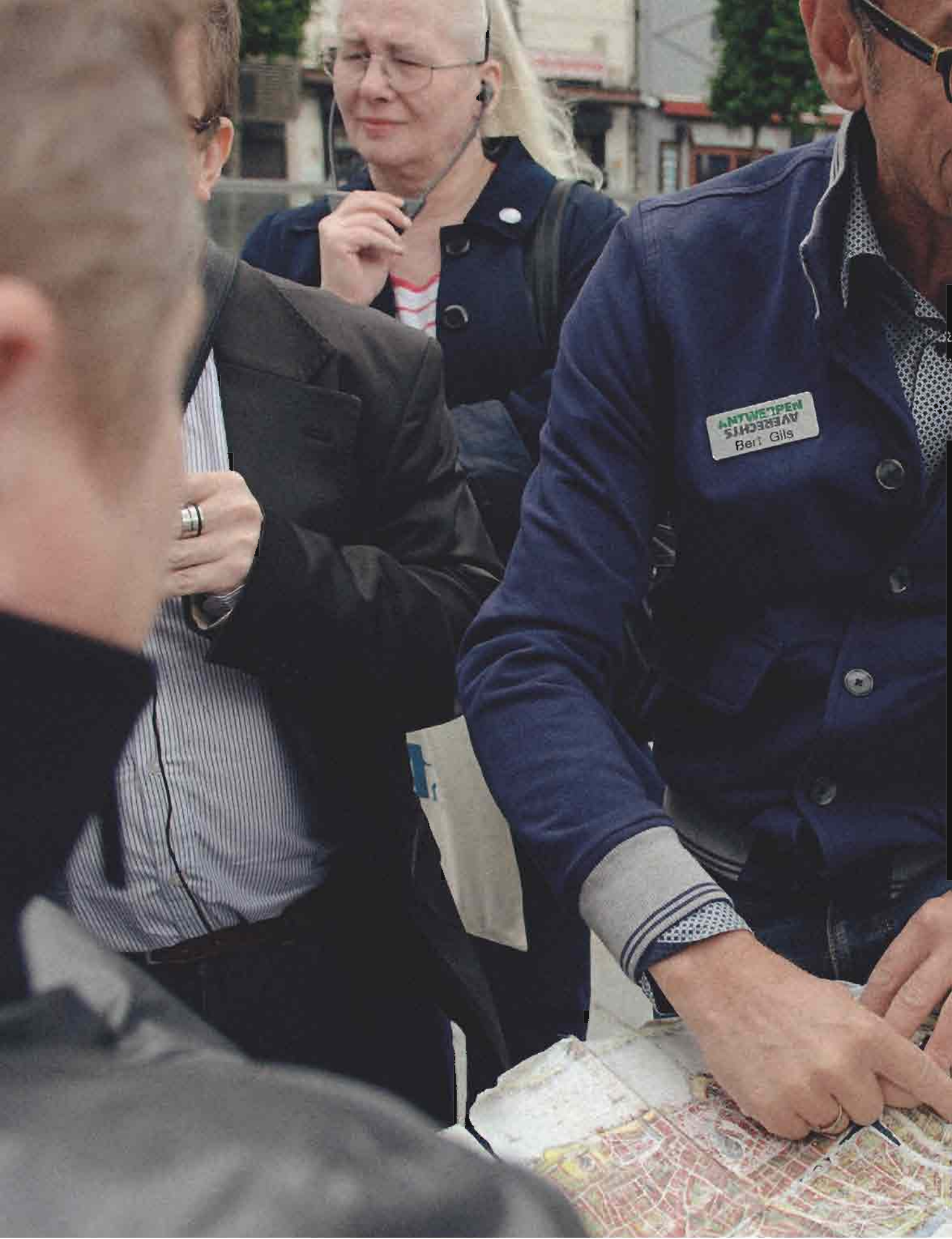
The discourse of this publication unfolds on several levels. Here readers will find a selection of the most important DNA projects – both small and large – which were organised in the four partner cities in recent years. At the same time we will also focus on the project’s cross-border impact on partners’ operations. We decided not to organise this book chronologically (the progress of the DNA project over the years) or geographically (what happened in each of the four partner cities). Instead, we chose to focus on several major themes which emerged as we studied the material. If you wish to follow the individual storylines for every partner city respectively, just let yourself be guided by the colour code which is used as a trail of crumbs in this book.

Finally, the various people who have been involved in this project for several years give a number of recommendations for the future.

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**‘Graffiti, Greenery & Goal-getters’** provides an overview of the completed DNA project as a *best practice guide* for anyone searching for inspiring examples of participation and bottom-up initiatives in the social field. At the same time the authors also hope that this has become a pleasant read and that the reader will enjoy leafing through it. In that sense you could also think of it as a social recipe book, which will probably provide creative fodder for professional and other aficionados.

Our working materials consisted of reports, study visits, progress and activity reports with a lot of interviews. The authors who compiled all this material were especially struck by the personal efforts and passion of the many local residents who effectively made ‘the difference’ in the described projects. As a result, this book also wishes to pay tribute to all the ground-breakers – citizens and politicians alike – who have forced an opening to a more social future for ‘their’ neighbourhood in the past three years.







PART 1:  
GUIDE

DNA wishes  
to increase social  
cohesion in the  
partner cities. The  
long-term objective  
is to create safe,  
attractive neighbour-  
hoods where people  
enjoy living, working  
and relaxing.

In order to help readers find their way through three years of DNA, we have set out the main points in this chapter.

Who were the partners that went on this adventure? Why did they sign up to this European project?

We then present the DNA project.

What was the wider framework?

What are the objectives?

Finally, in order to kick it all off, we sketch out the individual DNA ambitions of each partner city.

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1.  
**Four cities – one need**

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The tale of the Deprived Neighbourhood Approach (DNA) project unfolds in four European cities that engaged in a partnership for social cohesion and bottom-up operations over a three-year period. Four cities with very different identities, but also with neighbourhoods that required attention and which all had one thing in common: the social fabric urgently needed to be restored there.

A brief introduction...

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▲ Medway: Chatham High Street, one of the DNA districts.



# The neighbourhood around Antwerp's Central Station

Antwerpen-Noord (post code: 2060, the north of Antwerp) is a rather typical metropolitan station neighbourhood, with all the problems that are associated with this. It is a place of arrival for visitors and immigrants, a densely populated, mixed neighbourhood where dozens of nationalities live together. Generally speaking the houses in the neighbourhood are not in the best of shape and they are often used as transit homes. The income and social status of the local residents is very low here. As a result of the transit phenomenon there is a very low level of social cohesion here. Moreover, the neighbourhoods around Antwerp's Central Station mainly consist of neighbourhoods with an economy that reduces status. The people here require a lot of assistance. All these elements have contributed to making '2060' an important focus area for Antwerp.

### De Coninckplein: an open-air back room

De Coninckplein square, which is located in '2060', has had a rather unfortunate reputation for decades. The neighbourhood has struggled with heavy drug and alcohol abuse for years. The prevailing disadvantage means that various social organisations such as 'Doctors of the World' have their hands more than full providing assistance to the residents and the users of the square. The square is situated near the station and for a long time also had all the characteristics of a station neighbourhood. It was known as the 'back' of the station and served as an urban waiting room for newcomers. The neighbourhood had to contend with alcohol abuse, prostitution, international drug deals, brawls, street nuisance, litter and a widespread degradation of the infrastructure coupled with a large number of empty dwellings. The local residents had no sense whatsoever of ownership.

### An urban action plan: break, bend, build

Around the turn of the century the problems in Antwerp's station neighbourhood were tackled on a grand scale. There was a crack-down on prostitution with one operation. Ambitious urban renewal projects were developed and implemented, such as the construction of the Antwerp Design Center and subsequently in 2005 the construction of the eye-catching city library cum municipal offices in the former 'Permeke' garage/car show room in De Coninckplein. The urban real estate developer was also asked

to intervene in the square: strategic corner buildings were acquired, demolished and replaced with qualitative new-builds.

While all these radical interventions marked a crucial turnaround in the square's fate the social problems had not yet been eradicated. On the contrary even, as a result of the influx of new users (library customers, new, more prosperous residents...) the problem became even more pronounced. There was no real social mix. In recent years an in-depth analysis was made of what was happening on and around the square. In 2010, this analysis gave rise to an integrated urban action plan founded on three major principles: physical and social infrastructure, nuisance and criminality, and a targeted personal approach.

The municipal services henceforth took an integrated approach to the lack of safety and the nuisance in De Coninckplein and the surrounding streets, implementing a top-down plan. The campaign consisted of three phases: Break-Bend-Build.

*Break:* the repressive aspect: a ban on alcohol use and gatherings, a mandatory closing time for pubs, so-called GAS<sup>2</sup> fines ... Major police operations in 2010 and 2011 helped strongly reduce the nuisance caused by alcohol and drug abusers around the square.

*Bend:* accompanying measures: activation, 'active intervention', approaching those who caused the nuisance, ...

*Build:* build physical and social infrastructure: create an attractive living environment by renovating the square, with a new and diverse function and more security.

▲ 2. "Gemeentelijke Administratieve Sancties" (municipal administrative sanctions), similar to the ASBOs in Britain

The city worked with the public prosecutor's office and social organisations for the implementation of this plan.

What is the conclusion of all this? That the city's top-down decisions for the neighbourhood proved insufficient to bring about a sustainable turnaround. That is why the city also needed to work on social cohesion – along the lines of the project that DNA would devise. The top-down decisions of recent years did, however, succeed in creating a framework in which the municipal services could establish a dialogue with the local residents and work on restoring the social fabric with them.

### From forced therapy to voluntary action

The Antwerp DNA story takes place against the backdrop of the third BBB action phase – the (re)building. De Coninckplein was selected as a DNA area based on memos, discussion, the relocation of the Free Clinic centre for drug users to another neighbourhood and the police statistics about reduced criminality, as a result of which local residents would feel sufficiently safe to take action themselves.

## The city's top-down decisions for the neighbourhood proved insufficient to bring about a sustainable turnaround.

DNA's specific bottom-up approach aimed to 'hear' what the residents had to say about 'their' square, besides all the top-down measures.

Urban projects that need to garner durable support in the long term can only do so on the basis of ownership and participation. The objective: creating a square of and for everybody (residents, visitors, traders and people passing through) by actively tracking down and supporting local initiatives. The DNA budget provided the ideal leverage for this. Creating participation, commitment and a sense of shared ownership requires time and resources, two things DNA could provide. The local community regarded the 2010 action plan as forced therapy and initially thought of the 'European project' as a necessary evil, as well. Gradually, however, the added value became apparent and all the participants – residents and professionals alike – started to become really involved in the DNA adventure thanks to a series of projects that proved ground-breaking for the neighbourhood.

# Breda: a district-centric approach in Hoge Vucht

Boy Van Eil, Project Manager DNA Breda:

'The objective of DNA – to further develop a district-centric approach – tied in perfectly with the work we had been doing for years.

In comparison with the large cities in the Netherlands Breda is a medium-sized city with 175,000 inhabitants and a projected growth to 190,000. The city is too large to centralise the policy. That is why we work with districts, which in turn have been subdivided into a large number of neighbourhoods. Each of these entities requires a tailor-made approach.

As a result, the city has implemented a district-centric approach for almost 25 years.'

## Life after Vogelaar

**Boy Van Eil:** ‘Ten years ago, a district approach was developed on a national scale and became a priority on the political agenda. A minister for district development was even appointed, Mrs Ella Vogelaar. She had the districts’ problems analysed and chose to focus on the 40 biggest priorities at government level. The minister took away a lot of resources from the housing corporations choosing to invest these instead in the 40 districts – the so-called ‘Vogelaar’ districts. The next governments brushed aside Vogelaar’s policy but the results of her approach are visible: the districts in question continue to receive attention and the health of the residents and their labour market prospects have improved.’

‘There was no Vogelaar district in Breda but we had been working along the same lines for quite some time. District development in Breda means that we let our districts take action themselves. The recommendations of the sociologist Jos Van Der Lans (*see elsewhere in this publication*) also pointed in this direction. In Breda district development means that all the districts are monitored and receive a score based on their economic development, wellbeing, public health, sense of security, whether it is a good district to live and so on. In short, what do people think about the quality of life in their district? Every two years we map the district in our ‘Wijkmonitor’ or District Monitor, a report which includes all of the aforementioned data. This is a relative and subjective report, because it is never tested against objective information. It also looks at how the districts relate to each other. This means some always perform better than others. Based on this report the mayor and aldermen earmarked the Geeren-Noord and Geeren-Zuid neighbourhoods in the Hoëge Vucht district as

districts that merited special attention. This polder area was rapidly built up in the Sixties as a result of the population explosion. A large number of spacious cooperation dwellings were built. These are owned by three Breda housing corporations: AlleeWonen, Wonen Breburg and Laurentius.’

## Geeren-Noord: learning and health problems

Compared with other inhabitants of Breda the residents of the district of Geeren-Noord tend to be very negative when asked about the quality of life in their neighbourhood. The people do not engage with each other much. The 2014 Security Monitor indicates that 31% of all the residents feel unsafe in their own neighbourhood – something which is not reflected in police figures – and are not satisfied about the quantity of litter and the maintenance of the Public Space. The latter does not correlate with the measurements of the area managers of the ‘Outdoor space’ (Public Space) service. In spite of the monotony of the housing a large percentage of the people who relocate choose a dwelling in the same neighbourhood. This especially applies to older people, who feel that the neighbourhood is suited to their own age category and mainly praise the facilities. The number of pupils in Geeren-Noord with learning problems is four times higher (40%) than among peers in other districts of Breda. Eighteen percent drop out of education before obtaining basic qualification. This is twice as high as the overall figure for Breda. The share of unemployed young people is twice as high as the average in Breda. A quarter to one third of young people live in households with an income around the poverty line and many young people and young adults have already been in trouble with the police. A relatively high number of

young people have trouble with their peers. The nuisance caused by young people is also higher than average compared with the rest of Breda. In terms of their health, the young and adult residents of Geeren are a risk group: many of them are obese and do not exercise enough or do not practice enough sport. The percentage of young people who are overweight is the highest in Geeren-Noord: 36% of young people are overweight and 15% are even obese. There are quite a number of vulnerable people among the older residents. A lot of older people receive (informal) care and do not feel healthy.

### Geeren-Zuid: behind the façades of the garden city

Geeren-Zuid was also built in the Sixties as a modern new-build district for Breda's growing population. It became a garden city with wide streets and a lot of green areas with flowerbeds, designed for middle class families. Some of the first residents to move in still live here today. This is a clearly demarcated neighbourhood, with facilities in the vicinity. The neighbourhood has a shopping centre, a community school and a good bus connection with the city centre. Several single family dwellings are occupied by residents with different cultural backgrounds. Walk around here and at first glance you see a nice residential neighbourhood with an austere but viable layout. But there is a lot more going on behind the façades. A lot of work has already been done with young people. Currently the town is working on tackling the health issues because here too a lot of the young people are battling obesity.

Although the residents of Geeren-Zuid are also very negative about the quality of life and their residential surroundings, probably largely due to a feeling of insecurity, in general the quality

of life here is rather average or even above average. The neighbourhood scores well above average in terms of the facilities and the quality of the Public Space. In spite of the monotonous housing and the lack of social contact a lot of residents prefer to stay in Geeren-Noord when they (have to) move – much like the residents in Geeren-Noord. The opportunities for children and young people in the neighbourhood are not as qualitative. This is largely due to the high share of low skilled, unemployed young people, children who live in poverty, police suspects among young adults and the low percentage of young people who are a member of an association.

Low income also plays a role among adults: a lot of (long-term) unemployed, including a lot of immigrants and women, and several beneficiaries. One fifth of the households here have survived on the minimum social income for a longer period of time. The number of residents that are members of an association is also low among adults but a quarter of the local residents have actively contributed to improving the neighbourhood.

Although the residents of Geeren-Noord and Geeren-Zuid do not have a positive perception of their neighbourhood they do feel that there has been some improvement in their neighbourhood in recent years and they expect to see a positive evolution in the future. The uniform housing and the low value of the real estate contribute to the below average score of these neighbourhoods in terms of image. It is relatively easy to find social housing in Geeren as a result.

**It is relatively easy to find social housing in Geeren.**

# Kortrijk, a city with different speeds

Kortrijk, and by extension South-West Flanders, is sometimes called the Texas of Flanders because of its textile industry and its economic development. And yet the increase in poverty in Kortrijk, a city with 75,000 inhabitants, is worrying and often also invisible. Like other major cities in Flanders Kortrijk has to contend with poverty. One in seven children in Kortrijk is born into poverty. The gap between Belgians and 'new' Belgians is and continues to be significant.



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**In comparison with other West-Flemish cities like Bruges and Roeselare the unemployment is too high. That is why Kortrijk appointed an alderman who is explicitly responsible for combating poverty. Moreover, the city is targeting new Belgians, hoping to get them on board in the ‘new’ Kortrijk. The rights and duties are the cornerstone of the urban policy. The city has opted in favour of an active and prosperous city which makes all of its residents stronger, with activation and participation on every level. Strong streets, neighbourhoods and districts are a priority in this frame. The city attaches a lot of importance to district, neighbourhood and street committees. Where these do not yet exist, stimuli are given to establish such committees.<sup>3</sup>**

### Complex ‘one-man’ neighbourhoods

Kortrijk has six neighbourhoods that require attention, including Lange Munte and the V-Tex Site/Stasegemstraat. These are both ‘one-man’ neighbourhoods – this means that only one community worker is available, while other neighbourhoods can rely on a team of community workers. This is the reason why these neighbourhoods were chosen as DNA areas.

### Lange Munte: a ‘young’ neighbourhood with 29 nationalities

Lange Munte is not a very densely populated neighbourhood. Looking at the demographics of this neighbourhood we see that the number of residents of foreign origin is higher than the average for Kortrijk. The average age is also significantly lower than the average in Kortrijk

(about 38 years). The average household has three members. The incomes also score low (the second lowest in Kortrijk). The neighbourhood is made up of a social housing neighbourhood and a residential neighbourhood. The social housing neighbourhood is one of the twelve most vulnerable areas in Kortrijk. The unemployment pressure is higher than average and there are not many traders or businesses. The level of criminality is half of the Kortrijk average.

Lange Munte was the first neighbourhood where community development actions were implemented. The neighbourhood has a population of 2,700 inhabitants, 1,000 of which live in the social housing neighbourhood, in 278 dwellings. The neighbourhood is ageing at a rapid pace. At the same time a lot of newcomers are arriving here: there are 29 different nationalities in all. The city has built owner-occupied homes and social rented housing here. A lot of residents in Lange Munte depend on the social housing corporation CVBA Goedkope Woning (of which the city and the Public Social Welfare Centre are the majority stakeholders) but the corporation does not

spend much on residential comfort, such as double glazing. The result is a negative trend in the neighbourhood (low income – high energy bills). Petitions were unable to remediate the situation. There is no real collaboration between the services of the Public Social Welfare Centre, the community development projects or

**Lange Munte is ageing at a rapid pace. At the same time a lot of newcomers are arriving here: there are 29 different nationalities in all.**

▲ 3. Source: Coalition agreement “Plan Nieuw Kortrijk”, 2013

neighbourhood teams, like in Breda.

On the other hand Lange Munte has a lot of green areas, open Public Spaces and car-free streets, making it a pleasant area to live for families with children. A local survey on the subject of wellbeing raised the issue of safety: in spite of the positive figures in the Neighbourhood Monitor there was a general feeling of insecurity. In objective terms the neighbourhood is not any unsafer than other neighbourhoods but people do not report much nuisance from young people hanging around, because they fear retributions. Hence the perception of Lange Munte as an unsafe neighbourhood. The desolate open spaces in the neighbourhood also contribute to this feeling of insecurity.

### V-TEX/Stasegemstraat: life after the factory

The V-Tex neighbourhood once was a lively industrial site, renowned for its large textile factories, including the V-Tex factory. The factory workers lived in small houses that were specially built for them. The many pubs and stores made this a vibrant part of the city. When the factories closed down many of the original residents left. The pubs and stores closed. The neighbourhood became poor very quickly and gradually also acquired a negative reputation.

The V-Tex factory closed in 1996. The entire site, which is now owned by SOK (the munic-

ipal authority in charge of urban planning in Kortrijk), was heavily polluted and needed to be remediated. Today 'de V-Tex' has become a multicultural neighbourhood, largely because of the small dwellings and the mosque that opened here. The colourful population tends to live alongside each other, instead of with each other. The neighbourhood, especially the adjacent Stasegemstraat, is crippled by a lack of social cohesion and generally looks drab, suffering from a lack of maintenance. This is a transit neighbourhood for many newcomers.

Stasegemstraat, which constitutes an important traffic axis, is characterised by a high

level of diversity: middle class dwellings, social dwellings, a mosque, youth facilities, a youth centre aimed at young people of foreign origin, a supermarket and a laundrette. All in all the objective crime figures are low and the nuisance is relatively limited. In 2006, the gate building of V-Tex – which

has since become an important community centre – in Pieter Deconincklaan opened. The site of the former textile factory will be redeveloped: the aim is to build 39 single-household dwellings, twelve apartments and a park here. And yet non-residents tend to associate the neighbourhood with negative things. As a neighbourhood resident who moved here from a 'better' Kortrijk neighbourhood said: 'Moving to Stasegemstraat and buying a house there? My neighbours thought I'd gone mad.'

RESIDENT:

**'Moving to Stasegemstraat and buying a house there? My neighbours thought I'd gone mad.'**

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# Medway: challenges in the shadow of London

Medway is an administratively autonomous entity within the British county of Kent. It can be compared with a Belgian 'arrondissement'. The entity comprises the municipalities of Chatham, Rochester, Gillingham, Rainham, Strood and Luton/Wayfield and encompasses 253,000 residents. There are also 13,000 trading businesses and four universities.

**Medway, which is located approximately 50 km to the east of London, has a rich and interesting past. Since the Middle Ages, Rochester has been an important trading centre and is proud to have one of the largest castles from the Middle Ages in England. For many centuries, Chatham was known for its shipyards which, until the 1980s, provided 7,000 jobs. After closures, the region remained densely populated – partially as a result of a huge influx from Southern Asia and Eastern Europe, but new investment was not particularly forthcoming.**

Just like many other post-industrial cities, Medway has recently been working on regenerating the industrial landscape of old. Three million pounds was released in 2014 for the regeneration of the public area along the waterfront, in order to make it more appealing for visitors and residents. In this context, every intervention has to offer added value on a social level, too.

#### **Four different focus areas**

Medway Council selected four areas for the DNA project: Chatham High Street, Luton, All Saints and White Road Estate. Each one of these areas has active forums, groups or residents associations PACT groups (Partners and Communities together) and many residents are members thereof. A DNA residents working group is made up of residents, traders, neighbourhood council members, members of voluntary organisations,

the Chatham town centre forum and Medway Council staff.

#### **Chatham Town Centre: the ships are long gone**

Chatham is a historical urban entity within Medway. With the loss of the old shipyards, much of the surrounding industries also disap-

peared. The city centre comprises a typical 'High Street' with the obligatory shopping centre from the 1970s. The economic downturn had a massive impact on many companies in the area. This led to many shops in the High Street being left

empty. This is one of the most deprived areas of Chatham; in 2010, the centre was in the top three percent of the most deprived areas in England. Employment, healthcare and criminality are the most significant problems. The centre had a very bad name among residents. It was a location you were better off avoiding as a result of antisocial behaviour, alcoholics on the street and drug dealing and usage. Another problem was the high level of illegal trading practices, such as late night shops that sold cheap cider and beer.

#### **White Road Estate: a rental estate with a 'reputation'**

White Road Estate lies two kilometres from the centre of Chatham. The majority of the houses are rented out by the housing association MHS. The area was included in the DNA project as one

**In 2010, the centre of Chatham ranked among the top three percent most deprived areas in England.**

of the most deprived areas in Chatham. A survey in 2010 showed that the residents scored very low on parameters such as education, professional skills and income. Almost a third of the population is made up of children and youngsters (0-15 years old). There is a community centre that offers a range of activities for both adults and children. 'Sure Start', a national programme for toddlers, offers play sessions in the centre, a toy library and support for parents. Pregnant mothers can ask for assistance from a midwife and also obtain pre and post-natal support. The White Road Estate has a 'bad' reputation and is regarded as an area in which nobody would choose to live. In 2012, a group of mothers formed the White Road Estate neighbourhood panel in order to portray the area in a more positive light.

Safer Communities team have worked alongside residents to develop numerous initiatives for improved neighbourhood safety and social cohesion. The workers on the Safer Communities team tackle the day-to-day environmental problems with the residents, such as illegal dumping and other forms of nuisance.

### Luton/Wayfield: migrants and librarians

Luton/Wayfield is an area with a substantial migrant population. There is tension between the various communities and there are regular issues as a result of this (public drunkenness, night time noise, etc.). The police have to intervene in the area left, right and centre. There is no community centre in Luton. Luton Library provides access to computers, activities for all age groups and meeting space for residents groups. Christchurch provides activities including a crèche for children and lunch club for older people.

## Most tenants in All Saints are youngsters and newcomers from Eastern Europe (Slovakian Roma).

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### All Saints: slum landlords and illegal dumping

All Saints is an area with a mix of social housing and privately owned homes. Many of the houses are rented out cheaply by slum landlords and are in a very bad condition. Most tenants are youngsters and newcomers from Eastern Europe (Slovakian Roma). The neighbourhood has to deal with antisocial behaviour, drugs, alcoholism and prostitution. The quality of life is low: general mess and illegal dumping (dumping waste in public areas) are ongoing problems. This was selected as a DNA area for these reasons. In 2001, an All Saints community project was set up to provide answers to the needs and problems in the neighbourhood. It offers a range of activities for adults and youngsters. The 'Sure Start' programme also offers care and activities for toddlers and parents here. Kent police and the Medway Council



▲ Antwerp: De Coninckplein.



▲ Antwerp: De Coninckplein  
Action Plan according to Theater Vonk.



▲ Kortrijk: Lange Munte.



▲ Kortrijk: Lange Munte.





▲ Breda: Geeren-Zuid.



▲ Medway: Chatham High Street.



▲ Medway: Chatham High Street.



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## 2. DNA close-up

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**In July 2011, the cities of Antwerp, Breda, Kortrijk and Medway joined forces in this pilot project for greater social cohesion. Why DNA? What does it entail? What are the criteria and the objectives? Who stands to benefit?**

### **The bigger picture: a European support programme**

On 26 September 2007 the European Commission approved a programme for cross-border territorial collaboration between Belgium, Germany, Ireland, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Great Britain for 2007-2013. The 'North-Western Europe' part of the programme comprises EU grants for 93 areas in the participating countries. The total budget amounts to about 696 million euros. The EU invests about 355 million euros into the programme through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

The programme's main objective: to take advantage of the collaboration between important stakeholders and tackle territorial issues in North-Western Europe. The programme wants to contribute to the region's economic competitiveness, promoting a regionally balanced and sustainable development.

An important asset of this programme is that it combines action on the regional, national and

interregional levels. These cross-border partnerships and actions increasingly supplement the activities, the policy and the programmes of the individual participating countries.

### **Zooming in on Interreg IV A 2 Seas: cross-border collaboration to enhance the social fabric**

If we delve deeper into the European support framework for North-Western Europe, the INTERREG IVA 2 Seas programme comes into focus. This programme encourages cross-border collaboration between the coastal areas of four Member States: France, England (the UK), Belgium and the Netherlands.

*Deprived Neighbourhood Approach through the Creation of Ownership (DNA)* is an Interreg VIA 2 Seas grant project. Its specific priority is to 'improve the quality of life'. The main objectives are to promote and improve the social inclusion and the wellbeing of the various groups in society.

### DNA: from 'residents' to 'owners'

The DNA project, which the four partner cities conceived and developed, ran from 1 July 2011 until 30 September 2014. When this book went to press the preparations were underway for an international closing conference in Antwerp on 23 September 2014, which marked the end of the project.

DNA wishes to increase social inclusion in the partner cities. The long-term objective is to create safe, attractive neighbourhoods where people enjoy living, working and relaxing. The idea first and foremost is to restore the social fabric in vulnerable, deprived neighbourhoods. DNA capitalises on the need to improve the quality of life for the people who reside in these neighbourhoods. The project wishes to strengthen the sense of ownership vis-à-vis one's own residential environment by offering the residents the opportunity to take responsibility for their own neighbourhood and develop and implement initiatives. The City of Antwerp (the lead partner), the PSWC<sup>4</sup> of Kortrijk, Medway Council and the town of Breda joined forces for three years in a series of local and cross-border actions in order to achieve this objective. Within the context of these partnerships a productive dialogue was gradually established between all kinds of professional employees of local governments and local residents.

### A bottom-up approach yields sustainable results

Letting initiatives originate in the community and developing them into something that receives more widespread support - this bottom-up working principle constituted the back-

bone of the DNA project. Local residents were given the opportunity to choose the themes and angles for developing projects.

The low-level entry option was stimulated by founding neighbourhood committees, study visits by mixed teams of professionals and local residents, local workshops, a transnational taskforce, local pilot projects and the dynamics of a cross-border competition called the European Ownership Award.

For most governments this bottom-up approach is an atypical approach, and many city services often feel rather insecure as a result. This is quite logical given that as a traditional 'caring' government you are asked to let go of certain matters which you know you can probably organise quicker and more efficiently. But the efficiency and speed lost on this level are often compensated for by the sustainability and the social support for these projects.

The local residents – who often expect the local government to take the initiative as far as their living environment is concerned – often also feel uncertain about this bottom-up approach. A learning process, with the necessary trials and errors, was thus necessary for both parties. From the inception it was clear that some partner cities already had more experience in this field than others. In this framework Flanders has made the least progress in terms of policy although a wide range of civic initia-

For most governments this bottom-up approach is an atypical approach, and many city services often feel rather insecure as a result.

▲ 4. Public Social Welfare Centre. On behalf of the local public administration the Kortrijk PSWC organises assistance, services and care for anyone living in Kortrijk, focussing specifically on deprived people and senior citizens.

tives have been generated with a bottom-up approach. To compensate for this backlog the Antwerp DNA team decided to work with a specialised coach for this project.

Readers will learn how this bottom-up approach was implemented in the various partner cities thanks to the stories about the various local actions.

As will repeatedly become apparent in this book the bottom-up principle in any event is necessary to supplement the regular top-down approach if you want to encourage residents to take ownership of their own neighbourhood.

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▲ Kortrijk: Children rule! Stasegemstraat party on European Cooperation Day (September 2012).

## Small revolutions!

**Projects by local residents that originated bottom-up are part of what Rik Pinxten, a former professor of anthropology at the University of Ghent calls 'small revolutions'. They can be quite meaningful in a society 'in which we need to search for alternatives in an alert and self-sufficient manner'.**

Pinxten argues in favour of greater social self-sufficiency. There is not really a place for bartering and sharing in a neo-liberal society. In fact Margaret Thatcher quite notoriously said *'There is no such thing as society'*. Following the deep systemic crisis which we experienced in recent years Pinxten has seen a new model develop.

It is not merely defined by economy but by a combination of economy and culture. Referring to Bill Clinton's maxim you end up with *'It's the economy and culture, stupid!'* In our society wellbeing and happiness are largely defined by our material possessions. As a result, there is always a risk that 'you are because of what you have'. Groups that cannot derive a 'respectable identity' from their possessions are less wealthy as consumers and thus considered marginal in our identity-fuelled culture. They are 'less human'. But it is rather short-sighted to merely identify happiness and finding fulfilment with possessions. 'Solidarity, empathy, responsibility and even consolation and shared joy and grief are fundamental experiences of a social nature, which are not taken into consideration in our competition model that is out of control'.

Pinxten among others cites food, culture, health and politics as fundamental dimensions of being human, which should not be exclusively left to the market but in which citizens can also undertake a lot of action: 'what we can do ourselves, with everybody, because there is a lot of margin at the bottom'. In terms of food, town councils have to develop a spatial planning policy that promotes the self-sufficiency of town residents. Pinxten argues in favour of experiments, 'partly of a commercial nature and partly in the form of cooperatives', starting in the cities, the 'most important communities in our society'. Pinxten sees this as a 'great opportunity to engage in inclusive politics. Immigrants and the native population, refugees and the faithful can be asked to contribute to such a joint project.'

In terms of health he argues in favour of a stronger preventative approach to medicine. Part of the health care can be delegated to the patient, the patients group or care providers, for example through social media. This also requires a more active effort and own initiative on behalf of the residents. Pinxten thinks that powers will be transferred from the governments to the citizens and that this process cannot be stopped: 'the only real democratic movement of the past decades.' In case of opposition and when people start to search for alternatives there is hope again and creativity starts to flourish again... Decision-makers that are willing to listen and take their citizens seriously will be considered wise and competent leaders (in the future).

▲ Source: Rik Pinxten. 'Kleine Revoluties', EPO, 2013

## Working together, focussing on three themes

The microcosm of the urban fabric consists of 'ordinary' and not so ordinary local residents and traders, young entrepreneurs, regular visitors and people passing through as well as of groups of people like alcoholics and drug addicts. Target audiences that are not always easy to reach. In this framework the added value of combining several diverse expertise areas became more apparent...

During the preparatory strategic discussions for submitting the DNA project file the partner cities seemed to be confronted with very similar problems in their focus areas – although their approach was often quite different. Once all the questions and challenges had been collated it soon became clear that three focus areas needed to be tackled to improve the situation in deprived neighbourhoods and developing neighbourhoods:

- Community Safety
- Health & Wellbeing
- Public Space

During the preparatory sessions it also became clear that each of the partners contributed very specific skills to the project, based on their own work background and cultural and policy context. These complementary skills engendered rather high expectations in terms of knowledge exchange.

What about this complementarity?

**Antwerp** specialised in an integrated approach to deprived neighbourhoods. The City of Antwerp works very closely along with other services within the city, the local police and private organisations.

**Kortrijk** has a lot of expertise in terms of a low-level entry and a neighbourhood-oriented social wellbeing for individuals and groups. The city also has experience with specialised tools to analyse deprived neighbourhoods based on objective criteria.

**Medway** has significant experience with social regeneration and is capable of contributing several stakeholders to DNA: the police, several local council services and the National Health Service Medway.

**Breda** is an expert in terms of a location-specific approach of nuisance and stimulating entrepreneurship in unoccupied buildings.

Each city took on the role of lead partner for one of the themes in function of its skills. The lead partners would assure the knowledge transfer in relation to the selected theme through pilot projects and study visits to their own DNA area.

The roles were distributed as follows:

- Breda: lead partner for Community Safety
- Kortrijk: lead partner for Wellbeing
- Medway: lead partner for Health
- Antwerpen: lead partner for Public Space

This trifecta (Community Safety, Health & Wellbeing, Public Space) immediately provides a simple albeit powerful structure for the entire DNA approach. The various local and cross-border actions of the coming years would be developed in function of these thematic clusters. As a result the partners had a supralocal focus, which united them in a constant dialogue of knowledge transfer and cooperation. The difference in expertise levels as regards the bottom-up approach between the various cities was compensated for to a large extent by this

cross-border collaboration.

Without wishing to be exhaustive we provide a few examples of initiatives and projects that were developed around these themes in the course of the DNA project in the various cities:

### **Theme 1. Community Safety**

Workshops and pilot projects about nuisance, drugs, alcohol abuse, social cohesion, prevention, neighbourhood arbitration and community involvement.

### **Theme 2. Health & Wellbeing**

Pilot projects, local taskforces and a transnational taskforce on Health & Wellbeing, which developed an overarching cross-border definition of 'neighbourhood wellbeing', based on local surveys. An instrument that measures the perception of wellbeing.

### **Theme 3. Public Space**

Local taskforces about Public Space. Pilot projects about the development of facilities for children, the use and management of Public Space in deprived neighbourhoods, attractive streets and squares, the make-over of unoccupied buildings and places into vibrant meeting places, based on the input of residents and local traders. Partnerships with local stakeholders to effectively organise an offer.

### **An international partnership, the broad lines...**

The partners purposefully chose to combine the three themes (Community Safety, Health & Wellbeing and Public Space) for this project because all three are just as essential for better functioning neighbourhoods and promoting a commitment among the local residents.

The partners created and coached local committees/taskforces and workshops on each theme. Mutual study visits were organised for residents and professionals.

After the study visits the participating residents reported to their neighbours during local workshops. Afterwards, they examined how they could use this experience in their own neighbourhood. They received the support of professionals in this frame, who acted as a mediator between the residents themselves, local professionals and local politicians. The ideas from the workshops were developed and fine-tuned for implementation. In the meantime, the professionals facilitated the process on various levels, including the financial, administrative-legal and practical (implementation) level.

Pilot projects were set up for each theme in each of the DNA neighbourhoods while the partner cities supported and coached each other in the framework of cross-border teams.

Besides this a transnational workforce focusing on 'wellbeing' was founded by the Public Social Welfare Centre of Kortrijk, with representatives from the local workshops about Health & Wellbeing. This taskforce ended up formulating a joint definition of wellbeing, based on the results of the surveys. An instrument was developed based on this process to measure the perception of wellbeing. This measuring instrument will be used as a supplement to the existing Neighbourhood monitor (Buurtmonitor) of Kortrijk, which measures the objective wellbeing criteria.

In terms of 'Public Space' the partners organised the European Ownership Award (Europese Prijs Buurtinitiatieven), a transnational activity to promote neighbourhood ownership. After a

series of pre-selections it culminated in an awards ceremony.

### How did the DNA process go?

**Three years of planning, consultations, canvassing and surveys, studies, launches, starting over, visits, reflection, proposals, debates, celebrations, evaluations. In four different cities. In two different languages. With people from all layers of society. How do you go about organising something like this? Below is a list of ingredients ...**

'Cross-border' events, also for and by the local residents

*'Investing in your future. Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013 - Part-financed*

*by the European regional Development Fund*'. That is the complete baseline of the DNA programme. The 'cross-border' character of three years of DNA was structurally assured by mutual study visits and seminars. Each partner hosted a study visit in the field in which the city had the highest level of expertise (*see above*). Two seminars were also organised, one in Medway and one in Breda.

Thanks to these visits and seminars the professionals and the residents were given the opportunity to see what the grass looked like on the other side. This was a special experience for the participating local residents. They found themselves in a

largely unknown professional environment. The approach proved successful. Some local residents felt very at ease in the formal world of meeting rooms, auditoriums and keynote speakers during the seminar. They submitted their proposals and comments without further ado or political-academic considerations. The bottom-up approach was also extended in terms of knowledge and experience exchange because the local residents took part structurally in the visits and seminars. The local residents from the partner cities established a direct dialogue with each other about their concerns about

their respective living environment and where this could be improved.

The 'cross-border' character of three years of DNA was structurally assured by mutual study visits and seminars.

#### Monitoring Committees

A Monitoring Committee is a three-monthly project management meeting for

the control and planning of the project. Only for 'professionals' in other words. On the agenda: an update on finances, activities, six-monthly forecasts, problem-solving.

#### Activity Meetings

During the annual activity meeting the professionals discussed the ongoing activities and (new) methods were proposed.

#### Study visits

The knowledge and experience exchange among professionals during the DNA project was organised in various ways, but the emphasis was mainly on study visits. The study visits, in which groups of residents took part, had a lot of impact. Local workshops



were organised in each partner city based on these visits. The residents who participated in the study visit analysed what they had learnt from the other partner city and then implemented this knowledge in local pilot projects.

A brief overview:

- **April 2012 Medway (professionals):** visit, main theme 'health'.  
In Medway, thanks to DNA, there was a general consensus that resources were finally being earmarked for specific projects after many years of complaints and not much of a response. This created a positive dynamic among the local residents. Based on this first study visit Antwerp concluded that the idea of a 'community' with various services and meetings like in Medway was not feasible in Antwerp, where the emphasis mainly had to be on the low-entry in the field offering in the square.
- **June 2012 Kortrijk: cluster project Antwerp-Kortrijk.**  
Visit of Antwerp, which was very interested in the Kortrijk approach to 'well-being'. The community centres inspired Antwerp and both partners decided to establish their own collaboration cluster for this theme within the framework of DNA.
- **October 2012 Kortrijk** (residents): visit, main theme 'wellbeing'.
- **April 2013 Breda** (residents and professionals): visit, main theme 'Community Safety'.
- **June 2013 Antwerp** (residents and professionals): visit, main theme: the positive use of 'Public Space'.

### Seminars

The seminars that were organised once a year were used to communicate about DNA externally and to disseminate the project results. The seminars resulted in several fascinating and in-depth cross-border encounters, whereby the various parties delved deeper into the progress made in the field.

- **December 2012 Kortrijk** (residents and professionals)  
The first DNA seminar, which took place in Kortrijk on 4 December 2012 on the theme of 'ownership as medicine for improved health and wellbeing on the neighbourhood level', was a panel discussion with a keynote speaker and workshops. The guest speaker was Professor Dr Bram Verschuere (Public Administration and Public Management, University of Ghent) who spoke about co-production with local residents (*see elsewhere in this publication*). The seminar was attended by 150 participants, including 88 social work students of the West Flemish KATHO university college, who mainly appreciated the workshops. The DNA principle was also put into practice during the seminar as the residents helped define the agenda.
- **December 2013 Breda** (residents and professionals)  
The seminar on Community Safety which took place in Breda on 3 December 2013 was the sequel to the study visit to Breda in April 2013 on the same theme. During the seminar the partner cities exchanged experiences and best practices. Medway Council and the Public Social Welfare Centre Kortrijk stressed that they were inspired by Breda's approach,

which had already led to specific steps in the field. In the afternoon, an international jury announced the winners of the European Prize for Neighbourhood Ownership Initiatives (*see elsewhere in this publication*). The keynote speaker, Marnix Eysink Smeets, a former police officer and lecturer at Hogeschool Inholland (a university college in The Hague), who also specialised in local security themes, gave an inspiring lecture about the illogical relationship between the decreasing national crime figures and the growing sense of insecurity.

Change in districts is only sustainable if it has the support of local residents and front line workers, who after a while literally become part of their neighbourhood's DNA.

Change in districts is only sustainable if it has the support of local residents and front line workers, who after a while literally become part of their neighbourhood's DNA. The strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of the creative bottom-up approach to social regeneration were discussed in detail and commented by a professional who provided support for DNA for over three years (Ruben Degryse, DNA Project Manager Kortrijk) and academics who published on the subject (Professor Dirk Geldof,

**The closer: local residents contribute to a better closing conference!**

On 23 September 2014, the DNA project formally drew to a close in Antwerp. At this closing conference each partner again highlighted specific events and project phases. The results were also published at this conference.

Professor Rik Pinxten and Professor Eric Corijn). The residents of the different partner cities presented their own projects which had a positive impact in the field. Citizens, professionals and governments were given an overview of what worked/did not work and this publication was also presented there.

### Who stands to benefit from this?

As this project is fundamentally geared towards bringing together various stakeholders such as governments, wellbeing professionals and local citizens, the people for whom DNA can be relevant are naturally also very diverse. The most evident target audiences are the visitors and residents of deprived neighbourhoods, the members of local neighbourhood committees and taskforces, residents who are involved in local and cross-border activities, local entrepreneurs, traders, SMEs and potential start-ups. This story first and foremost focuses on them and their social emancipation.

A second group of stakeholders are the local, regional and national governments? Other European cities with a comparable background in terms of deprived neighbourhoods can take advantage of the knowledge sharing and knowledge building by the DNA partners who now share their findings with stakeholders all over Europe through their reports and this publication.

Finally, the local governments also stand to benefit significantly from better trained field workers. They were given the opportunity to develop their expertise in the framework of DNA during study visits, in taskforces and through pilot projects. In the future, they can implement

what they have learnt locally (pilot projects) and across the border (cross-border study visits): to support and stimulate / trigger citizens to develop their own living and working environment.

### The DNA partners, ready to go

**The DNA neighbourhoods and their 'expertise' have now been presented. Before we look at what happened during three years of DNA projects we will examine each partner's starting premises and ambitions.**

**Antwerp: social interaction, more green areas and better public lighting**

Project Manager **Birgitte Bruyninckx:**

'During DNA one of the main priorities for De Coninckplein was to make the square and the surrounding streets safer. The safety measures, such as the ban on all alcohol and the policing in the framework of the De Coninckplein Action Plan, are still in place. At the same time they are less noticeable because the square has since become significantly more viable, meaning the number of repressive, police interventions was reduced.'

The study visit about neighbourhood safety in Breda (leading partner for Community Safety) was deemed interesting and enriching by everyone. Back in Antwerp we wanted to further focus on durable projects, based on the surveys among local residents. A cleaner and greener square, good public lighting in the neighbourhood and more (informal) social control were the three main priorities that the square's residents wanted to focus on.'

'To further improve the sense of security in the square the DNA project would focus more on the steering committees of local residents, local traders, target groups that were difficult to reach and visitors. The main expectations of some of the residents whose opinion had been asked were the following: increased (informal) social control, preventative action and some material interventions. De Coninckplein square is associated with poverty, the bad health of many of the residents and the poor quality of the housing. There is a lack of information for the many newcomers. Until recently, a lot of drug addicts and alcohol abusers used to hang around the square. An increased feeling of well-being and the better health of local residents consequently were part of the proposed DNA approach to revitalise the neighbourhood and restore the self-respect of the target groups.'

'A local taskforce was organised in the field, founded by the social community workers. Actions were devised, based on three key themes: sport and healthy leisure activities, adapted information for newcomers and low-entry 'wellness' initiatives, such as healthy food and custom assistance. In Antwerp, DNA strove to improve health and wellbeing with more green areas in the city, through urban gardening and encouraging people to grow their own fruit and vegetables: a healthy, sustainable and tasty combination of more ownership, motivation and healthy food.'

'An unattractive square and bad housing, unattractive cafés without a terrace and a lack of space for children to play. Making De Coninckplein partly car-free and providing space for playing equipment seemed vital steps to increase the viability in a manner that was tailored to the local residents, people passing

through and (potential) users of the square. On the infrastructural level the city thought about partly renovating the square (which ultimately did not happen because the local government wishes to re-examine the plans, ed.), with café terraces and playing equipment to attract young families and traders again and provide an extra impulse for the library visitors. The square also had to be used more intensively and in a better way for all kinds of feel-good activities, which ultimately would enhance the public perception of De Coninckplein as a vibrant and vital square.'

**Kortrijk: health and wellbeing, defined in terms of social cohesion**

Kortrijk's Public Social Welfare Centre chose to approach health and wellbeing based on social cohesion instead of on healthcare, when it developed its DNA project proposal. Social contact, networks and connections were the cornerstone of Kortrijk's DNA project proposal. They opted for an integrated approach to the wellbeing and security issues based on the restoration of the social cohesion in the neighbourhoods involved. In Kortrijk,

DNA would fully focus on the co-production principle. They expressly chose not to focus on Public Space because the Public Social Welfare Centre

considered this to be mainly the city's competence. As we will see, however, DNA Kortrijk has indirectly had an impact on this specific theme (through the Children's Parliament and Spijkerpad, *see elsewhere in this publication*).

A DNA worker: 'V-Text and Lange Munte were selected as DNA neighbourhoods because they already had sufficiently advanced community projects in the V-Text gatehouse and the Lange

Munte community centre respectively. So it was relatively easy to launch something quickly there, with pilot projects that had already been partly launched and were now rolled out further. The community workers were only involved at a later stage, during the project development phase, because the project managers originally were uncertain how the project would develop. Ultimately Kortrijk's Public Social Welfare Centre chose to prioritise 'wellbeing' and 'viability' in this project and worked with the neighbourhood police. In the past, security contracts had already been concluded with the neighbourhood but they did not increase the sense of security. In Kortrijk the prevailing view was that merely relying on the police was not sufficient. The social cohesion in the neighbourhood needed to be strengthened first and foremost. This is not necessarily an obstacle to repression as it can be combined with it. Using the Public Space in a positive manner also increases the security. In that respect, Kortrijk was able to weigh in heavily on the definition of the objectives and was able to manage the content of the DNA project.'

**Breda: security for and thanks to healthier residents in Geeren**

As the lead partner for Community Safety Breda already could draw on extensive experience and a solid, structured approach to nuisance and criminality. Generally speaking the physical living environment in Breda is good but the social context in certain neighbourhoods contributes to a sense of insecurity: low income, a low level of schooling, personal problems, low social cohesion, conflicting cultures and a low level of interaction. The city responded to this by setting up a network, consisting of police, municipal services, city inspectors, the housing corporation, youth coaches, neighbourhood

**DNA in Kortrijk focuses on co-production.**

monitors and care agencies. The cornerstones of Breda's approach are neighbourhood arbitration, neighbourhood prevention and neighbourhood undertakings.

Another priority was health. There clearly were health problems in Geeren: overweight, diabetes, depression and psychosocial illnesses. The existing methods for tackling these problems proved insufficient. A new approach was needed, founded on integrated management that was tailored to the demand. So an environmental analysis was organised, professionals were trained with regard to a demand-driven approach, focus interviews with children, young people and parents were conducted, and the existing networks were integrated. It was also a matter of finding an answer to the underlying question: why did the residents exercise so little or eat unhealthily? An exercise taskforce and a healthy food taskforce were established for this purpose. The taskforces would formulate their recommendations based on the environmental analysis and a survey of the residents. The professionals mainly needed to provide support to residents and children especially and encourage them to exercise daily and eat healthily. The idea was also to determine which adjustments could be made to make the neighbourhood healthier. These could be of a physical nature (playing fields, pavements, cycling paths) or policy-based, e.g. through campaigns in the schools. The aim was to make people more aware of the fact that the healthy choice is the easy choice and to make young people exercise more. In Breda, two working groups were founded that focused on health and wellbeing: 'Healthy food and taking care of yourself' and 'the importance of your existence'.

Breda also wanted to focus on the revaluation of empty spaces and buildings. The community centre in Geeren would have to accommodate three activities: a paramedical centre where commercial organisations provided care to local residents, a community kitchen with a restaurant and multipurpose spaces for meetings, trainings, activities and organisations run by local residents.

#### **Medway: working on health and wellbeing, doing well in the public domain**

Medway is an urban region that has to deal with many social economic and spatial challenges. The precarious situation in the housing market is one such issue. **Vince Maple**, local councillor for Chatham Central: 'Bad housing is one of the most significant problems in the DNA areas. Medway has faced many challenges since Margaret Thatcher shut the shipyards. Many people left at that point, house prices fell and the economy plummeted compared to the rest of Kent. This created several deprived areas with high unemployment rates and low educational levels. For the past ten years or so, there has also been mass immigration from Eastern Europe, including many Roma. In Medway, many properties are also rented out by slum landlords who let their properties go to wrack and ruin. They then threaten the tenants if they dare to complain. All this makes life very difficult for *community leaders*, the police, the municipality and the community in general. Medway Council rents out 3,000 homes in Gillingham; in Chatham there is a housing association (MHS). There are 18 *Registered Social Landlords*; the MHS is the largest of these. We have a little more control over these than over private owners. However, in neighbourhoods with high immigration levels, conditions are wretched. Some houses are in a very bad way

and this results in health problems. MHS has a few good initiatives whereby residents are rewarded for their efforts (*Community Champions*) and they also provide sports equipment to local youngsters. Most of the Registered Social Landlords are sufficiently involved with their properties to at least maintain basic standards.'

For Medway, the starting blocks are set out: the city region will participate in the lead partnership on the theme 'Health and Wellbeing'. And one of their most notable achievements is also to be found within the sporting context (the Air Football project - *see elsewhere in this publication*).

Drugs and alcohol are recurring problems in the DNA areas despite previous campaigns. In the context of DNA, Medway Council planned neighbourhood safety campaigns against alcohol and drug abuse, linked to personal supervision. The campaigns were not just focussed on the superficial aspects of drug use, such as needles and bottles, but also aimed to rehabilitate users.

Before DNA was rolled out, various residents' groups in Medway were also very active with respect to Public Spaces. The local neighbourhood councils, in collaboration with the local council and service providers such as the

National Health Service Medway, had to lead the campaigns and projects. These ambitions were further projected onto the DNA project. DNA Medway principally wanted to focus on regenerating the streets in the centre of Chatham. This would primarily involve the High Street, not just as a shopping street but also as a location for all types of social activities. It concerned initiatives such as flower baskets and attractive meeting places that would make the surrounding areas cleaner and safer. This was also an ambition that would ultimately lead to one of the more substantial actions that took place in the context of DNA. More about that later, in the Story Box...



▲ Antwerp: brainstorm on project proposals in deBuurt community centre.

# 39



▲ Medway: Monitoring Committee: quarterly cross-border consultation (April 2014).



Open  
Domein

de wereld om  
de hoek

Wereldmarkt

Zondag 3 oktober 2010  
van 12 tot 16 uur



WATSON JCI

A

Wil je meehelpen  
tijdens een activiteit?



A







PART 2:  
THE TOOLBOX

‘When facilities are  
thrown into your lap  
from the top-down  
there is always a  
threat of consumerism  
and indifference.  
If they are your own,  
however, then some-  
thing extraordinary  
happens’

Anyone who considers the DNA activities of the past three years will conclude that this project followed both a surprising and an erratic pattern despite its transparent, compelling mission and objectives. Naturally, this is related to the fundamental receptiveness to – sometimes completely unexpected – initiatives from local residents, which helped define the process.

In this chapter, we will highlight a number of triggering actions, which served as an incentive, as well as longer-lasting incentives and the main principles of some policy decisions in more detail.

These are beacons which helped define the DNA landscape and which can be used in the future as valuable, inspiring ‘tools’ to put the DNA principles of empowerment and a bottom-up approach in practice.

Now and then we will also hand the floor to some academic experts, who share some theoretical observations about this process.

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## 1.

### 'What does wellbeing mean for you?'

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## From an 'innocent' question to a transnational taskforce and a measuring instrument for neighbourhood wellbeing

**Kortrijk's Public Social Welfare Centre, which was the lead partner for Wellbeing, instigated a local participation project, which ultimately led to a cross-border definition of wellbeing and the development of a simple tool to measure the perception of wellbeing, thanks to the collaboration of inhabitants and professionals from the four partner cities. A detailed report about the process.**

The process encompassed three major steps:

Step 1: arrive at a local definition of wellbeing on the neighbourhood level (for every partner in the own DNA neighbourhood),

Step 2: develop a common definition of wellbeing on the neighbourhood level within a transnational taskforce,

Step 3: develop a measuring instrument that can measure the perception of wellbeing on the neighbourhood level.

### A local participation process

How did the partner cities organise their local surveys? A summary:

- Antwerp: during various events in De Coninckplein the community workers asked local residents and people passing

through to write their ideas for the square on wooden boards

- Kortrijk: organised a survey in the Lange Munte community centre
- Medway: small-scale surveys in a wellbeing centre, a child-care facility and a library (respondents in various age groups)
- Breda: used existing data from the Neighbourhood Monitor, which were gathered through similar surveys.

*'What does wellbeing mean for you on the community level?'* In Lange Munte, they used this question as a starting premise to define wellbeing. This definition was then compared with the definitions of other partners. Based on this, a simple, easy to use measuring instrument was created, focussing on wellbeing on the community level and based on the perception of the local residents themselves. It was important that the questions were drawn up and clustered by the residents themselves and not by the community workers. After all, local residents have a different perception of 'wellbeing' than professionals. They then delved deeper into this issue based on the very divergent answers.

Several focus groups were formed to develop a

definition of wellbeing. During in-depth discussions the groups zoomed in on clusters. Based on this, a more comprehensive definition of wellbeing was distilled. This was then discussed and used by the transnational working group (*see below*). A seminar followed to disseminate the survey results and the results of the focus groups among a broad audience.

The definition of wellbeing as devised in Kortrijk to a large extent was similar to the definitions of the three partner cities. The outcomes were discussed in focus groups. A vote was then organised about the results. The conclusion was that the perception of wellbeing in essence is a universal perception.

#### A) Kortrijk

Step 1: individual survey of local residents

The individual survey was organised in De Lange Munte community centre, among visitors of the community centre and volunteers. The organisers started from one question: what does wellbeing in the neighbourhood mean for you personally? Then they asked the respondents a number of additional questions to zoom in more on certain aspects (e.g., if you were forced to move to another neighbourhood, why would you/would you not do this?). After the individual discussion, each participant was asked to describe wellbeing in the neighbourhood for the residents in one word. These words were gathered in a 'wellbeing envelope'.

Step 2: group discussion in focus group

Focus group discussions on the subject of health and wellbeing were then organised with the local residents of Lange Munte based on a number of questions. A number of topics were discussed. They debated the sense of insecurity,

public transportation problems, the lack of traders, the characteristics of the neighbourhood that could positively influence wellbeing, such as the number of green areas and the tranquillity.

In addition to the question 'What does wellbeing mean for you?' the residents, besides the individual discussion, were also encouraged to summarise the most important concept in one word. The ranking of the most frequently given answers was as follows:

1. Security
2. Tranquillity
3. Green areas
4. Respect
5. Born and raised here
6. Mobility
7. Shopping

It was also interesting to see that although Lange Munte is considered a 'racist' neighbourhood the answers did not corroborate this perception. Instead, the local residents wanted to get to know their immigrant neighbours. This need was ultimately catered to with the Baking project (*see elsewhere in this publication*).

## The topics that were most frequently discussed during the individual discussions at De Lange Munte community centre:

- The need for neighbourhood shops. You cannot do all your shopping by bus.
- The pavements have to be levelled. A sense of insecurity because of the risk of falling, especially among people with reduced mobility
- Insufficient respect of young people in the neighbourhood (e.g. football violence)
- Sometimes the cleanliness in the neighbourhood leaves much to be desired (waste near the chip shop, dog poo)
- Sufficient contact in the community centre
- Busy traffic: speeding in the neighbourhood streets
- Sense of insecurity, especially at night
- A lot of noise at night
- A sense of insecurity prevails because of loitering youth
- More security
- Enjoying fun times together
- No longer able to practice a sport because of a disability: sense of loss
- Lack of public transportation: not being able to go where you want to
- Nature and tranquillity are very important
- A mutual assistance system (spontaneously helping people in the neighbourhood with odd jobs for example)
- A great need for social contact
- General lack of satisfaction about local residents: too unfriendly, not enough respect
- Need for a laundromat in the neighbourhood having to rely on public transportation to do your laundry = difficult
- Need for a small neighbourhood shop for small purchases
- A lot of space for growing children to play and run around
- Litter: the neighbours frequently leave their garbage out
- Being able to take a walk. Tranquillity and green areas: a positive effect on health
- Nice neighbourhood (parks)
- Being able to go out/ a place where local residents meet is very important
- Born and raised in the neighbourhood
- Like the people in the neighbourhood
- Dialogue and accepting everyone as they are
- Public transportation is lacking (night buses)
- Friendly people in the neighbourhood
- I feel very good in the neighbourhood because I know it inside and out (born and raised here)
- A very strong sense of insecurity due to several robberies

- Not enough social contact. You always meet the same people. A dormant neighbourhood
- A good neighbourhood for young people: a huge amount of space
- Cleanliness and maintenance of the green areas is sometimes a problem
- Walking with the dogs in green areas
- The neighbourhood exudes a sense of tranquillity
- Shopping is difficult, but fortunately there is a shopping service
- Young people need their own place, centre. Take one's own responsibility.
- A meeting place in the neighbourhood is very important to foster contact among the residents
- Not too busy (quiet surroundings)
- Illogical subdivision of the neighbourhood. Strange layout of the streets. Easy to get lost in.
- Nuisance from loitering teens: not daring to leave the house
- More control!
- Fewer immigrants
- A lot of crime
- Drug problems
- The neighbourhood lacks common, joint activities. There needs to be a sense of community in the neighbourhood (possibly a neighbourhood committee?)

## B) Antwerp

During three different events in the square (De Coninck Sport 4/07/12 – comic strip and book market 22/07/12 – De Coninckplein Live 26/07/12) visitors were asked to take a short survey: 'What does wellbeing mean for you?'

The respondents were asked to jot down one or more words on a wooden board. These boards were then inserted in a wooden frame so that all the passers-by could read the various conclusions. A total of 160 boards were collected. These were stacked like stones, as a symbol for 'building happiness'.

All the boards were clustered in ten themes: regulations vs. personal freedom / health / disadvantage / multicultural / social capital / activities and facilities / respect and tolerance / green areas / security / the homeless.

A 'word cloud' was created for each theme with the concepts on the boards. These word clouds were then used to launch the discussion during the focus group discussions that were subsequently organised.

Six focus group discussions were organised among six different target groups:

- traders in the square (eight participants of foreign origin, started in Dutch, switched midway to English).
- senior citizens from the nearby De Olijftak retirement flats (nine participants of Belgian origin)
- local residents who gave their address during one of the three activities (seven participants of Belgian and immigrant origin, one participant spoke French)
- clients of Activering Free Clinic, a low-entry assistance organisation for drug abusers.

- patients of Doctors of the World (six participants, all of North African origin)
- the Chinese women's group - IBPS Belgium (seven participants, in English).

After a brief introduction about the purpose of the discussion several paper slips were laid out on the table, with the various themes. Each participant could choose one.

The participants were then given the matching word cloud for the theme of their choice and asked to critically examine it. They were then asked to indicate what struck them and whether they thought something was missing from the list. The themes were then discussed one by one. A city employee served as panel moderator.

The discussion ended with a final question: 'If you consider your own wellbeing and everything you have heard here today, what is the main condition for feeling good in this neighbourhood?'

Based on the six reports, 14 definitions were formulated. Each of these statements was made in at least two focus groups. These definitions were then translated into English and French. Then the organisers asked 100 people in five different locations who belonged to the same target groups as the focus groups to indicate the three most important definition(s). Finally, the definitions were ranked in order of importance.

Wellbeing in De Coninckplein means it is a place...

- ... where people respect one another
- ... where people know one another and are friendly
- ... where we can live a healthy life

- ... where it is clean
- ... where there is no drug dealing
- ... where I feel safe at any time of the day
- ... where there is sufficient space to relax and unwind
- ... where we do not need to adapt to people of another origin
- ... where people are given a second chance
- ... where I can do what I want, without control or being bothered
- ... where you can safely move around in traffic
- ... where people can drink and smoke
- ... where I don't have to worry about not having enough money
- ... where there is easy access to and information on various services

A delegation (consisting of one professional and one neighbourhood resident) shared this listing in the Transnational Taskforce on Wellbeing.

#### C) Medway

In Luton, a small-scale survey was conducted among a good cross-section of the community (young and older people, young parents) into the personal significance of wellbeing. From the approximately forty response forms, several basic themes could be identified. The same themes emerged with all the groups: concerns about the environment and the quality of life in the area. These were included in the Seminar on Health and wellbeing in Kortrijk and the transnational taskforce.

#### D) Breda

In Breda, the wellbeing survey was organised slightly differently than was the case for the other partners. This is partly due to how their administration and government are organised and partly due to previously developed instruments. Here we give the floor to **Inge Wolters**, policy advisor 'Spelen in de openbare ruimte'



(playing in Public Space) and DNA project leader Health & Wellbeing for the municipality of Breda: 'In the Netherlands there is a difference between health and wellbeing on the administrative and organisational levels. Breda has chosen to link health to a national Dutch project called JOGG (Jongeren Op Gezond Gewicht, Young people with a Healthy Weight). As a result, we focus on young people and the prevention of overweight and their lifestyle: eating healthily and exercising. Within DNA we mainly focus on health and we will continue to execute JOGG after DNA ends.'

'The wellbeing aspect meanwhile, including youth work, is the responsibility of wellbeing organisations such as Surplus Welzijn and Social Works. For health we have the GGD or 'gemeentelijke gezondheidsdienst', the municipal health service. On the DNA level we work closely with the GGD for health in Breda. We implement DNA together in the DNA areas.'

'In Breda, we took a slightly different approach to the Wellbeing survey compared with the

other DNA partners. Breda has the 'Wijkmonitor' or Neighbourhood Monitor, which replaced all these kinds of surveys before we launched the transnational task-force. So there was no

reason to canvas our inhabitants again with the same questions: whether people are satisfied with their living environment, whether there are sufficient green areas nearby, whether they have sufficient social contact or suffer from depression... The Neighbourhood Monitor has mapped this in great detail for every neighbourhood. We contributed this existing definition to the transnational taskforce and presented it to the partners. We already had a good measuring instrument. Developing a new one made no sense. It was interesting, however, to see how the definitions were very

similar in the four partner cities in spite of the great differences among the neighbourhoods. The basic premise of what you need to feel at home always is more or less the same: security and social interaction. The exchange in itself was very useful: it makes it easier to ask each other for advice.'

It was interesting to see that although Lange Munte is considered a 'racist' neighbourhood the answers did not corroborate this perception. Instead, the local residents wanted to get to know their immigrant neighbours.



## The Neighbourhood Monitor in Breda

**In 1996, the national ‘Grotestedenbeleid’ (Large Cities Policy) programme was launched in the Netherlands. As a result, some neighbourhoods in Breda received funding to improve the viability and the security in these neighbourhoods. A measuring tool was developed at the time to measure the effects of this approach.**

In 2010, the Breda Neighbourhood Monitor was developed, based on the measuring instrument of the Large Cities Policy. The municipal officials with responsibility for the policy areas related to viability added a number of new items. They also organised panel discussions with the inhabitants and interest groups in the city prior to developing a new policy. The outcome of these city-wide panel discussions constituted the cornerstone for the new policy. The new items in the Neighbourhood Monitor are based on the input of the inhabitants in these panel discussions.

The Neighbourhood Monitor represents the main objectives of the Neighbourhood Development Programme, which have been translated into sub-objectives and indicators. The five main objectives are: a nice place to live, grow, participate, healthy and caring and attractive/competitive housing. The neighbourhood development and impulse areas were evaluated based on these main objectives. The idea was to understand which problems were prevalent in which areas and to assess whether the approach gave rise to improvements.

But the Neighbourhood Monitor does not exclusively focus on the neighbourhood development and impulse areas. It paints a picture of all the neighbourhoods in Breda. In this report an overview was established. It consists of a top 10 of the neighbourhoods with the highest negative scores. The neighbourhoods that experienced the greatest improvement or deterioration since 2001 have also been mapped.

## The Transnational Taskforce on Wellbeing: learning from one another across borders

Transnational or cross-border operations are an important aspect of the DNA project. That is why the decision was made to examine how local residents in the various partner cities described wellbeing. Including possible differences it enabled the taskforce to arrive at one common definition of wellbeing on the neighbourhood level. The aim was to develop one monitor based on this: a simple measuring instrument to ask all the local residents about their health and wellbeing. This measurement became a baseline. After the project the same questionnaire will be used to see how things evolved and whether the evolution could be linked to the actions in the framework of DNA. This is and continues to be a work in progress.

### Operation and composition

Every partner city seconded one resident and one professional to the transnational taskforce. The group met four times to discuss the results of the local wellbeing surveys. The objective results per neighbourhood and the results of the process to arrive at a common definition were compared on this level. The sessions were organised in the various partner cities: Kortrijk (9/10/2012), Breda (25/10/2012), Medway (08/11/2012) and Antwerp (22/11/2012). The final outcome would be a transnational definition of wellbeing.

### The taskforce: learning to talk with each other

The inhabitants were involved in the entire process and although the enthusiasm for DNA was considerable it was not exactly easy to find people who wanted to commit to this. The

foreign travel and the fact that English was spoken during the meetings played a major role in this. Communication was not always easy. The composition of the taskforce was balanced, however, both in terms of age and gender. In this context, the support of the professionals was important but the contribution of the partner cities' inhabitants was just as crucial. They continuously pointed out to professionals that they should not lapse into jargon or warned them that their reference frame was not necessarily that of the local residents. As a result, the taskforce was a very interesting exercise.

During the Health & Wellbeing Seminar in Kortrijk in December 2012, the participants shared their experiences during the show & tell session for the working group. The agenda also included an interactive debate, in which students of the West Flemish Catholic University College KATHO participated. This focused on two – rather 'challenging' – premises by local residents including 'wellbeing is: sitting outside on a bench with a pint of beer and a cigarette', with immediate voting results which were displayed on a large screen in the auditorium. This resulted in some lively discussions. The seminar was conducted in the open spirit of the DNA project, whereby local residents intervened at the last minute in the seminar's schedule. Taking the bottom-up approach to the edge, which is not always evident for the 'professionals'. The presentation by the local residents in an auditorium environment was a meaningful moment on the day itself, which also created some stir outside of the seminar. As a result the 'co-production' principle (*see elsewhere in this publication*), developed in the margin of the DNA project, was included as a permanent module in the training programme for social-agogic work at KATHO.

### Arriving at an overarching definition based on differences and similarities

An enumeration of the objective similarities and differences among the neighbourhoods:

The main similarities:

- The immigrant community is heavily represented in all the neighbourhoods and tensions have been observed between the various communities.
- Nuisance (caused by young people) is seen as a point for attention in all the neighbourhoods.

The main differences:

- De Coninckplein is situated in the centre of the city whereas Geeren and Lange Munte are located outside of the city centre.
- The target groups in the various neighbourhoods are quite different from each other (e.g. strong focus on drug users in De Coninckplein).

When examining the results of the wellbeing definition in the various neighbourhoods the team arrived at the conclusion that in spite of the differences that arise from the individuality of the respondents and the specific properties of the various neighbourhoods there are common themes that become apparent.

A brief listing of these common themes identifies the following threats/disruptions to wellbeing on the neighbourhood level:

- a sense of insecurity
- a sense of fear of the unknown: both of the environment and of each other
- a lack of confidence, in oneself, in the environment in which you live, in society, in the other local residents

- a sense of helplessness
- a sense of alienation from the environment in which you live.

Based on these threats an attempt was made to formulate a definition that best describes wellbeing on the neighbourhood level.

The brainstorm gave rise to the following result in English: ***'A sense of belonging, a belief that one's involvement can make a positive difference.'*** The project thus came full circle and was simultaneously taken to the next level: the taskforce had processed the various data from the different neighbourhoods and now provided the partners with an overarching definition of wellbeing, which could be used as a benchmark for following measurements.

**A sense of belonging,  
a belief that one's  
involvement can make  
a positive difference.**

## A monitor for neighbourhood wellbeing: measuring the unmeasurable

DNA followed a process, along with the local residents in three different countries, which allowed them to give a European interpretation to wellbeing on the level of their own neighbourhood. Not an objective interpretation, based on figures, such as for example the number of reports of theft, but subjective information that cannot be measured. DNA tried to convert this elusive information into parameters so it could be measured, nonetheless.

Two fundamental questions were raised while developing the instrument:

1. What exactly will we measure? (= content)
2. How exactly will we do this? (= methodology)

**What?** The aim is to measure the effect of participation on wellbeing in the neighbourhood. A distinction is made between the 'ins' (local residents who contributed to DNA) and the 'outs' (local residents who are not involved in the project).

The definition is used as a starting point to develop the tool. This consists of two elements: feeling secure in the neighbourhood and the participation.

The five key themes which were identified for each neighbourhood in every partner city were also taken into account:

1. Security
2. Facilities
3. Living environment (green areas, tranquillity, rubbish, ...)
4. Contact among local residents
5. Respect and tolerance

**How?** When defining the methodology the

choice was made to organise a survey among the people who would participate in the project. They were canvassed before the participation commenced and subsequently at other times (longitudinal). An alternative consists of organising a survey among the control group that does not participate.

In contrast with other partners Kortrijk's Public Social Welfare Centre also wanted to measure the effect throughout the neighbourhood, including among people who did not participate. The decision was made that every DNA partner would decide independently who they wanted to canvas. Every partner city surveyed all the project participants.

The questionnaire was purposefully kept very short. It asked respondents about their appreciation of the neighbourhood, their engagement in the neighbourhood, the participation in the neighbourhood and the motivation for participation. Every item came with several options and participants could give a score from 1 to 5.

The Catholic University College KATHO was in charge of the baseline and processed all the results, with a phased plan. The complete survey about neighbourhood wellbeing was described in a publication by KATHO, which served as the cornerstone for the subprojects. A useful tool for the dissemination of the results.

Based on the measurement tool the KATHO students already conducted a survey in Veldstraat in Kortrijk as well as in several sidestreets in the V-Tex neighbourhood. A subsequent, second measurement in Veldstraat will be organised in the future.

The added value of this measurement tool,

which was developed by processing the findings in the four partner cities, lies in the fact that it was achieved with a bottom-up approach and was thus not 'hindered' by any 'academic' expertise or know-how. This means that it can easily be used by every neighbourhood resident because it is so simple and transparent.

One final comment: not every neighbourhood resident participated in the wellbeing surveys and the team did not make use of scientifically comparable samples in the four partner cities. So this by no means can be considered as a proper scientific sociological study. The first objective of the DNA surveys was co-production with the local residents – an objective that was definitely achieved.

The first objective of the DNA surveys was co-production with the local residents.



► Antwerp: 'What does wellbeing mean for you?' — Survey during De Coninck sport! De Coninckplein (July 2012).



▲ Kortrijk: residents, project participants and policymakers meet at the V-Text site.



◀ Antwerp: 'Wellbeing Wall' during De Coninck Sport! (July 2012)



▲ Antwerp: wellbeing focus group, including the women from IBPS.





◀ Antwerp: project proposals kick-off event, coached by Theater Vonk (January 2013).

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▲ Breda: 'Wijkavontuur' meeting.



◀ Medway: a resident tells the story of the mural in Chatham High Street during a study visit (April 2014).



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## 2.

### Surveys: triggering the DNA dynamic in Antwerp

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What started out as a rather modest, well-defined survey about neighbourhood wellbeing under the impetus of Kortrijk's Public Social Welfare Centre (the lead partner for Wellbeing) in Antwerp gained significant momentum, leading the neighbourhood to devise a series of inspiring project ideas. Some of these ideas have since been implemented

*(see elsewhere in this publication).*

The survey as a trigger for bottom-up processes in other words. Below we give a simple overview of the surveys and the resulting working groups that would ultimately prepare the projects. We have added a tip, as well: some information about the methods used.

## 1. Survey about needs (experiencing wellbeing)

During three different events in and around De Coninckplein in Antwerp 160 residents were asked to list their needs in terms of wellbeing. They made associations with 'wellbeing' and recorded them on wooden boards. Eleven themes were identified, based on these 160 associations. The discussion ended with a final question: 'If you consider your own wellbeing and everything you have heard here today, what is the main condition for feeling good in this neighbourhood?' Fourteen definitions were distilled from the six reports. The local residents then re-submitted these definitions to the participants of the focus groups. The participants were asked to vote for their two favourite definitions. This led to the development of a local wellbeing definition: 'De Coninckplein has to become a pleasant and clean square, where people feel good and secure and can move about freely.' This result was communicated to the Transnational Taskforce on Wellbeing (*see previous chapter*).

In the meantime, the DNA team re-examined the associations again. They re-analysed the evaluations of the 160 respondents. They then identified six themes that garnered broad support. They also searched for themes that would lead to feasible and meaningful pilot projects. They had one main objective: the projects had to make the local residents feel that they would indeed achieve results if they decided to take action themselves. The themes and possible interpretations were:

- **Sport and games** (chess, dance, a circle game with 100 people, Tai Chi)
- **Children** (circus, trampolines, dance, play afternoons, sport and games every weekend, carnival)

- **Diversity** (a multicultural market, cooking workshops, events during which visitors encounter and learn more about different cultures)
- **Culture and festive openings** (talent hunt, picnic, big barbecue, Flemish carnival, film (screenings and making your own films), a 'bal populaire', storytelling, motorbike meeting, a summer beach, terraces)
- **More green areas** (high demand for additional trees and other green areas, as well as activities for and by animals, a community (vegetable) garden)
- **Market** (permanently weekly flower market, flea market in the square)

The team translated these themes into operational objectives, which could be used to develop projects. Ideas were suggested and the local residents were given sufficient margin so they could develop their own interpretation.

An overview of the operational objectives: Green areas / Public lighting / Social Control / Meeting and networking / Sport events / Healthy food / Theatre walks / Cultural and festive activities in the square / the partial renovation of De Coninckplein. The square festival 'Cult 2060' was often quoted as an incentive for a creative, multipurpose use of the square. An organisation of the 'Programma voor stad in verandering' (Programme for a changing city) unit within the City of Antwerp, which focuses on neighbourhoods where major interventions are scheduled.

## 2. Kick-off evening for the project proposals

On 31 January 2013, the time had come: a kick-off event was organised to discuss the project proposals that had been developed for the square. About fifty people met in the auditorium of Permeke Library (a mix of local residents and community workers) to take the next step in their collaboration. The programme included feedback about the results of the surveys for the three DNA focus areas (Community Safety, Health & Wellbeing and Public Space) and the presentation of the themes that were identified following the survey. The participants were given the opportunity to propose additional projects and were asked whether they wanted to contribute to a project.

It was a very interactive, fun evening. The residents were subdivided into three groups and took a walk around the neighbourhood together with an actor of the local theatre company, Theater Vonk. The actors guided the groups around the square past several pubs and restaurants, where they could participate in a survey over a drink and a bite to eat. In the first venue the participants were given post-its and a sheet on which they could express their interest and commitment during the course of the evening. In each venue the actors presented the results of the survey and the initial project proposals, which had been exhibited in a fun manner. If the exhibits elicited new ideas from the participants then they could add their ideas on post-its to the exhibited ideas. They could also share their commitment to certain projects with these post-its. The evening ended with a brief reception in the café of Permeke Library where the workers discussed the next steps in the project and the local residents were happy to network.

## 3. Survey of residents' working groups

The next step was to discuss the various themes, projects and project proposals in more detail in March 2013 in four working groups (Green areas, Traders, Public Space and Health & Wellbeing). Several potential projects were discussed in each working group. The participants in the working groups were subdivided into smaller think tanks that were asked to elaborate the various projects in more detail. All the participants were also asked to choose one project and commit to it. The groups were also given a number of questions to answer such as 'What should be the outcome of this project in a year from now? What do you think should happen or should be visible? Why do you think this is important? Which activities do you think tie in with this project? Where and when do you think this should happen?'

Six projects were retained among all the projects that were reviewed. It was decided that a neighbourhood resident would have the lead:

1. Community centre /
2. Christmas market /
3. Storytelling /
4. Community vegetable garden /
5. Sport /
6. Green areas.

At the end of the evening, a number of people indicated that they were prepared to take the lead of a project. It did however become clear that guidance and professional coaching would be necessary.

Workers' coach **Goele Leyder**: 'This type of collaboration requires a lot of 'working' time. Moreover the local residents need an immediate perspective, in the form of quick wins so that they feel encouraged to continue. On the other hand, the professionals, who are used to working top-down, have to really be interested in the bottom-up projects or there will be no

results. It is not sufficient to just send mail or flyers to raise awareness among people. You need to take time and visit the people in person: go from door to door as it were. In any event the Antwerp DNA projects were developed based on a pure bottom-up approach'.

#### 4. The overarching working group

The survey of the working groups in March 2013 led to several strong, feasible projects and passionate local residents who were willing to contribute to this. Naturally they also required support. That is why project groups were established in April during a meeting of the overarching working group. The idea was they would further fine-tune 'their' project. Every driving force behind a project assisted a group to make specific agreements. The participants had to indicate what they were good at (based on competence sheets) and in function of this they could take on a specific role within the project group.

The questions asked were the 5 Ws and 1 H:

**Why** do you want a project, what is the objective, what should this lead to?

**What** do you want to do more specifically? Define subprojects or activities.

**Who** will do what?

**When** are these subprojects or activities scheduled?

**Where** will this take place?

**How** do you intend to tackle this?  
(see diagram on p.60)

#### 5. The European Ownership Award: a 'survey' of a competitive nature (May – October 2013)

The City of Antwerp developed the final element of the DNA project, i.e. a fun competition for all the DNA neighbourhoods involved. The concept tied in very strongly with the surveys about people's concerns on the neighbourhood level. All the DNA partners and local residents contributed to the final result, i.e., the European Ownership Award. The objective of this competition was to provide support for projects that

demonstrate that citizens can make 'their' neighbourhood nicer, more pleasant to live in, safer and healthier by taking the initiative themselves.

We have decided to limit ourselves to Antwerp's story here as this subject is discussed in more detail elsewhere in this publication.

GOELE LEYDER:

'Professionals, who are used to working top-down, have to really be interested in the bottom-up projects or there will be no results.'

Every city organised a local pre-selection. From the seven submissions the Antwerp jury selected three projects as candidates for the final in Breda in December 2013: 'De soundtrack van ons plein' (the non-profit organisation Bateau Lavoir), Multi-cultural Expo 'A' Coninckplein (the Chinese community) and 'Outside Gallery' (Jo Adriaens & co). At the last minute, Jo Adriaens & Co decided to withdraw because they deemed



the deadlines to be unfeasible. Ultimately, 'The Soundtrack of our Square' won the award but after the awards ceremony the Antwerp jury decided that all the new ideas which were submitted during the pre-selection would be implemented in Antwerp in the framework of DNA – either in the framework of regular initiatives or with a cash amount as a competition bonus.

Consequently, the projects in Antwerp suddenly picked up speed. Another six projects were added to the six existing projects that had been developed based on the surveys and in the working groups. The objective now was to collate projects that were very similar so that the organising residents would present a stronger front.

#### In hindsight

We end with an initial conclusion: a bottom-up project requires a specific approach. The idea is not merely to grant people the right to participate but to also let them design and develop their own projects. The initiatives of residents, traders, visitors and other 'users' of a neighbourhood have to be maximally facilitated and encouraged. And this became highly apparent during this survey process. In the initial phase you need to make a significant investment to gather local residents, to forge ties and provide guidance for group processes so that some of these groups will also start to form an independent entity in this neighbourhood after some time. Only then will a new, own dynamic come about in the neighbourhood.

It is clear that the survey process gave rise to this vibrant dynamic. After feedback to the working groups and the neighbourhood the survey results gave rise to proposals about meeting and networking, sport events and

shared gardening, to create a pleasant and nice square. Specific proposals for a cleaner and safer square, for more green areas in and around the square and social control with terraces and public lighting soon followed. The residents brainstormed about stories, intercultural events and physical interventions and changes to develop a vibrant square. In a sense Antwerp, more than its other partners, thus focused on a threefold policy (Community Safety, Health & Wellbeing and Public Space) to build a more viable DNA neighbourhood.

Secondly, on the surface this chapter in essence seems like it is just another local story. But the projects that these surveys gave rise to and which led to a further spread of the DNA dynamic will correct this perception elsewhere in this publication (*the Story Box especially*). The DNA European Ownership Award, which is also founded on the survey principle, added a cross-border impact to this story, which was literally felt in every DNA neighbourhood.

In the initial phase you need to make a significant investment to gather local residents, to forge ties and provide guidance for group processes.



## Survey methods

For the surveys the Antwerp DNA team was mainly inspired by two methods in the Government of Flanders' Participation Toolbox: the ABCD method and the Planning-for-Real method.

**ABCD (Asset-Based Community Development)** is a method whereby you work from the inside out to revive a neighbourhood from an economic, social and cultural perspective. To achieve this you need to map the talents and skills that are present in each community, regardless of how deprived it is. What is typical about the ABCD approach is that you completely turn around the policy perspective. Instead of residents participating in government policy you create government participation in civic initiatives. So the local government facilitates certain matters and grants assistance. Once the process begins the local government transfers responsibilities to the citizens.

**Planning for Real** is a method whereby the 'moving spirits', the silent workers or people who take action, the driving force in a neighbourhood, play a key role. Their efforts and enthusiasm are vital for the neighbourhood. They activate the residents to work actively and independently for the neighbourhood, as well as maintaining contact with the decision-makers during this process. They are responsible for three tasks from the start of the project: they are talent scouts, they establish a scale model of the neighbourhood and involve other residents and decision-makers in their activities. The dynamics in the neighbourhood change during a 'Planning for Real' process. By tackling small things, the self-confidence of the residents grows, as well as the interest of outsiders and decision-makers.

▲ [www.participatiewordtgesmaakt.be](http://www.participatiewordtgesmaakt.be) – Participation toolbox

▲ [www.participatiewijzer.nl](http://www.participatiewijzer.nl)

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### 3. Co-production: a new policy instrument for Kortrijk's Public Social Welfare Centre

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**Co-production is a relatively simple concept: it consists of bringing people together and letting them create something themselves. This is not a new way of getting things to move forward. When used as a policy instrument, however, it is a new approach, especially in a policy culture that is traditionally organised top-down. That is why it is quite remarkable that Kortrijk's Public Social Welfare Centre decided to use co-production as a policy instrument in line with the DNA project. It is one step beyond participation and 'the informed vocal citizen' but it is a relatively new instrument as such.**

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DNA Project Manager **Bruno Vandenberghe**: 'We decided to include a new 'co-production' staff position in the new organisational chart of Kortrijk's Public Social Welfare Centre. I will take up this position myself. My role will be to stimulate co-production along with community work in the two DNA neighbourhoods as well as in other neighbourhoods that require our attention. The first focal point for the neighbourhood is and always will be the community worker, but my work is supplementary to his. The idea is not that I launch initiatives myself. The citizens need to take the initiative. And we will continue to ensure that the most vulnerable local residents are involved'.

'Co-production as a term was mentioned for the first time at the end of 2012 during our Wellbeing seminar in the framework of DNA in the keynote of Professor Dr Bram Verschuere of Ghent University (*see page 65*). Based on this theory we arrived at the insight that our DNA work largely consists of 'co-production'. In the meantime, the term is widely used in Kortrijk's policies. In fact it is even over-used. So we need to fine-tune the definition a bit. It is true that without DNA co-production would have never been included as a policy instrument by the Wellbeing directorate of the Public Social Welfare Centre and the City of Kortrijk. As far as the perpetuation of the DNA results is con-

cerned I think that this probably is our greatest achievement.'

'Co-production increases the impact of the local residents on policy. Citizens are consulted in a traditional participation process but after that they no longer need to be involved. This all depends on the goodwill of the politicians. In the case of co-production in an active neighbourhood committee the residents become part of the action themselves and the decision-makers really need citizens. It is important that the initiatives are also effectively communicated as initiatives of the local residents in collaboration with the city. If the politicians were to take credit for these initiatives this could undermine the entire process. Local residents also strongly insist on their independence. But naturally the city and the Public Social Welfare Centre also invest in the initiatives developed by our staff, which also merit attention. It is always difficult.

BRUNO VANDENBERGHE:

**'In the case of co-production in an active neighbourhood committee the residents become part of the action themselves and the decision-makers really need citizens.'**

And sometimes a community worker's job is one big balancing act.'

### **Neighbourhood undertakings: co-production in Kortrijk based on the Dutch model**

To ensure that co-production was on the right track the decision was made to work with neighbourhood undertakings in the Kortrijk neighbourhoods in a subsequent phase. These will consist of local residents, traders, social organisations, community schools, community workers and area workers. The objective is to ensure that the neighbourhood undertakings transcend the participation process. Instead they need to develop and execute the projects that the residents propose. As of autumn 2014, community work resources will be used differently in Kortrijk: the city will grant neighbourhood budgets. 'This is real progress', Bruno Vandenberghe confirms. 'We visited Breda, where they have already been working with neighbourhood undertakings for several years. The neighbourhood budgets have already been included in the policy plan in Kortrijk, so this went quite fast. Now all the parties involved need to sustainably use these resources. These are not supplementary resources. Instead, we have redistributed our resources, asking the local residents to manage them.'

## THINKERS THINK ALONG > BRAM VERSCHUERE

**‘Clearly define the role and competences of the town council, professionals and residents.’**

**Professor Dr Bram Verschuere (Public Administration and Public Management, University of Ghent) was invited by Kortrijk’s Public Social Welfare Centre as a guest speaker on the topic of co-production during the Wellbeing seminar. The city is investing in this operational principle with the new Co-Production unit within Kortrijk’s Public Social Welfare Centre. But what does this entail exactly?**

‘Co-production is a form of participation, but it is much more than this because it relates to *service*: in effect co-production is part of the execution phase in the policy cycle. It is executed in collaboration with the client – the neighbourhood resident in the case of DNA. It is actually quite simple: just think of the example of a city that installs leaf baskets in which the residents can deposit fallen leaves instead of relying on the Parks Service to pick them up: in that case the city engages in co-production with its residents. Informal care is another example of volunteers and professionals who provide care together.’

‘Currently, the international research community is focussing on three fundamental questions. Firstly, how can you motivate people to co-produce? Secondly, how do you organise an urban policy structure so it can set to work with this? And thirdly, what are the effects of co-production? Is it cheaper, does the quality of service improve, does it benefit the democratic nature of the provided service? Co-production can also have disadvantages, such as the *insider-outsider* dynamic. Certain profile groups are inclined to co-produce like the higher educated white middle-classes but the question has been raised whether this also creates new exclusion mechanisms as a result.’

‘People are prepared to co-produce when they stand to benefit from it in one way or another, but here too there are nuances. You may do it out of self-interest. We studied why people were motivated to join Community Information Networks – which produce security, together with the police. In this case self-interest can be a strong motivating factor. This motivation is *self-centred*. Others think it is important from a democratic perspective, so this involves a more normative, *community-centred* approach. People also have to effectively be capable of co-producing. Their capabilities and capacities also play a key role. Finally, they must also feel that their contribution makes a real difference. All these conditions need to be fulfilled to get people on board. The descriptions of roles and competences also have to be clear. Community workers should refrain from intervening as much as possible in this case so that people take the lead themselves. They should work as facilitators instead.’

'Kortrijk's Public Social Welfare Centre believes in the method with which they experimented extensively thanks to DNA. A study based on the results of the focus groups and professionals could be useful to provide figures and data for policy-makers or future initiatives. There are not that many effect studies about the effects of co-production in the long term. In any event cities that wish to implement co-production have to invest in it. Kortrijk is a good example because it integrated co-production in its policy structure. The citizen is recognised as a co-producer instead of just being considered as a passive client. In times of savings co-production is also used for ideological purposes but as a policy-maker you have to be very careful about shifting the responsibility to the residents. It is a complex story which requires the right preliminary conditions in every policy area.'



▲ Breda: Luton Infant & Nursery School, participants in the European Prize for Neighbourhood Ownership Initiatives (December 2013).

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## 4. The European Ownership Award – working together towards a moment of triumph

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**When it comes to stimulating people to set the bar high and achieve something themselves a competition is always an interesting concept. The cross-border competition for four partner cities, which was launched by the City of Antwerp and to which all partners made an enthusiastic contribution, wrapped up the DNA project.**

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After two years of working intensely to achieve a bottom-up approach and generate community engagement, the local residents were given the opportunity to develop their own project and let the neighbourhood share in the results. All prior DNA initiatives gave them the necessary inspiration to compete with their own project proposal to win the resources to implement it. In the words of DNA Project Manager Birgitte Bruyninckx: 'This competition was a real test for DNA'.

The competition concept, with local pre-selections and a final, was developed by Antwerp as the culmination of their three-track policy "Security / Health & Wellbeing / Public Space". The Antwerp team prepared the competition rules and criteria and adapted them during an Activity Meeting together with the partners, so they could be applied in all the partner cities.

Local juries in the various partner cities were responsible for selecting the proposals that would compete in the final. They examined the written project proposals.

The final took place in Breda on 3 December 2013, after the Community Safety seminar. The jury was an international jury, consisting of one resident and one professional for every partner city. An award was presented to the best project proposal for every partner city. There were five winners (Kortrijk was divided into two DNA neighbourhoods, V-Tex and Lange Munte). Each winner received a grant contract to the amount of 5,000 euros from their respective DNA partner city to implement their project.

### **The criteria for participation**

The competition targeted the DNA target groups: all citizens with good ideas to make



their neighbourhood safer, more pleasant, safer and/or healthier. These citizens live, work or (regularly) pass through the DNA area.

The minors in the target group could also participate subject to prior permission from their parents or guardian.

#### Content criteria

The project:

- has to contribute to a nicer, more pleasant, safer and/or healthier neighbourhood,

- has to generate added value for the neighbourhood as a whole. Projects that only improved the situation of the participants were not considered in other words.
- has to take place in the neighbourhood,
- may be a once-off or consist of several sessions (durable projects score better than once-off projects),
- must be described in a clear and detailed manner,
- must contain a clear and detailed budget.

## Community budget method as inspiration

For the organisation of the competition the Antwerp DNA team (which became an expert at organising neighbourhood surveys) applied the community budget method as described in the Participation Toolbox of 'Samenlevingsopbouw Vlaanderen' (the non-profit organisation Community Building Flanders)<sup>5</sup>, a tool with which the Government of Flanders provides real support to organisations to stimulate the engagement of various groups in a creative and relatively easy way. The method was creatively adapted to the situation.

A short description of the objective of the community budgets taken from the Participation Toolbox: *'When residents' groups think about their neighbourhood they come up with several ideas. It is not always easy to fund these ideas with ordinary resources. Often the road from dream to reality is a long and administrative process. Implementing major interventions takes a lot of time and the result is not always immediately visible. Sometimes the implementation of smaller interventions also gets bogged down in procedures and red tape. The community budget is the perfect tool to implement visible change in a neighbourhood in the short term. It reduces the imbalance of power between neighbourhoods and increases the efficiency and effectiveness of the policy process. Above all community budgets are a stimulus for self-development, prompting local residents to*

▲ 5. See also [www.participatiewordtgesmaakt.be](http://www.participatiewordtgesmaakt.be)

*take responsibility for their neighbourhood. This budget is budgeted per neighbourhood or district. The money becomes immediately available when a consensus has been reached about a certain implementation. It can also provide a step up to community management'.*

*'Community budgets make residents think about potential projects in their community. They also make decisions about whether or not and how projects should be implemented. Moreover, community budgets encourage local residents to implement projects themselves or contribute to this. This is neighbourhood management. And because these projects are so specific policy-makers and officials can also respond more easily to the growing dynamic approach of the residents. The community budgets are an excellent tool to let local residents participate on a high level in the process of decision-making and policy implementation.'*

A first step in this direction was taken by letting the local residents budget their own project for the DNA European Ownership Award.

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In hindsight this event strongly boosted the dynamics in all the DNA neighbourhoods. In all the cases these interventions were clearly visible in Public Space and the winning projects contributed to permanently and visibly embedding the DNA dynamic in the community's fabric.

For the participating residents – who play a crucial leading role in their own communities – this was an amazing reward for their efforts. The fact that this competition was an international one also added a different dimension to the prizes. All the participating local residents

used the proposals that were presented in Breda as inspiration, sharing them with their own community.

The winners and the significance of their projects for the entire DNA process are explained in the Story Box of this publication.

The winning projects contributed to permanently and visibly embedding the DNA dynamic in the community's fabric.



▲ Breda: networking lunch, seminar on Community Safety (December 2013).



▲ Breda: presentation of 'Spijkerpad', a project submitted by Kortrijk for the European Ownership Award for Lange Munte (December 2013).



▲ Breda: several members of the jury for the European Prize for Neighbourhood Ownership Initiatives, a mix of residents and professionals (December 2013).



▲ Breda: European Ownership Award, the Mayor of Breda presents the prizes (December 2013).



▲ Breda: presentation of Parkhovee Breda-Noord, one of the contestants for Breda in the European Prize for Neighbourhood Ownership Initiatives (December 2013).



▲ Breda: presentation of A Soundtrack for our Square, one of the contestants for Antwerp in the European Prize for Neighbourhood Ownership Initiatives (December 2013).

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## 5. The Neighbourhood Approach, a new cornerstone of Dutch policy

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**Culture psychologist Jos van der Lans developed policy recommendations about a community-oriented approach, founded on the notion of stimulating more ‘citizen power’ in communities. The DNA partner Breda refers to this a cornerstone of its urban community development policy. And it has to be said that this specific approach, in which bottom-up communication is already firmly embedded, served as an example for the future for the other partners that still have a way to go. From ‘rijk’ (nation) to ‘wijk’ (community): the Community Approach in a nutshell.**

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The Dutch government has transferred important tasks of the wellbeing state in terms of care, youth and employment to the municipalities, which, in turn, rely on own initiative and social entrepreneurship for this. The government also believes in giving more power to the citizens: change from the bottom up, giving citizens and their networks more leeway to operate. Besides this there is also the reorganisation of wellbeing work, social services, care, youth care and employment arbitration in social community teams, which work in an integrated, generalistic manner, close to their clients, the citizens. Community budgets, community centres and community monitors are

the consequence, as well as local residents who take the initiative and decide to manage community facilities themselves. Neighbourhoods become the playing field for urban innovations. But this is not only happening in deprived neighbourhoods. Communities are becoming labs where the new, decentralised wellbeing state is developing itself.

Are we expecting too much from this? What are the pitfalls and the dangers? And what are the ingredients of success? In the past years several dozens of successful innovative projects were launched in this framework. Van Der Lans has distilled six key aspects from this:

1) An integrated approach requires a defined area: when people continue to work and think based on the framework of their own organisation and – also an important factor – their own funding then the community-oriented approach does not work.

2) A preventative approach requires organising proximity: working close to the people thus has a preventative effect. You need to gather professionals from several organisations in a team to provide effective service close to the people, with only one professional (instead of several) in charge. One issue, one plan, one professional.

3) The community approach means that citizens no longer have to just live with the problems. They also become owners of the solutions. Durable engagement is organised through ownership: in practice by effectively giving the residents a say in what has to happen in their community. Neighbourhood undertakings have already been launched in several cities, where the residents themselves decided to organise activities in the community.

4) The Community Approach teaches us that this is foremost the work of people and not of institutions: the triumph of *best persons*. Success strongly depends on the people who work to achieve it rather than on *best practices* that cannot be copied everywhere.

5) The Community Approach requires broad support – vital coalitions, crossovers between several organisations are crucial for its success.

6) The Community Approach pays for itself and is founded on several sources of funding. An effective community approach is the best

investment in prevention. It prevents problems from manifesting themselves in an even worse form in the future, which in turn will result in even more costs.

The important movement for the Community approach, in addition to the shift of competences to the local level (from the national to the community level), is the bottom-up movement. Synonyms include citizen power, an active democracy, social DIY or the participation society. Collective actions work like a correction mechanism: they create alternatives where the market and the institutions fall short. A new bottom-up coalition of residents, artists, architects and social entrepreneurs takes the initiative. In the hands of social entrepreneurs and local residents Public Spaces take on a different intensity. When facilities are thrown into their lap from the top-down there is always a threat of consumerism and indifference. If they are your own, however, then something extraordinary happens.<sup>6</sup>

JOS VAN DER LANS:

‘Communities are becoming labs where the new, decentralised wellbeing state is developing itself.’

▲ 6. Source: [www.josvdlans.nl](http://www.josvdlans.nl) and Jos van der Lans. DECentraal. De stad als sociaal laboratorium. Atlas Contact, 2014.



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## 6. The community adventure in Breda: a cooperative undertaking promotes ownership

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**Although strictly speaking 'Het Wijkavontuur' (the Community Adventure) should not be included in the list of DNA projects, this organisational structure is closely interwoven with the DNA process in Breda. Moreover, several partners, after study visits and seminars, indicated that the introduction to 'Het Wijkavontuur' had been an eye-opener for their own operations. Setting up permanent structures, which bring together professionals and residents with a productive mindset, is an interesting option for the community future. That is why we decided to discuss this instrument in more detail in this publication.**

'Het Wijkavontuur' is the collective name for all the neighbourhood undertakings in Breda. Starting up and managing a cooperative together ensures that local residents also take more responsibility for the plans for their community or district. Cooperative neighbourhood undertakings also are part of the evolution from a less regulatory government towards a society that is given more responsibilities in exchange for an active engagement. Buurthuis ONS in Geeren (*see below in the Story Box*) serves as the headquarters of Het Wijkavontuur and is also the community's multifunctional centre. It is the crossroads of the community initiatives in Breda, both in the physical and social sense of the word.

Het Wijkavontuur connects all the visible talent in the community with each other and thus provides support for ongoing and new projects. As a result, these complement each other even more. Projects thus become permanent more easily because they are based on a structure. Projects that exist alongside each other are much more vulnerable. Het Wijkavontuur is the structure that guarantees an overview of all the initiatives.

**Angelo Gommeren** (Wijkavontuur Coordinator): 'Het Wijkavontuur is an experimental partnership between professionals and residents. Together we decide what needs to happen in the community and in which order. Together

and on equal footing we implement (residents') initiatives which strengthen the neighbourhood. Anyone can contribute his capabilities and talent to this. In principle 'Het Wijkavontuur' works based on a quid pro quo approach.'

'The beating heart of this organisation is Buurthuis ONS: the Wijkavontuur meetings are held there every Wednesday. It also serves as a branch of the town hall when the neighbourhood entrepreneurs want to arrange something. Het Wijkavontuur was launched around the same time as DNA and is an umbrella struc-

ture for several projects that were stimulated by DNA. All the projects are gathered here, allowing us to combine potential opportunities and possibilities more quickly. In essence we work based on demand, with the permanent support of the municipality. This cooperation structure is a good example of how to give residents the initiative and show them that you take them seriously'.

BOY VAN EIL:

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'Wijkavontuur Breda is an experiment in ownership, a cooperative neighbourhood undertaking and an adventure all at once. As far as I'm concerned, this method is a 100% implementation of the DNA philosophy.'

## THINKERS THINK ALONG > EVELIEN TONKENS

### Cooperatives, involving professionals and residents

According to Professor Evelien Tonkens (Professor of Citizenship and the Humanisation of Institutions and Organisations at the University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht, since April 2014) stimulating active citizenship should not mean that public administrations are deprived of their financial resources. But the available government budgets can be used differently.

Tonkens among others argues in favour of giving professionals the possibility and the resources to found cooperatives with local residents that offer assistance, education, care, housing and so on, based on their own insights and on social entrepreneurship models, with the lowest possible level of control and without forcing them to register (which in itself saves costs). However, the organisation has to embed the democratic approach in its activities down to the smallest details. Tonkens considers the participatory society 'a beautiful ideal, if it is not opposed to the wellbeing state but becomes an extension thereof, an improved version of the wellbeing state in other words.'

▲ [www.actiefburgerschap.nl](http://www.actiefburgerschap.nl)

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## 7. Community Safety Wardens in Medway: synergy between citizens and the police

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**Even though the various DNA partners in their deprived areas are faced with very similar problems, the severity of the situation can vary greatly per neighbourhood. Whereas a neighbourhood such as De Coninckplein in Antwerp, with its ‘Break-Bend-Build’ approach, for example, has already reached a cautious (re)building phase, Medway still has a great deal of work to do with respect to safety and Public Spaces. This involves a lot of hard work via a formula that combines a top-down policing approach with intensive neighbourhood collaboration. The Community Safety Wardens are paving the way towards a recovery of the social fabric.**

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The problems in Medway essentially boil down to nuisance, too many people living in small spaces (up to 30 people in one apartment) and an abundance of slum landlords. On an environmental level, there are illegal dumpers, noise and general nuisance too. Residents are often in transit. Under the influence of the DNA bottom-up approach, the Community Safety Warden Service in the All Saints neighbourhood is increasingly taking on the role of a hub for neighbourhood work and social control (with the help of the local residents).

You could, therefore, also refer to the neighbourhood workers in Medway as Safety Wardens. They have good contact with the residents but their role more closely resembles that of the police and the authorities than of the neighbourhood workers. Together with other partners, they provide education about responsible citizenship and try to work with the residents on resolving problems and issues as quickly as possible. The Safety Wardens also played a role in achieving the DNA objectives as they are close to the residents when it comes to quality of life in the area, safety and waste recycling.

## Street Weeks: involving the neighbourhood in policing

Every week, the waste from 111,000 houses in Medway is recycled. Recycling is quite new to Britain but is obligatory. Medway was able to purchase organic waste containers thanks to European aid, but the use of these is not yet embedded within the communities. When it comes to safety, the Police Community Support Officer supports the regular police in the neighbourhood. The largest migrant populations in Medway can be found in Luton, All Saints and the centre of Chatham. There is huge mistrust of the police and the neighbourhoods are weighed down by a lack of social cohesion. The various partner organisations in Medway strive to find a method for resolving this. The Street Week is one such method. The first of these took place in January 2014. Together with partner organisations and via residents meetings, the Community Safety Warden Service investigated the most pressing problems and which residents would be prepared to make an effort for their street or neighbourhood. The first Street Week survey resulted in a list of 90 complaints regarding litter, health and education. High on the agenda were also human trafficking, drugs and prostitution, i.e. more traditional police work.

The involvement of residents in these issues is new and takes the edge off the image of the police as the exclusively repressive body.

The involvement of residents in the Street Weeks is new and takes the edge off the image of the police as the exclusively repressive body.

**Neil Howlett**, Community Safety Partner Manager: 'In 1998, the *Crime and Disorder Act* came into force; this meant that every area had to sign up to a *community safety partnership*. Since then, neighbourhood safety has not been the exclusive responsibility of the police. The local council, the police, fire brigade, probation service and healthcare providers must work together. Every municipality now has its own *community safety partnership*, which is usually linked to the local council. In Medway, the partnership is quite unique in that it is specifically positioned within the police function.'

'My job is to coordinate the working partners. In order to do so, each year the neighbourhood is screened in terms of criminality, housing, health, etc. The priority actions are then selected on this basis. I coordinate everything and also provide recommendations on the basis of my findings. The DNA areas form part of the most substantial focus areas.'

'I have been doing this since 2008; I have been involved with DNA since the very start. In actual fact, DNA is an extension of what we do. It has provided us with the stimulation to work alongside residents more readily; from *community enforcement* to *community engagement*. That was

a gradual process; we slowly became more involved with residents' groups and then began to understand what they could contribute.'

‘By working so closely with the police, the *community safety unit* has become embedded in their role. On every level, from high to low, they know how they can involve us to combat nuisance and antisocial behaviour. And not only for safety, but also for specific health questions or to set up a Public Space. Our hub in the police station is also the point of contact for all partner organisations, such as the volunteers who work with us.’

‘Within the unit, there is also an ‘employment’ department. Therefore, we have data from the job centre, municipality and police and also facts and figures about health and housing. As a result, we can see in which streets the most significant problems occur. We then roll out the ‘*your health your lifestyle*’ survey: we make house visits in pairs to ask residents to complete a questionnaire. This enables us to see where help is needed. We then pick one street and give it our undivided attention for a whole week: this is what the Street Week entails. It takes place once every five weeks somewhere in Medway. It is an intensive process because it involves a great deal of after-care and between eight and ten partners.

‘We want to increasingly involve the residents in the process; this links seamlessly into the DNA objectives too. Local residents also man mobile *Council Contact Points* during the Street Weeks in order to be able to address residents systematically. The buses are manned by volunteer residents of all age groups. This significantly increases the degree of participation by residents in the safety of the neighbourhood. We can also recruit more residents for *Neighbourhood Watch* in this way. And I

am happy to report that nuisance levels have dropped considerably since the residents have become more involved with police activity. Links are more quickly and efficiently formed with troublemakers or criminals in the area. Also, many of the residents are referred onto training, work and assistance via the Street Weeks process. It is a win-win situation for all parties.’



▲ Medway: study visit in Chatham High Street (April 2014).



## Big Society – letting go or leaving behind?

**A project like DNA is embedded in a political and policy context. In that respect, the same phenomenon, of a ‘receding government’, is apparent on the social level in every country. Also in Great Britain, where this new policy approach was named The Big Society.**

*The Big Society* is the ideological cornerstone of the course that the British Government has charted, which puts citizens in the driver’s seat in the public sector. *Big Society* consists of three principles. The first is *Community Empowerment*. Local communities have a greater influence on services and facilities through a bottom-up approach. Secondly, by breaking open public facilities new (private) service providers are given the opportunity to offer their services or product. Thirdly, citizens are encouraged through social action to actively participate by volunteering.

The British political thinker, philosopher and social and economic commentator Phillip Blond is the spiritual father of the *Big Society* concept and the director of the internationally renowned British think tank, Res Publica, in which his ideas are further developed. Blond is in favour of a power transfer to organised citizens, who think and act democratically. The public sector has to come in hands of the public and the more intensive administrative control (from an increasingly larger and thus more inefficient) distance has to end. In the *Big Society* local societies and their citizens become stronger so that the power of politics can be restituted again to the citizens.

According to Blond this requires a detailed insight into implementation and execution. Only frontline workers and users have such an insight. Blond thinks you can only achieve a more efficient and passionate public sector through frontline leadership. Executive professionals chart the course and adjust it, based on the participation of users and other parties who are closely involved. Preferably through co-ownership, as the best guarantee for responsibility and involvement.

The type of savings in the public sector which the current British Government is implementing do not achieve the desired *Big Society* effect. Under the influence of the current savings operations the *Big Society* will become an unbalanced economy, with growing inequality and a smaller but equally inefficient government. Consequently, the savings operations pose a threat to the positive effects of *Big Society* before the benefits even come to the fore.

▲ [www.respublica.org.uk](http://www.respublica.org.uk)

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## 8. Back into the auditorium: some academic observations about superdiversity and social work

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**You may have already noticed that ‘Thinkers think along’ in this book: scientists and philosophers are becoming involved in the social debate about the changing relations between the government and citizens – either as analysts or as explorers who inspire the community. We conclude our Toolbox with the voices of a number of relevant members of academia, to provide a context for the DNA cases that are explained below. These are the voices of Ico Maly, Dirk Geldof and Sami Zemni.**

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Multicultural, intercultural, super diverse: different nationalities, background and social strata add a dimension to the already complex idea of giving citizens more responsibility in their street or neighbourhood. The superdiversity of the twenty-first century is mainly urban. That is why it is crucial that it is taken into account when organising a bottom-up approach. A lot of DNA projects are not as successful at achieving and generating an engagement among certain residents’ groups, while other social groups have no problem taking control. How does superdiversity influence this, how is it different from multiculturalism and how should social workers approach this?

### Superdiversity

According to the philosopher and culture scientist **Ico Maly** there is a difference between superdiversity and the traditional multicultural thinking. ‘Dividing people into nationalities, creating a society by letting these different nationalities ‘integrate’ only renders a small part of the real superdiversity visible, i.e. the diversity in terms of origin. Moreover, ‘origin’ is only a small part of people’s identity: you may share the same origins, but not the same identity, values, norms and culture.’ According to Ico Maly superdiversity is also a ‘fun’ term designed to make multiculturalism hip and

In recent years the transition to superdiversity was very fast and the organisations and social undertakings were unable to follow suit at the same pace.

trendy again. It is a new paradigm that replaces the multicultural paradigm. It refers to ethnicity, gender roles, subcultures as well as to the experience that people have with education, administrations, their role in society, their social class...

The sociologist **Dirk Geldof** (a lecturer on Sociology at the University of Antwerp and the author of 'Superdiversiteit. Hoe migratie onze samenleving verandert') has the following to say on the subject: 'The superdiversity of the twenty-first century is different from twentieth-century migration because of the changed migration patterns and the impact thereof on our society. Besides the increase in ethnic-cultural diversity the main characteristic of superdiversity is the growing diversity within diversity. Today, our cities are characterised by a multitude of countries of origin, cultures, languages, religions, statuses and social positions. This creates diversity among and within groups and communities.'

**Ico Maly:** 'In anthropology we are increasingly referring to identity as a *life project*, as the conscious construction of an identity within various micro-hegemonies. Our identity resides in the fact that we can function within very different micro-hegemonies: we know what are the norms, know which language we need to speak and how we need to style ourselves. Who we are can be quite different depending on the various contexts within which we are ourselves.'

### Social work needs a new interpretation

According to Geldof social work has a long tradition of working for and with migrants to structurally improve their position in society, based on a professional focus on vulnerable groups and its approach to rights. But in recent years the transition to superdiversity was very fast and the organisations and social undertakings were unable to follow suit at the same pace. Geldof thinks that social work needs to tackle structural factors of exclusion, but this needs to be done based on an approach to cultural differences (which can be a strength as well as an obstacle). According to Geldof, tackling exclusion in a structural way means that cultural elements need to be included in the change process. The question then remains whether all these groups have to be approached in a neutral way (as is traditionally the case) or rather in an active and pluralistic way. Geldof thinks the choice is clear: 'Desperate attempts at neutrality in relationships of assistance often overlook the role of religious beliefs or ideology. A forced neutrality only enhances the polarisation into we-them thinking. If you want to respect people's lifestyle and the world they live in then you also need to actively recognise the potential role of their religious ideological choices, and possibly link it to the importance of religious symbols. This means that active pluralism becomes the main principle in a superdiverse society. It recognises differences but also pleads in favour of a continuous open dialogue between these various religions and ideologies.'

### Superdiversity, learning (from each other) and bottom-up work

Professor of Political Sciences **Sami Zemni** (Ghent University) extends this reasoning to bottom-up work and spontaneous expressions of solidarity, i.e. to social citizenship with an emancipatory effect: 'The attention to procedural uniformisation (*see Geldof's 'neutrality'*) and the administrative efficiency prevents social work from being able to appreciate forms of spontaneous solidarity that have been organised by citizens. The top-down rules prevent the bottom-up ideas about solidarity from flourishing.'

According to Zemni social work can provide important support for the consolidation of spontaneous processes of solidarity. The starting point of such a view is that solidarity has become a source of conflict among minority groups which often heckle the universality approach (i.e. the 'neutrality') of social work as maintaining the dominant power patterns of majority groups who find it increasingly less evident that so-called 'outsiders' are entitled to services. This tension is especially palpable in the cities. Social workers often work on the frontline of these challenges and have to contend with the shock waves of poverty, migration, asylum and the commodification of social relationships. At the same time, the target groups of social work do not rest on their laurels either: 'In cities especially we have seen several initiatives of organised forms of cooperation and solidarity develop.'

Zemni continues: 'Social work can play a unique role in this because it can provide support for these creative experiments through a social learning process. When citizens start to look together for collective answers to shared problems, which change their personal and community life, then they really become democratic and social citizens. This process can be described as a social learning process: people and groups who jointly formulate shared problems.'

'Experiments in direct solidarity which spontaneously come about offer social work the opportunity to win back its critical role. I think that social work can play an important role, especially in the context of superdiverse cities, in providing support for and enhancing new solidarity arrangements, through a social learning process. But this can only be achieved if two pitfalls are avoided. On the one hand, a culturalisation of social problems that is too far-reaching would mean that social work would essentially play a harmful, essentialising role. On the other hand, a naïve approach, which would consider these local experiments as the only way forward, as a result of which the bigger picture of inequality in structures of power, which underpins these problems, is no longer questioned.'

#### ▲ Sources:

Dirk Geldof. *Superdiversiteit als onverwerkte realiteit. Een uitdaging voor het sociaal werk*. Alert, July 2013, pp12-23  
Ico Maly. *Superdiversiteit en de democratische uitdaging*. De Geus, May 2014, pp. 6-10  
Sami Zemni. *Sociaal werk in tijden van superdiversiteit: een test voor de democratie?* Colloquium Sociaal Werk en Democratie. Ghent University, October 2013.



▲ Kortrijk: relaxing during the 'Children rule!' street party in Stasegemstraat (September 2012).



▲ Breda: Wijkavontuur, performance by Dansnest.



▲ Medway: two residents in front of their mural in Chatham High Street.



▲ Breda: ONS Wijkatelier.



▲ Antwerp: working group at deBuurt community centre.



▲ Antwerp: an attentive audience during the study visit focusing on Public Space, De Coninckplein (June 2013).





HOUSE

Rich



PART 3:  
THE STORY BOX

‘Thanks to DNA  
we were able to build  
bridges, facilitating  
a joint approach  
and developing  
creative initiatives  
without using too  
many resources.’

KATHLEEN DEBRUYNE,  
DOCTORS OF THE WORLD

The DNA project was a learning process. Knowledge and expertise were accumulated gradually by the four partner cities via a series of actions, which all focussed on the three main working themes: Community Safety, Health & Wellbeing and Public Space.

The results after three years encompass an impressive mosaic of projects of varying quality. On the basis of their own area of expertise, each partner realised a number of ‘pilot projects’ which were presented to visiting partners during study visits and seminars as possible sources of inspiration. The collection includes short, one-off projects with a specific radius and large-scale events with an ongoing impact.

The ‘stories’ in this chapter do not form an exhaustive overview of projects and actions that have been realised within the DNA time-frame. It is rather a generous ‘selection’ of best practices. They make the reader think about the processes of bottom-up working and community regeneration.



Most of the activities set out are, quite literally, in the form of a story: there are signs of the individual voices of the people that are behind these projects throughout.

Consequently, we have not categorised the activities according to the city; we have divided them according to universal themes that can be found in every partner city. The reader will detect an abiding principle throughout all of the stories: the quest of a community to find a better, broader pathway ...

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In between the projects, you will also hear the voice of one academic expert and of various residents who were personally involved in the DNA process.

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## 1. People on the move

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When people think ‘health’ and ‘wellbeing’, they associate it with ‘dynamics’ and ‘movement’. If you want to get groups of people to move, you automatically end up thinking of ‘sport’. Not just for health purposes but also because sport and games are the ultimate community builders.

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▲ Medway: the AIR football team.



▲ Kortrijk: Stasegemstraat becomes a play street (September 2012).

## De Coninck Sport!

### Kick-off for a series of collaborations

**Kathleen Debruyne coordinates Doctors of the World\* and collaborated in the De Coninck Sport event on 4 July 2012.**

**Kathleen:** 'During the start-up phase of DNA, **Doctors of the World** and other partner organisations that work in and around De Coninckplein met with the residents and traders to discuss how the square's appearance could be improved because it had a very negative reputation for quite some time. The residents and social organisations came up with the idea of turning it into a green square with community gardens and so on. But we thought sport was quite useful to bring together people from different layers of society and from different cultures. There is something universal about sport, isn't there?'

'That is how the idea of a sport afternoon in the square developed. We installed ping pong tables and video games. You could play a game of bowling in a tent, there was a bike which you could ride to press your own fruit juice – because health is associated with healthy food. That day, hundreds of curious people turned up – including people from outside of the neighbourhood. We were on hand with two nurses so that there was medical assistance available, even though fortunately none was needed. The low-entry aid organisation Free Clinic was also

present, with their Buro Aktief project, that offers 'drop-outs' an alternative to the regular work/care projects. They specifically target the drug and alcohol abusers that used to hang around the square in the past.'

'During the event visitors were asked to write their idea of the concept of 'wellbeing' on wooden boards. Sport and leisure were frequently mentioned, as well as more green areas (*also see the Toolbox*).'

'I think the added value of DNA is that I got to know the various partner organisations in the neighbourhood better. We tend to work separately, alongside each other, targeting the most vulnerable target groups – old people, drug abusers, the homeless, people without valid papers. Thanks to DNA, we were able to bridge this gap, facilitating a joint approach and developing creative initiatives without too many resources. Like this sport afternoon.'

\* Doctors of the World (originally 'Médécins du Monde') is an international non-profit association that targets people without valid papers. The Antwerp operation has a few staff members but mainly relies on its 60 volunteers. Thanks to the new collaboration with other care organisations other vulnerable groups have also discovered the care services of Doctors of the World. The main objective is to help people from vulnerable target groups find their way in life again through regular health care.



## Women on the move

### Mapping health

The district of Geeren has more overweight residents than other parts of Breda. DNA encouraged the residents to exercise more and cook healthy food. Youth Worker Lita Kalle and Project Manager Jenny Parren explain how the DNA project ‘Vrouwen in Beweging’ (Women on the move) came about, creating an easy solution for the – mainly immigrant – women in the neighbourhood so they could exercise without trouble.

**Jenny:** ‘During the initial phase of DNA, we organised a survey about health in the neighbourhood. The objective was mainly to reach children. We thought that if you are targeting children you also need to get their mothers aboard. We managed to reach a lot of women through Vrouwenstudio Amalia (*see elsewhere in this publication*) and the Speel-o-theek, where people can meet and borrow games. These volunteers have a network throughout the entire neighbourhood. We worked with them to conduct a health baseline study. The people who participated in this wanted to actively do something. They wanted a gym that was accessible. They could practise sport four times a week for six euros. After a few meetings, ‘Vrouwen in Beweging’ became a real project for which we searched for funding through DNA. The municipality made a temporary space available for free. Women turned up for the first sessions but by the Christmas holidays nobody came anymore.’

**Lita:** ‘The young girls continued to come. But there were some problems: nobody knew how to draw up a list of participants for example. I did not expect such simple things to be a

problem in a group. In that sense DNA was a learning process. Today, ‘Vrouwen in Beweging’ operates autonomously. After increasing demands by the municipality in terms of resources and infrastructures the project was integrated in the Wijkavontuur neighbourhood undertaking. They were not just given cash or space there. I did briefly hesitate whether they needed further guidance but in the meantime the women themselves have taken action and have started to recruit others. Originally, they did not succeed but now the extended group is up and running. And the issue of the membership fees has been solved so now they are self-funding. They pay an entrance fee, so no administration is needed. They also have a good exercise teacher. I don’t know what will happen with this project when the municipality decides to stop lending them the space. They might have to merge with a similar existing group. The dynamics are good, and there is a lot of interaction with the rest of the neighbourhood.’

## AIR Football

### ‘Every player has a story!’

**Increasing the residents’ ownership of their neighbourhoods is not an easy task in Medway. Various campaigns around drugs and alcohol have produced minimal results so far. However, thanks to the ability of competition to raise awareness among young people, AIR Football training seems to be bucking this trend. The project targets youngsters between the ages of 14 and 16 and those over the age of 18.**

**Tim England**, Coordinator Community Safety Partnership Medway: ‘The lion’s share of the financing for this project has come from the DNA budget for neighbourhood safety. Football is an ideal way to put youngsters back on the right track. In just three months, AIR Football has succeeded where we had achieved virtually nothing over the past years. *Achieving, Inspiring, Recovering* – that is what the ‘AIR’ that precedes Football stands for. Recovering from criminality, drugs and bad health. The founders created the movement to give something back to the community, principally in deprived areas. Many of the AIR supervisors come from difficult situations themselves; a few are ex-prisoners.’

‘AIR Football is a sponsored, private initiative that is active across South East England and involves collaboration with the police and rehabilitation services, the National Health Service and others. Their objective: to motivate and inspire people to change and to move away from drugs and criminality towards work and integration. The AIR supervisors were asked, after a programme with the Drugs and Alcohol Cell in Kent, to start AIR Football in Medway too, in order to involve the Roma, Eastern European and Asian communities in their neighbourhoods.’

The first week is all about building trust. The police and local partners helped the AIR trainers to approach youngsters on the street, in their own territories and invite them to attend training sessions. The fact that the AIR team walks around in trendy training outfits means they also seem approachable, familiar and, most importantly, are not associated with the authorities.’

The kick-off in January 2014 was surprisingly successful. There are 35 youngsters of eight different nationalities that come to the sessions for children on Wednesday in the local school. Three of them would like to take on the role of trainer. There are also adult sessions during which we have around twenty players: Africans, Afghans, Iranians, Iraqis, Turks... At first, there was a language barrier so we decided to work with ‘buddies’. Now, they link up via Facebook, play our Sunday matches, go out together... Two men have also become AIR Football volunteers. We can, at the very least, offer an alternative to hanging around on the street. The cash that used to go on dope or drink is now spent on good football kit.’

‘Once DNA has come to an end, this project must be given priority in order to continue in Medway. Children that find the right path also make better life-decisions at the age of 15 or 16.’

## RESIDENTS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES &gt;

**Stephen Perez, the driving force behind AIR Football:**

‘They don’t have to like each other, they just have to get to know and respect one another.’

**Local resident Stephen Perez is very involved in his neighbourhood of Luton. He was almost entirely responsible for getting AIR Football off the ground in Medway and, in just three months, it expanded into one of the most successful DNA Neighbourhood Safety pilot projects. We talked to this father who walks to school every day with his kids and sees and hears a great deal along the way.**

**Stephen:** ‘Originally, I wanted to do something for the youngsters and children in the neighbourhood, in the context of DNA’s focus on health and wellbeing. I genuinely believe in sport and exercise as the basis for a healthy lifestyle, alongside a good diet and adequate sleep. AIR Football brings these elements together and is a trigger that you can use to attract people. It’s not all about physical challenges but more to do with the health choices that people make. For people with different language backgrounds, football is also a communal language. They don’t need to like each other, as long as they get to know and respect one another. Respect for someone you don’t know is the most important lesson. Everyone is different but you’ll only find that out if you get to know the other person. This is not always obvious to these youngsters.’

‘When AIR Football came to Medway as a result of our request, I showed them the places where they could approach people in Luton/All Saints. This is a neighbourhood where absolutely nothing happens, where loads of people are bored rigid from dawn to dusk. This is clear from the answers given to questions such as ‘What do you do, where do you go and what are your plans?’ They simply don’t have any goals. And then someone comes along to ask if they want to play football, for free. You are, in fact, reaching out to people at a crossroads, who need some support to stop them falling even further off the right track.

‘Many youngsters were surprised that someone who wasn’t in uniform and who spoke their language was even interested in them. The men from AIR Football do not beat about the bush; they tell it exactly how it is. But this is how you win respect on the street. Their attitude and outfits are refreshing and notable on the streets; they are most definitely noticed. The coaches are also credible because they have had the same experiences; most of them have also been in hopeless situations.’

'I've been living in Luton/All Saints for eight years. I truly believe in the power of a community in order to keep things on track. Before AIR Football, I was involved in many other initiatives because this is a deprived area. I am a volunteer for the local day-care centre and the church. I walk my children to school every day and let me tell you: this is when you can hear and see things if you are open to it. I love my neighbourhood despite everything. There are many advantages, the location is not bad and most of the residents have a good heart when you actually speak to them. It's just that the good aspects are often not appreciated.'

#### WINNERS!

## A new play area for children

### Indiana Jones comes to Luton Infant and Nursery School

The parents association for the Infant and Nursery school in Luton walked away with the European Ownership Award (Europese Prijs Buurtinitiatieven) with their proposal to install playground equipment in their desperately needy school. Other rivals for the prize included the ANNEX Ladies and Youth Football Team (ALYFT), who wanted to start up a ladies and youth football team, and Physical Folk, a theatre project that is active in line with the bottom-up principle and primarily focuses on encouraging creativity and restoring a feeling of self-esteem among participants. But, in this case, the smallest won.

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Luton is one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Medway. There is little to see or do on the streets; there are no major shops. Luton Infant School is a community school with a bare piece of tarmac for a playground. The municipality only provides vital maintenance and there is no cash for any equipment.

But this is set to change, thanks to the competition cheque. The £ 4,000 will be spent on setting up a new playground area. In terms of teaching, playground equipment is good for the physical development of the 297 children; it allows them to learn to collaborate, solve problems... and have fun. Members

of the parents association **Kelly Marsh** and **Jo Sievenpiper** submitted the project on the recommendation of local resident **Sue Crittenden**.

**Sue:** 'We came up with the idea thanks to DNA Project Manager Noreen Ryan, who told us about the competition. As a local resident and manager of DNA's Community Food Project (*see elsewhere in this publication*), I was already familiar with DNA. I work in the school where Kelly and Jo send their children, so I made the connection quite quickly.'

**Kelly and Jo:** 'The installation is a real

godsend. The children were bored rigid with their 'play' area. Forty-two percent of them come from foreign countries so involving their parents in activities is very difficult. As a result, of the language barrier, the school even has to use interpreters. Play is the perfect way for encouraging children from so many diverse ethnic backgrounds to communicate.'

'It was also the children – within limits – who chose which playground equipment was bought. A genuinely bottom-up approach! We

also raised some funds in the neighbourhood, via an Easter party and cake sale. This was great for involvement in the neighbourhood but most of the parents do not have sufficient resources to raise the kind of money we've won. We were quite scared of presenting our project in Breda (she laughs). But it turned out to be a great experience.'

▼ Medway: children testing their new play equipment.



KELLY MARSH:

'Play is the perfect way for encouraging children from so many diverse ethnic backgrounds to communicate.'

## The ANNEX football team

### The magical glue of ‘the beautiful game’

**Miranda Shah has lived just outside Luton for all of her life. As a youth worker, she sought ways to keep the youngsters in her neighbourhood busy. She would now like to expand the ANNEX football team that she set up to include teams for youngsters and women. Her proposal competed for the European Ownership Award but just missed out on taking the cheque. That will not dampen her enthusiasm, however.**

**Miranda:** ‘The population here has changed dramatically since the borders with Eastern Europe opened up. Many Slovakian and Roma families have arrived, with the corresponding social problems. I have been involved in neighbourhood work for the past four years. We wanted to seek out the youngsters between the ages of 15 and 17 in White Road, a very deprived area, and find out if they would be interested in an activity. The answer was unanimous: football. It is usually the youngsters who are bored; they are not really looking for trouble and are a mix of school age children and those who have just left. Some of them even go onto further education.’

‘There was no money to rent a football pitch but the playing area for the youngsters had to lie in the immediate vicinity. So we started in the local Palmerston park. Together with a few other locals, we organised friendlies between foreign youngsters from a social residential area in the neighbourhood. We hired the sport hall and, at one point, had around forty players! Thanks to earlier subsidies, we were able to engage a coach, allowing ANNEX to develop to a higher level. We are now heading into our fifth season, and have progressed from the sixth to the first local division!’

‘The DNA money, via the Community Safety Partnership (Neil Howlett), in the context of drugs and alcohol prevention, meant that we could continue with the ANNEX football team and, as a result, make the neighbourhood healthier.’

‘We are now also going to diversify, with a group of Eastern European youngsters that smoke a lot of weed in the park. The police have spoken to them, via DNA, and they are quite keen to join in with the football. We would like to invite the youngsters to Palmerston park to form their own team – it is hard to integrate them in the existing team as a result of the language barrier – and we will buy them a football kit.’

‘As far as I’m concerned, that is the power of DNA: the fact that various actors, whether it’s the police, us as neighbourhood workers, or the kids themselves, all work together. After the match, the players chat among themselves and plan the next matches. They do this completely independently. The captain is a good leader and we have really seen him come into his own. He also takes responsibility for the team; he is a genuine role model. It’s great to see that the fifteen year-olds that joined us have changed completely for the better by the time they turn nineteen.’

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## 2. Food makes the heart grow fonder

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Love is not the only way to people's heart ... Put some people around a stove and you will find that there is a lot less that needs explaining. Cooking together: one of the oldest and most durable ways of achieving peace that you can imagine. There is something about the gathering of ingredients that transcends all cultural differences.

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▲ Antwerp: planning of De Oogsttoren.

▼ Kortrijk: the Baking project brings children and senior citizens together (April 2013).





## The Harvest Tower

### An artistic heart for a green urban network

**De Oogststoren (Harvest Tower) is a social-artistic project which focuses on 'ecological gardening'. The concept ties with in previous sound and light installations by Tom Vermeyleen and James King, which turned the 'cleared' De Coninckplein into *the talk of the town* in previous years during the Christmas period. The project proposal by artist Els Aerts did not make it into the pre-selection for the DNA European Ownership Award but now she can still make her dream come true thanks to DNA support ... much to her pleasure.**

**Els Aerts:** 'Until a few years ago you had to basically ask dealers to step aside if you wanted to get to your house in this neighbourhood. Nowadays, the neighbourhood has been cleaned up and new initiatives are organised such as the deBuurt community centre, Café Kiebooms, Viggo's coffee bar and so on. I never noticed much crime but I thought the soured intolerance of my neighbours was a bigger problem. I'm not always happy with the repression and the display of power that is used to clean up the square but it has changed this place for the better. New people are moving to the square and a lot is also happening on the cultural level: the neighbourhood attracts artists.'

'De Oogststoren' is based on the idea of the Tower of Babel. That tower was never completed because God smote humanity with confusion and misunderstanding. This made me think. What if people would come together again to complete the tower? 'De Oogststoren' stands for the 'harvest' we will all enjoy if we work together. It symbolises the dynamics in the square and is also an idea that is easy to understand. The installation of the tower involved a long period of preparation, in which the entire neighbourhood was involved. We introduced people from several cultures to all kinds of herbs and plants. People sow and harvest at home, in the inner courtyard of Permeke Library, in trays that will subsequently be used

to build the tower. What is sown elsewhere can be incorporated in the tower at a later date. The idea is to create a central "green" point in the square, which also attracts know-how about urban agriculture. The supervisor is Daphne Aalders, of Food for Foodies, a cooking workshop in the square. The tower will be seven metres high and eight metres wide. It will remain in place for three weeks and will be beautifully lit during this period. A cooking event will be organised on 21 September, when the tower will be built. We are also planning information and learning sessions, workshops with Velt (an organisation for ecological consumption and gardening) and EcoHuis Antwerpen (a non-profit organisation of the city for sustainable building and living). And then everyone can enjoy the feed and celebrate. At the end of the event, the local residents can pick up a vegetable and herb box, consisting of produce that they sowed themselves and we will also freeze vegetables and herbs. The local residents that have since launched the "Buurmoestuin" community garden are also interested. After the dismantling, the planters used to build the tower will be installed in the square, the library and the surrounding streets. All in all, this is a large-scale artistic project related to *urban farming*, with several ramifications throughout the neighbourhood. We could never have organised this without DNA, which provided half of the resources.'

## Lange Munte Baking project

### A trail of sweet crumbs from and to the community centre

**There is something universal about baking biscuits and cakes together, it connects people. Based on this philosophy the local residents of Lange Munte came up with the proposal of setting up a baking project with community development, the residents and community organisations. The outcome was a spectacular party, focussing on people's own baked goods, with 350 guests, establishing better ties between the two communities of local residents, i.e. the locals and the newcomers.**

From 22 until 26 April 2013, the local residents and organisation members visited each other to bake together and test recipes. Meanwhile the residents, school children, community workers and residents of the local residential care centre got to know each other. The week ended with a party: the entire neighbourhood was invited to enjoy a pancake and coffee, there was a cupcake workshop and a giant cake was baked. Some immigrant residents provided Moroccan tea and pastries. And the local residents turned up en masse: 350 people joined the party.

What preceded: during the community team's monthly meetings in the community centre, community worker **Rebecca Vanoverberghe** spread the message that the local residents could do 'something' and would receive DNA support for this. The 'something' became a fixed item on the agenda during the meetings. Finally a Moroccan mother suggested doing something that involved 'baking'. Because she felt that the local residents, whether native or immigrant, all had in common that they used flour and sugar. The community worker discussed the idea with the other organisations. The neighbourhood's schools played a major role in this: the parents were reached through their children.

**Rebecca:** 'I was afraid that I would have

to "convince" people to bake with us, but I shouldn't have worried. Nor did we have to explain the entire theory behind DNA – this would have been counter-productive. The project developed into something that was instigated by and belonged to the people themselves.'

The project was developed with the various community organisations. They succeeded in mobilising about sixty volunteers. The children of the neighbourhood school went to the residential care centre where they baked 'old-fashioned' pastries. Since then the contacts between the organisations and the neighbourhood have significantly increased.

**Rebecca:** 'This helped us force an opening to the immigrant community. They now organise their own activities, for example a Dutch conversation session in the community centre. A number of women also set up their own group, and are teaching each other to read and write. Suddenly, ten immigrant families registered for the St. Nicholas party. The simple bottom-up baking idea provided the leverage for this rapprochement in Lange Munte. As a result the sense of insecurity in the neighbourhood has been reduced. Other co-productions will be necessary in the future but this may be facilitated by the sense of ownership that has been created in the neighbourhood.'

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## The Community Food Project

### Eating to combat obesity and diabetes

Medway Council is working hard on healthy eating via DNA. Obesity and diabetes are a huge problem in deprived areas. Local resident and Community Leader Sue Crittenden was born and raised in the area and has taken on the organisation of several projects regarding healthy eating. Healthy eating, organic food: in the eyes of many locals, these are simply 'luxuries' that they cannot afford. On the basis of simple, child-friendly initiatives, however, Sue tries to make it clear that this is not necessarily true.

**Sue Crittenden:** 'Via the Community Food Project we try to make the children aware of healthy eating so they can educate their parents. We thus organised a healthy cooking day in Luton Library, during which the kids were able to cut up the vegetables. The fact that this is a location where the whole neighbourhood comes and goes means that they can make contact with us easily; this is what we strive for. The Free Fun Cookery Session is another project focussing on tasty and healthy eating, which involves parents and their children. Local residents give one another ideas for tasty and healthy lunches. On the Smoothie Bike, healthy fruit drinks are created by and for the locals. During the *Food Recycling Event*, DNA focussed on food waste in order to encourage people to be economical and mindful with respect to food (or material) waste.

#### **Grow-your-own: the local library in Luton as 'healthy' community centre**

Just to be clear: there is no community centre in Luton. The local community library is a friendly, easy-access location that has to fulfil the role of community centre in this extremely deprived area in Medway. In the library, several

local residents organised an event focussing on healthy eating: Growit, Cookit, Eatit, where children and parents alike could prepare organic vegetables and herbs for trial sessions during the holidays. Luton Library took the initiative to do something in the context of DNA and asked local residents if they wanted to sow flowers and plants on the undeveloped land in front of the library. This 'garden' was eventually released by the owner, a housing association, and can now be used as a community garden. Two locals also signed up to training to become Master Gardeners. They now educate their fellow residents about the usefulness and advantages of growing your own vegetables.

**Sue:** 'It's not easy, because people here have all sorts of problems and are busy enough just 'surviving'; this isn't one of their priorities. However, on a small scale, we are succeeding in gradually raising people's awareness.'

Healthy eating, organic food: in the eyes of many locals, these are simply 'luxuries' that they cannot afford.



▲ Antwerp: De Coninck Sport! (July 2012)



▲ Kortrijk: the Baking project.



◀ Breda: Vrouwen in beweging (Women on the move).



▲ Antwerp: de Oogsttoren, work in progress.





▲ Medway: a match with the AIR football team.



▲ Medway: a training session of the ANNEX football team.



◀ Medway: the new play equipment at Luton Infant and Nursery School.

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### 3. A good start...

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This idea returns in many of the discussions: the sooner you involve children and young people in community building activities, the sooner you provide them with positive models, the more chances they have of making ‘healthy’ decisions for themselves in the future. You might call it an ‘investment’ or a form of ‘empowerment’.



▲ Antwerp: Rapporteurs for De Coninckplein.

## Rapporters of De Coninckplein

### Battles in the square

**'Rapporters' in De Coninckplein is a music/spoken word project by and for young people between the ages of 17 and 25 years, combining modern media and live performance. The programme includes learning to use multimedia (music, images, spoken word and performance) and their own talent. The emphasis is on hip hop poetry and street culture. The project proposal did not make it into the pre-selection for the DNA European Ownership Award, but is now being implemented with DNA support. DNA champion James King and Sofie Crane about their 'protégés' and the future.**

**James:** 'The cultural mix around De Coninckplein is huge, and it has a huge amount of potential. I launched Sunshine Concerts in 2000 – because I had a musical dream about a better, more vibrant square. We provided support for local artists. This has all developed and now Sunshine Concerts has become part of a company called Sunshine Projects. The 'Rapporters' project has a bit of both. It is performance with *slam poetry* and *spoken word*.'

**Sofie:** 'Hip hop is a form of word craft that is not really appreciated that much here, but for our rappers it is a fulltime occupation. Give them a theme and they start to write about it. This art form provides them with a real outlet. There are now hundreds of them in Antwerp but only the mainstream hip hop scene knows about them. These kids are like contemporary city chroniclers, who perform content that really matters to them.'

**James:** 'For 'Rapporters' they go out and interview local residents. We give them small camcorders so they can record the interview. In a sense this is journalistic research, aimed at raising awareness, in their own environment: they have to formulate questions and put them to their fellow citizens. What is their perception

of 'others', of immigrants, of gays, of people who practise another religion?'

**Sofie:** 'We try to reach the young people here through various channels, among others through a youth centre, workshops, word of mouth advertising ... Of the twenty kids that initially said they were interested there are now about eight, from various backgrounds. They indicate what they hope to achieve with their work, we just suggest the themes (which they developed beforehand). Work, love, brotherhoods, but also fines, problems ... These are recurrent themes, regardless of whom you interview in the square.'

**James:** 'Antwerp could be a springboard for this project. In the future, we hope to implement the "Rapporters" in other cities. We are currently organising a couple of try-outs and during the summer we will present something during De Coninckplein Live. We will show the project as a whole during the Cult 2060 festival in October. Then we will see. If we can turn this into a European project, with exchanges between the cities and university colleges, the 'Rapporters' have a bright future ahead of them.'



## Carte Blanche dance workshops

### Children dance onto the square

The non-profit organisation Carte Blanche has been organising dance, singing and percussion courses and other training initiatives for over twenty years in Antwerp's Noord district. De Coninckplein is also located in this district. For DNA, Carte Blanche organised dance workshops for children in the square, which led to a mass influx of young kids with a positive mindset. Managing director Hilde Broos explains the project.

**Hilde:** 'Carte Blanche consists of two people, me and dance teacher Fanny Heuten. We rely on sixty volunteers for all forms of active art education that we offer. They are all highly professional dance and art teachers. We really select them in function of this. We originally started with African dance, but over the years we have added other forms of dance and expression.'

'Every Friday evening for the past four years, we have been organising dance workshops in De Coninckplein. Thanks to word of mouth a lot of participants join us. On some occasions we have had more than 300 people, not just from the neighbourhood

HILDE BROOS:

'I think the added value of DNA is the fact that we have built bridges with partner organisations.'

around the square but also passers-by. It's amazing how you can put such a diverse group of people in touch with one another in this way. We recently launched dance workshops for children. This was a new concept for us. In addition to having good dance skills the volunteers who teach the children's dance workshops also need to be good educators. We raise the children's enthusiasm by visiting the

six schools that are within walking distance of De Coninckplein ourselves. What's nice is that most headmasters respond positively although the workshops fall in the test and examination periods. The workshops went really well. It all ended with about 260 children dancing together in the square. The schools really liked the idea that you can introduce the children to the neighbourhood in a positive way by letting them dance together in the square. For many children this is a neighbourhood where they only go to school. They might never even come here on other days. If you combine our project with the other DNA projects for young people such as the "Allemaal op het Plein" comic and "The soundtrack of our Square" or "Rapporters" then I think we have succeeded in getting a lot of young citizens to this square.'

I think the added value of DNA for Carte Blanche is the fact that we have built bridges with partner organisations. Even when the project ends I think that the ties that have been fostered are strong enough to safeguard our activities in the square. We hope to turn this into an annual tradition, developing a partnership with the schools. I don't know how we will go about this but I am sure that we can come up with a solution thanks to our in-house talent and the contacts we established.'

## The Children's Parliament of V-Tex

### Kids cast their vote.

Everyone literally gets a vote/voice in the V-Tex neighbourhood. Community worker Valerie Deprey talks about the Children's Parliament, that will help shape the future of the V-Tex neighbourhood.

**Valerie:** 'The kids in V-Tex came up with the idea of a children's parliament themselves following the most recent municipal elections. The children had all kinds of questions. At the time, my predecessor facilitated "own" elections in three nearby schools, with a lot of socially vulnerable children. Ten children in the fourth, fifth and sixth years were elected. Every class could elect a representative to the Children's Parliament. They meet once a month in the V-Tex community centre over crisps and a Coke. The community worker is the facilitator. This year we also hope to involve a policymaker.'

'The children came up with an idea box to foster participation in the classes. The MPs call on their classmates to drop ideas for community work, for the school or the city in the box. The questions for the City of Kortrijk have been grouped and the Children's Parliament was invited to the town hall, along with the representative of the Youth Team. In addition to questions about the world they live in the mayor also had to answer several direct questions like "how come you were elected?" and "do you own a limo?" The policy plan now includes a Children's Parliament for the city.'

'It is not evident to motivate children who have spent a whole day in school for this 'meeting', says Valerie. 'The schools' expectations about the output should not be too high either. Our

objectives focus on networking and passing on information to the parents. But the children themselves also evolve in a positive way.'

'The neighbourhood parliament has already developed several interesting side projects such as the youth promotions of the local Budascoop cinema, the 'Tapas de luxe' project, which introduced children to the local sport clubs and associations. Urban renovation also became a point of attention when the children took photos of 'ugly places in the neighbourhood', after the graffiti jam (*see elsewhere in this publication*) and the various proposals related to this. Here too the Children's Parliament will play a role. An important point because the participation of children in urban renewal is generally even less relevant than that of adult local residents in vulnerable neighbourhoods.'

'Originally, the Children's Parliament was an initiative of the community workers. So strictly speaking it is not completely 'DNA', but the bottom-up approach and the fact that it has been permanently included in the policy plan (with subsidies until 2019 and an extension to other districts) means this is an important project within DNA Kortrijk. DNA was also the perfect breeding ground, providing the necessary support (among others through the graffiti jam) to turn the Children's Parliament into a key policy concern.'

## Big Brothers

### Role models instead of youth workers

**Community Safety in Breda and nuisance in Geeren are partly tackled with the 'Grote Broers' (Big Brothers) project. No more repressive police action. A very inspiring project that Antwerp was looking forward to hearing more about. The Project Leader Jenny Parren (Stichting Kick) discusses a DNA success story in Geeren.**

**Jenny:** 'The 'Grote Broers' or Big Brother project is organised by Stichting Kick, which operates in Breda. At the request of the municipalities we develop projects relating to sport, self-fulfilment and group building. We work wherever we are needed. This is done with co-funding, not just with European subsidies. Kick's strategy is to guide young people, who fall just between the cracks of the regular system, back to school or work with sport. Usually, young people are 'placed' with Kick. They are forced to enter the project. 'Grote Broers', by contrast, works on a voluntary basis. This is a project targeting young people from the neighbourhood. They often know better than we do what is at stake. These are all boys who want to contribute to the neighbourhood's viability. Like the others, they are local residents, which is why 'Grote Broers' is such a good match with DNA.'

'The boys really work on the streets: they talk to teens that hang around, go play a game of football. They often are also brothers, nephews ... They know each other. It is important that they keep that connection with the others so they are not considered as some sort of 'traitor'. They need to retain the trust of their community but sometimes the community looks at them askance. It is always a balancing act, you know.'

'There's also an element of competition to 'Grote Broers'. The young people's prestige is based on their ranking within the group. You enter as bronze, then evolve to silver and gold respectively. The higher your status, the more tasks and responsibilities you get. If you have gold, then you divide the tasks yourself, provide assistance to older local residents, go out with people in wheelchairs. Old people often get to the market because of these kids. People now get to know young people through 'Grote Broers', so the perception is that they are less dangerous because they know them better. One resident even sits with the young kids in the neighbourhood square. Half a year ago, that would have been unthinkable. We have managed to restore some mutual understanding.'

'Obviously, there are always kids who you simply cannot reach but 'Grote Broers' functions like a safety net for anyone wishing to evolve in the right direction. Moreover, as local residents, they seem to be able to get rid of undesired behaviour, something youth workers have failed to do.'

'We feel that in the past a lot of damage has been done by approaching young people in the wrong way and amends have been made thanks to this project. The new generation of teens is reaping the benefits of this.'

## RESIDENTS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES &gt;

**Grote Broer Joel Cicilia (19):**

## ‘Everyone wants to get past bronze’.

**Joel originally comes from Curaçao and lives in Geeren-Zuid. The ‘Grote Broers’ have changed his life for the better.**

‘I’ve been a Grote Broer (Big Brother) for almost four years. I was born in Breda, then I spent some time in Curaçao, returned and then lived in Amsterdam. When I was fifteen, we moved back to Breda. I used to hang around on the street a lot. At the time, my friends were ‘trainees’ with ‘Grote Broers’. They had to do this for school and they got me on board. I was a HAVO (ed: senior secondary education) student but I wasn’t doing that well at the time. The transition from primary to secondary education was a little too much for me. I was also starting to focus on girls, hanging around on the street. People expected a lot from me at school but I wasn’t interested. And so I went from HAVO to MAVO (ed: junior secondary education). Ultimately, I was stuck in a class well below my level and skills. I regularly chatted with Jenny of Grote Broers. Then I decided it was time to change things, change my outlook. I realised that if I wanted to have a future I needed to do something now. Jenny and I agreed that she would get me into a level four programme in secondary vocational education. And, what do you know, now I’m starting higher vocational education next year. I want to be a social-cultural worker. Try to connect people with each other through your network. It’s all thanks to ‘Grote Broers’ because that is exactly what I do there.’

‘Every week, we spend two half days on the street with the ‘Grote Broers’, one afternoon and one evening. The objective is to establish contact with all the young people in the neighbourhood. I ask them what they’re doing but also and especially what they want to do. We then try to develop an activity based on their answer. And we’ve been quite successful so far because there are many young kids who know us. Here and there you have to contend with kids that cause nuisance and that are not interested in what we do, but we don’t bother with them. We focus on the positive kids. We try to get anyone who is interested in coming on board out of these groups that cause nuisance. A lot of boys no longer go to school and we try to make them think about this. We also organise activities ourselves: game evenings, Ramadan activities on nights that they are outside on the street – we mainly work with Moroccan kids – during this period, we might organise a film evening or a football tournament in the gym. We really do this because the kids ask us to. That is the bottom line: we ask the kids what they want to do. They have to formulate the demand.’

'On the street we have our own hierarchy, leaders and followers. You need to prove yourself to climb up the ranks. If you have gold you need to really be able to lead the group and organise, prepare and carry out activities yourself. The neighbourhood knows your status because of the shirt we wear. That's how we really become role models for the others. We also receive compensation, depending on our status, equivalent to the compensation a trainee or a volunteer receives. Bronze members receive four euros a day. Silver is seven euros, silver+ nine euros and gold twelve euros. Young people really want to achieve this higher status, they think it's cool. Everyone wants to get past bronze'.

'Being a 'Grote Broer' is a step up to something bigger. Sometimes we tell some youngsters that they have achieved the maximum of what they can do in our organisation. Then we guide them to school or work. My own objective is to leave when I graduate but at least I will have my network. This really saved my life. And that is an experience I'll always cherish.'

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▲ Breda: Grote Broers, time to relax.



GROTE BROER JOEL CICILIA (19):

‘My own objective is to leave when I graduate but at least I will have my network. This really saved my life.’



▲ Breda: the 'Grote Broers' now also have a 'Grote Zus' (Big Sister).

► Antwerp: the Rapporteurs for De Coninckplein.



◀ Kortrijk: members of the Children's Parliament get a vote (January 2014).



▲ Breda: Grote Broers during the festive opening of Buurthuis ONS community centre.





▲ Antwerp: one of the dance workshops for kids (June 2014).



► Antwerp: young residents working in De Verborgen Kloostertuin, the community vegetable garden.



▲ Antwerp: ready to sow in the community vegetable garden.

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#### 4. Green equals eating and breathing

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An ‘urban oasis’ no longer is just a fenced in green area, with azaleas and a park bench. These days, urban green areas purify our air, reduce the heat-island effect and stress levels. Urban green areas allow us to exhale and strike up a conversation. And if we’re lucky we can harvest the greens we grow there and eat them together...



▲ Antwerp: trimming and pruning in the new community vegetable garden.

## The Hidden Convent Garden

### A community vegetable garden that follows all the rules

It can be quite difficult to set up an initiative, even for 'informed' local residents who are familiar with the complex tangle of city services. Health & Wellbeing and Community Safety project worker (and neighbourhood director) Barbara Thys and neighbourhood resident Koen Wynants share the thrilling journey of a group of local residents who wish to claim an empty Public Space.

**Koen:** 'As a local resident I am involved in the learning network (non-profit association) Antwerpen aan 't Woord and urban agriculture. During a neighbourhood walk which we organised two years ago, a resident of Zusters-der-Armenplein showed me a hidden space there. It was a perfect spot for urban agriculture. We called it The Hidden Convent Garden. I had already heard of the DNA project, among others through deBuurt community house, which had just opened. So all the elements were in place to start a community vegetable garden in this location. I decided to go through the 'official' channels to do this, instead of starting a guerrilla garden. Which was unfortunate because we lost half a year in the process. It is even more unfortunate because this is Public Space. If you see how much red tape is involved to do something with this as a resident ... We should probably evaluate with associations that focus on urban agriculture, like Velt, Samentuinen and Stadstuinen, how many steps were needed and develop a standard approach. In that sense the garden really was a learning process.'

**Barbara:** 'Koen's proposal for Zusters-der-Armenplein was more than welcome. The square is situated on the perimeter of the DNA project area. It is private land of a public nature, which is owned by Zorgbedrijf Antwerpen (Antwerp's Public Social Welfare Centres) and

Woonhaven, a social housing company.'

**Koen:** 'I had already previously spoken with Woonhaven. The project also required consultation with the city's Parks Service, which was responsible for the maintenance of the land. The negotiations for reclaiming the land for the neighbourhood were more difficult, but now we have unlimited use of the land. We were given formal permission by Zorgbedrijf to use it.'

**Barbara:** 'The initial idea was to plant in full soil but we ultimately decided to work with planters instead. It's all about trial and error ... For example, there is a big difference between gardening alongside each other and gardening together: we need to see what works best. Thanks to DNA, we can now purchase garden tools. The European support has accelerated the entire process.'

**Koen:** 'And fortunately so, because the interest in reclaiming Public Space is constantly growing in Antwerp's Noord district. Among residents and in community centres. But the red tape needs to be reduced. For the time being, the city is merely paying lip service to residents' suggestions for using Public Space. But people are getting to know each other thanks to the residents' meetings, even before a plant starts to grow. So on the social level the community vegetable garden is already making a difference.'

## WINNERS!

## Pine trees in the V-Text neighbourhood

### The wild freshness of green plots

The Kortrijk projects 'Spijkerpad Lange Munte' and 'Sparrenbosje V-Text' both won the European Ownership Award in Breda – a shared price for the two neighbourhoods. The people who took the initiative for the project each received a cheque to the amount of 2,500 euros. They were able to finalise these two projects within the year. On warm days the V-Text site will smell a lot more fragrant ...

Unused urban land, which is claimed by local residents to create green areas in the neighbourhood: this is increasingly happening in 'paved' urban districts. The winning 'pine forest' for the V-Text site will be planted on a derelict plot of land, owned by Eandis (an energy distribution company) and which is situated in the heart of the neighbourhood. No urban agriculture in this case but a real miniature green lung for local residents and visitors.

The non-profit association Natuurpunt, the local residents and the community workers joined forces to prepare the land to plant the pine trees. Attraktie, a social organisation that works with young people, was also involved.

A lot of people were spontaneously turning their thoughts toward Public Space in the V-Text neighbourhood. Previously, the local residents had already claimed a small community garden (the Zonne). Then they had the idea of petitioning the King Baudouin Foundation for a grant for the V-Text neighbourhood. Their suggestion? Local residents and children could maintain

gardens together: a community garden in front of the church, next to the V-Text site ... On the other hand, the grant would enable them to buy tools which could be kept by the 'tool library', where local residents can borrow tools. The shared cheque thanks to the European award helped supplement the budget and was more than welcome.

Unused urban land, which is claimed by local residents to create green areas in the neighbourhood: this is increasingly happening in 'paved' urban districts.

## WINNERS!

## The community garden in Geeren-Zuid

### Restaurant supplier since 2014

The residents of Geeren were interested in an urban agriculture project on a plot of land which was once occupied by apartments of the Wonen BreBurg housing corporation. The apartments were demolished to make way for new-builds that were never built. DNA Wellbeing project worker Inge Wolters and youth worker Lita Kalle talk about the community garden of Geeren-Zuid. The project made it through the pre-selection of the DNA European Ownership Award and won the cheque for 5,000 euros during the final.

**Inge:** 'Before 2020, this derelict plot of land will not be used for anything. Fifty local residents were interested in developing a two-hectare community garden here. A young *urban farmer* wants to also use it for farming activities through a cooperative and will employ people who have fewer chances on the labour market. The farmer has also committed to maintaining public gardens because his business model will come full circle then. The entire project is currently in the decision-making phase. Legally, things had to be arranged in such a way that the housing corporation can build here again after 2020. So this is a temporary use. The local residents won 5,000 euros which they can use for tools and management thanks to the European award. The project holds huge appeal for the local residents. In the long term the restaurant of the community centre will source its produce from the community garden. The idea is even for the kitchen volunteers to grow their own produce there.'

**Inge:** 'The community garden will be completed in the course of 2014. The garden is very important from a wellbeing perspective. Growing vegetables together, creating something together, also creates a connection. Children can also play here in natural surroundings. This extends far beyond the scope of the community centre.'

'DNA has offered us more opportunities in terms of resident participation and given us more clout because we have European funding. The demand-oriented approach would not have been that clear without DNA. The project now involves more collaboration and has a better structure. And yet we continue to be critical in Breda. There are limits to bottom-up work and the fact remains that you should not place too much responsibility on the residents' shoulders. They need a lot of support and coaching, for example on the administrative level. The governments have to be on hand to think along and continue to provide support to professionals.'

**Lita:** 'The team is incredibly motivated and diverse. There are 53 volunteers who all want to help even though to date (*ed: this interview dates from mid-March 2014*) there is still no garden to work in. Originally, no children or young people were involved. We ensured that this was the case and the children suggested building a nature playground. And so we will, at their request. There is also a link with the schools and with education because they will be growing produce themselves in the school garden. I think the community garden really deserved the DNA award.'



## Theatre Royal Square

### A theatrical closing scene for Chatham High Street

**Proud resident and Chairman of the DNA residents working party David Taylor on the planned creation of the resting place in Chatham High Street. This will create a new benchmark in the axis of peaceful areas and meeting places in the High Street. A successful collaboration between the DNA residents working party and Medway Council.**

**David:** 'Theatre Royal Square will become a location for relaxation alongside a historical theatre on High Street, where Charlie Chaplin took to the stage: the *Theatre Royal*. There is a great deal of history at this location. Now that the theatre is set to be converted into a bistro, the locals wanted to retain some of their heritage. Next to the theatre, there is an abandoned square covered in weeds. We wanted to update it with the support of Council as the land is owned by them. One of the issues is traffic

safety because part of the square has to be accessible for car traffic. We will create wooden fencing around the square and give it a fresh appearance; there will also be a central plaque that provides information on the location's theatrical

past. The square will be an ideal oasis on the High Street to take a break. On the other side of the street there is a block of social housing;

these residents will also appreciate the extra breathing space. We have decided to call this new area Theatre Royal Square. Medway Council will take care of maintaining the green space and the information signs. This will make it a little easier for us. We need a great deal of support in order to finish everything quickly. What is especially nice is that we can use Theatre Royal Square to create an axis which includes two 'resting' places in the High Street, from the mural (*see elsewhere in this publication*) to this square. Two places where the locals have reclaimed a small piece of Public Space. We can just do it with our budget, supplemented by voluntary work and money from the *Community First Initiative*\*. The Council will take responsibility for maintenance as they own the land. But what is most important, it is the initial consultation carried out by residents from the DNA working party that got this idea off the ground.'

This will create a new benchmark in the axis of peaceful areas and meeting places in the High Street.

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\* Community First is a support programme provided by the government which amounts to 80 million pounds. The programme runs over four years, until March 2015, and supports work between municipalities so that they can determine their strengths and local priorities in order to be more robust as they head into the future.

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## 5. A home for the neighbourhood

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Every community has one: a focal point, a beating heart that keeps the network alive, a roof over one's head at difficult times. Or at least: that's the way it should be. Every community needs a 'haven' like this – regardless of its form. A place everyone can call home and visit to recover.

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▲ Breda: reopening of Buurthuis ONS community centre (January 2014).



## From ‘Empty Spaces’ to Community Centre ONS

### Interaction between municipality, housing corporation and citizens

In the framework of DNA the Municipality of Breda organised the ‘Empty Spaces’ project along with the AlleeWonen housing corporation. The idea was to find a new use for unused Public Space. This led to the sale of an empty community centre in Geeren to the AlleeWonen housing corporation. On 6 January 2014 the new ONS community centre reopened. Social entrepreneurship and reintegration play a key role here. The DNA Project Manager for Public Space Mylène Hodzelmans (Municipality of Breda) and Monique van Winkel, Project Manager for Community Development with AlleeWonen housing corporation, explain the crucial role that the Dutch housing corporations play in active citizenship.

**Mylène:** ‘Before the start of DNA, the municipality had already conducted a study into the presence of business spaces in what are currently DNA neighbourhoods. It showed that Geeren needed business space in the paramedical sector. The neighbourhood has a lot of houses and one large shopping centre, but that’s where it ends. There is barely any “business” here and as a result there are no paramedical services: no physiotherapists, community nurses or midwives for example.’

‘Within the framework of DNA in Geeren we wanted to draw up an integrated plan for security, health and Public Space. The biggest problem was finding available buildings where these three functions were possible. The starting point for the Public Space aspect within DNA was to re-use empty spaces in the neighbourhood, based on bottom-up input by the local residents. Within DNA we decided to launch a demand-oriented pilot project about business. At the time, the municipality had two vacant buildings in the neighbourhood, including the former community centre. We wanted to find a new use for them.’

**Monique:** ‘AlleeWonen owns a lot of property in Geeren-Zuid. This does not belong to the municipality. It has transferred the ownership to the housing corporations. That is why we, as a corporation that works with public money, want to invest on various levels in Geeren-Zuid. Our philosophy is that if the residents are doing well then the neighbourhood is also doing well. Nothing can permanently change without the input of the residents.’

‘Our corporation already had established good contacts with the residents in Geeren. The communication lines are short and because this is a focal neighbourhood we also have a greater presence there. So AlleeWonen purchased the closed community centre from the municipality of Breda. Together with the local residents we were able to find a new use for the building so it would also really become theirs.’

**Mylène:** ‘The data from the neighbourhood surveys showed that in addition to needing business space the neighbourhood also required a community centre and a space

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for young people to learn. With DNA we were able to ensure that the local residents could decide for themselves how the building would be used. As a result, a training/working restaurant was opened here, which also provides training. From the start, the aim was to turn this into a multifunctional community centre. The municipality did not want to invest in it: the policy on community centres is to only use these as a resource to achieve policy objectives. In practice this means having the local residents take over and only intervene as a facilitator. The housing corporation saw this as an opportunity.'

**Monique:** 'The housing corporation funded the entire renovation. DNA made available the cash so we could devise and organise everything with the residents and with businesses, during various sessions and design workshops. The community restaurant and the facility rentals are now managed by a residents' cooperative. This works well but it wasn't easy. You have to remember that the cooperative members often haven't worked for several years and now "run a company". These people return their benefits and can save in the cooperative, which is part of their training budget. We also have seen several people find regular jobs thanks to this project.'

'All in all, it's all going very well. The community restaurant serves community dinners twice a week in the evening. There have been several theatrical performances with an audience from all over Breda. We are providing support in terms of business management, accounting and hospitality. There is also an educational component, with custom education for socially vulnerable young people from the neighbourhood. Courses are taught. A women's

studio also operates from here (*Vrouwenstudio Amalia*, see elsewhere in this publication).

They are currently establishing a clothes and sewing workshop.

Finally, there is also

De Witte Werkster (The White Worker), for care services: they provide domestic help and medical-technical support. The community centre holds huge appeal for professionals and for local residents alike.

Something beautiful is developing here.

The town council was so proud of the ONS community centre that on 15 May the new Mayor and Aldermen were presented to the city in this community centre.'

**Mylène:** 'What's nice is that what started thanks to DNA, i.e. finding a new use for empty spaces, has become such a meaningful project now. All the action areas of DNA are growing very organically here: care, exercise, security.

By getting young people off the streets, by creating a space, we can now develop all this. The success cannot be copied to other neighbourhoods or community centres. This requires a tailor-made approach. But the political trend in Breda is to "let the residents take the initiative".'

MYLÈNE HODZELMANS:

'The data from the neighbourhood surveys showed that in addition to needing business space the neighbourhood also required a community centre and a space for young people to learn.'

## deBuurt community centre

### A café converted into a community centre: an experiment

20 January 2013 was a historical day for De Coninckplein. The new community centre, Buurthuis deBuurt, was simply too small for all the people that had turned up for the opening reception. The location of the centre could hardly be more symbolic: a former popular pub on the corner of the square (called Non-Stop) which had closed after several decades now reopened as an alcohol-free community centre. For the time being the community centre's existence depends on DNA funding and the strong shoulders of the two women who took the initiative. The City of Antwerp is, however, looking at ways of perpetuating it. The community was and is an experiment that people need to learn from. The main thing is that the residents indicate what they want to achieve with the community centre. Marleen Vervaeet and Wiske Renoz, who took the initiative, reflect on how it came to this and look ahead.

As a volunteer, Marleen wants to focus her huge commitment in the community centre on referrals to aid. Her companion Wiske is in charge of the social aspect. The community centre is open two days a week and the rest of the week it is a meeting point for the various local associations. It is successful but there are still some question marks about the future. It is becoming very difficult for Marleen and Wiske to cope with the growing number of activities that are developed in the community centre. More support and more volunteers, in other words?

**Wiske:** 'I ran a pub here for 25 years, the neighbourhood pub Non-Stop, and I am also a member of the non-profit organisation Plein-groep De Coninckplein. Thanks to DNA, we were able to open Buurthuis deBuurt in the same location.'

**Marleen:** 'We are both local residents and have worked for several years as volunteers in the square during summer music festivals and

Muziek in de Wijk (ed: a fixture on the schedule of the summer city festival, De Zomer van Antwerpen). For quite some time we felt that local residents needed a space to be able to meet with each other. When Wiske's pub closed, we thought the time had come. We submitted a proposal for this space, with interested local residents and professionals. Our activities are entirely based on the residents' input. All in all, it took four months of preparations (refurbishing, interior decoration).'

**Wiske:** 'It's a lot of fun, but I had hoped there would be more volunteers. It is not that easy to get people to commit to the two weekdays that we are open. The rest of the time the space is used by associations and we ask them to do something in return. This can involve running the centre for a day, a performance ... We got this idea from DNA Kortrijk. The people of our own day team tend to give up too easily, often because of a problematic private situation or due to a lack of motivation.'

**Marleen:** 'You also need to always make sure that the starting premise of your project doesn't change. New visitors have to be effectively 'received', you need to welcome them. Not everybody is capable of this...'

**Wiske:** 'Whichever way you turn it visitors always ask for Marleen or Wiske. We have become the face of the community centre. Everyone approaches us in the street. And then you realise how much this community centre was needed. People worry about the future. They ask us where they will go if this ever closes.'

**Marleen:** 'In effect we almost are working on the streets with people. The local residents know us and we help them, refer them to aid organisations and social and economic activation. We can no longer refer them to the district office in Permeke Library in the square because that office has now been closed.'

**Wiske** (adds): 'Yes, that was very bad news for our neighbourhood.'

**Marleen:** 'Not everybody speaks the language or knows how to use a computer. So we suggested compensating for this by setting up an information desk for certain administrative matters. But then we need to know whether the community centre can stay.'

'Our idea first and foremost is to reach the group of people who never enter anywhere and above all to give the local residents a place where they can really get together. In that sense we are somewhat disappointed: most people who enter here like the place but that's where it ends. And it has almost become a full-time job for me. The Pleingroep is responsible for all the aspects of the community centre,

including the administration. But we need more volunteers who want to commit to this. The Public Social Welfare Centre cannot help. Nor can the city due to cost cuts, although they did commit to a meeting and association centre when the Permeke site opened in 2005. We especially have problems to store the materials during the Muziek in de Wijk concerts. A bigger building would be more than welcome. Two services centres in the neighbourhood have made us a proposal. They invited us to discuss it.'

**Wiske:** 'I think that Breda's community centre operations are much more advanced. And also how they have a presence in the streets, like with the 'Grote Broers' project! I love the idea that these boys climb up the ranks. People really respect them.'

**Marleen:** 'I also think that the Public Space which the city offers to its residents in Breda is a plus. Public Space should be made available as much as possible and have a function in the neighbourhood. I heard that a basketball coach has been appointed through "Buurtsport" (Community sport) in Antwerp who is present on Wednesdays to coach the young people in the square. I think this is a good example of a positive intervention, something which should be done all the time.'

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## 6. In the picture

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Sometimes people need a mirror. Not because of vanity.  
But to become whole again. To be able to redefine  
themselves and say: 'Look, this is who we are. And this  
is our life, the world we live in.'



◀ Medway: also the portrait of  
the municipal maintenance operator  
was incorporated in the mural  
in Chatham High Street.

## The graffiti jam in V-TEX

### New policy lines tagged

**Artcore is a group of young people from Kortrijk who have been painting graffiti in the V-TEX site and in other 'illegal' places like squats, places that cause a lot of nuisance in the opinion of many a neighbourhood resident. Although this is mainly a question of perception due to the boys' appearance. The graffiti artists wanted to do something about this negative image and the ensuing sense of insecurity.**

The V-TEX site is a stunning location for graffiti and children are also interested in it (*see the Children's Parliament, elsewhere in this publication*). Before the graffiti artists came, this was an unsafe place. Various problems were tackled simultaneously thanks to the graffiti jam that was organised here: the site was secured while residents were given the opportunity to see the artists at work and meet each other. The graffiti artists wanted to do away with their negative reputation and the association with vandalism.

The project was eligible for DNA funding because the V-TEX site is centrally located in the neighbourhood and Artcore mainly operates here. A kids wall was also created in the secured site. The Children's Parliament raised enthusiasm among the schoolchildren to visit the site and paint their own graffiti, which in turn led to contacts with the team of community workers. Graffiti was a frequently suggested item in the idea box of the Children's Parliament so it was bound to be a hit. A colouring competition was also organised using a poster developed by Artcore. The first prize was a workshop at Artcore during the graffiti jam for the winner's entire class. During the jam, local

bands provided live entertainment. The nearby Stasegemstraat was closed to traffic so the children could play in the street, creating a festive atmosphere in the entire neighbourhood.

This bottom-up initiative and political agendas nearly collided when the Mayor and the Alderman for Youth visited V-TEX during the jam to paint their own graffiti. But the media attention which the event generated as a result was a huge boost for the image of the graffiti youngsters. It largely neutralised the negative perception amongst the local residents which had come to the fore during the wellbeing survey (*see elsewhere in this publication*).

Soon the V-TEX building will be demolished to make way for new-builds and green areas. Kortrijk's town council will give the graffiti artists - who drew attention to the use of Public Space in the V-TEX neighbourhood - a new place to organise their activities.

**The graffiti artists wanted to do away with their negative reputation and the association with vandalism.**



## The mural in Chatham High Street

### Using paint as a social glue

Anyone who takes a look at the mural in the centre of Chatham High Street will immediately notice that this is more than just a cosmetic tweak to cheer up a degenerated area. The painting, which is several metres long, encompasses the past, present and the future, as envisaged by the community of Chatham. Very intimate, personal residents' stories are interwoven with historical events. No fewer than three hundred pairs of hands worked on this artwork. We let some of those who had a hand in this neighbourhood activity have their say.

**Max and Riven** (*residents, artists*): 'The wall was a bare, dull element in the High Street. We were able to realise this collective artwork, thanks to DNA funding. It was a fantastic community project. Everything was coordinated by the artist Richard Jefferies. This was his way of giving something back to the community. The way in which Richard led the workshops for the mural was brilliant. He made the preparatory sketches, told stories... He pressed brushes into our hands and told us to get on with it! Three hundred people were involved in firing the wall tiles with the name inscriptions of the local children. Even more people got involved with the project when random passers-by decided to have a go too. The artistic community<sup>7</sup> also helped out: photographers, painters,...

That was really helpful. I am unemployed and working on the wall put me in touch with loads of people. I really felt as if I was able to develop

my artistic qualities. I'd love to help with new murals elsewhere in Medway.

**Sue** (*resident, Community Leader*): 'I live in Luton, where I am the voluntary chair of the local PACT<sup>8</sup> neighbourhood committee. I became involved in DNA via PACT. We asked the locals about their priorities and they frequently mentioned a cleaner High Street. For me, this was the best pilot project with respect to Public Spaces and Community Safety. It would be great if we could develop an art route or have a monthly guided tour. That is another way to get people involved. If you take ownership of your neighbourhood, it makes you feel better about living in it.'

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▲ 7. **Nucleus Arts Center** in the centre of Chatham is an independent 'charity' founded in 2002 where around fifty artists have a studio. The gallery outlets sell artworks from about one hundred artists. There is also an exhibition area for short-term exhibitions. From here, pop-up shops, the High Street Parade, summer festivals and the annual, free art festival are organised.

8. **Partners and Communities Together (PACT)**: a collective initiative from the police and partner organisations that helps communities define and tackle problems with respect to Community Safety and quality of life.

## Square residents transformed into a comic strip

### A healing mirror for the neighbourhood

Comics artist and neighbourhood resident Steven De Rie about the comic *Allemaal op het plein* (*Life in the Square*), a story starring a mix of real and fictional local residents. The final result in October 2012: an accessible, up-beat book that proudly held up an assertive mirror to the community around the square. In brief: a next step towards restoring a collective identity, which was deemed lost.

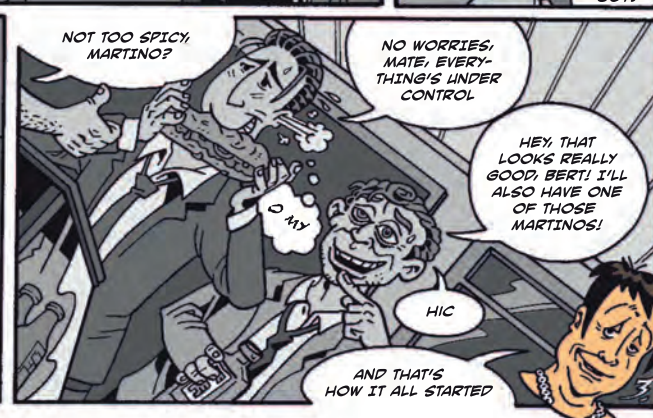
**Steven:** 'I have been living in this neighbourhood for 17 years, in a fun alley with a lot of flowers and plants. I design comics, work as an illustrator and also teach comics workshops in schools and cultural centres. Every third Sunday of the month, De Coninkplein becomes a book market and Erik Richart (a project worker for Public Space) and I thought that it would be a fun DNA project to draw a comic about, for and by the square – drawn by me, a neighbourhood resident, and based on neighbourhood stories.'

'We started searching for a script in various ways. One of the sources of inspiration was the comics workshops, which I taught in the Royal Athenaeum, the school near the square. Some of the characters and story lines in *Allemaal op het Plein* were developed with the help of the students of the Athenaeum. Hundreds of students contributed to it.'

'To cast even more characters one night I visited Café Kiebooms in the square with Erik where we talked to the patrons and I drew caricatures. During the annual piano marathon we set up shop in the centre of the square and approached people. The DNA workers were simultaneously canvassing people in and around the square about their notion of wellbeing. The respondents got their own caricature to take home as a gift.'

'Ultimately, the story became a mix of fictional and real local residents. You can easily recognise Wiske and Marleen of the community centre, the knitting club in the Permeke cafeteria, the members of the Pleingroep. What's really funny is that the local residents swear they recognise the fictional characters. All in all, I created this fantastically vibrant fictional party in the square, as it could be in real life. And the neighbourhood liked it a lot because they received positive attention for once. The deBuurt community centre distributed a lot of copies.'

'It was a really fascinating undertaking, creating a comic strip based on all these interviews with residents. An artistic challenge and a fun job which has put a lot of people in touch with each other. What's more, we found a visible, nice way of involving the Athenaeum – which is part of the immediate surroundings around De Coninckplein – in the comic. This proved really useful because many students had never even been here.'



▲ Antwerp: a page from the comic book 'Allemaal op het plein'.





▲ Kortrijk: the graffiti jam at the V-Tex-site (October 2013).



▲ Antwerp: the festive opening of deBuurt community centre (January 2013).



▲ Medway: the mural in Chatham High Street, work in progress.

## Culture policy, community development and citizenship

Unlike DNA pilot projects that directly target health and wellbeing, such as healthy food, sport for immigrant women and girls, football for young boys in deprived neighbourhoods like in Medway, “culture” is a concept that is difficult to define. You cannot simply measure the direct impact of cultural events on a neighbourhood’s viability. The DNA pilot projects that directly benefit the health of the local residents, the medical check-ups for the over 45s in Medway or the ‘Grote Broer’ project in Breda are initiatives which are perceived as positive by broad layers of the population and by the administration and government. But things are quite different for culture. That is why it is useful, in addition to the tangible *outcome* of the DNA pilot projects that use ‘culture’ to promote more Community Safety, wellbeing and consequently viability, to see which role culture can really play in community development and citizenship.

An interesting definition of culture was coined by urban researcher and culture philosopher Eric Corijn, who links culture policy, community development and citizenship. According to Corijn, culture and art can contribute to the self-activation of local residents in various ways as well as creating a local identity on the neighbourhood level. ‘This can be done by drawing up an inventory of traditions that exist in the neighbourhood and by creating a ‘métissage’ or mix of these traditions (ed: such as the ‘De Soundtrack van ons Plein’ project), by presenting contemporary art forms as means of expression (ed: Oogststoren, the V-TEX graffiti wall, the Chatham mural and so on).

Exactly what many of the culturally inspired DNA pilot projects do. Corijn adds that a local meeting place is vital in a neighbourhood to ensure that this self-produced art and culture can make a difference in terms of social cohesion. Specific preliminary conditions include a better local centralisation of the services (in wellbeing and in the social-cultural sector), assisting people to evolve from a passive use of the services to an active participation in self-organisation and the development of local committees. Infrastructure and services have to be grouped as much as possible.

Corijn concludes: ‘If you want to add substance to the neighbourhood level (i.e. develop a sense of community, social cohesion, the development of an own identity within the bigger urban fabric or even a local specificity) then this has to be actively shaped, actively incorporated in a story. Culture policy plays an essential role in this. And more importantly, because you need to create an active and participatory cultural structure, it also needs to be linked with the development of a local political forum, with local citizenship.’ According to Eric Corijn, culture can provide leverage for social dynamics that benefit a neighbourhood’s viability. Ultimately, it helps generate local citizen participation, allowing the local residents to get a grip on their daily and immediate living conditions.

▲ Source: Corijn, E., ‘*Stadschriften. Kan de stad de wereld redden?*’, VUB Press, 2012

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## 7. Wayward wanderers

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A static person is basically a dead person - movement equals life. The more you move, the higher your chances of success. Targeted movement ensures efficiency, while consciously getting lost may lead to insight and wisdom.



◀ Kortrijk: the child- and wheelchair friendly Spijkerpad in Lange Munte.



▲ Medway: health checks in the National Health Service bus (study visit April 2014).



## The pub crawls of Theater Vonk

### Neighbourhood visitors and café residents

Erica Van Hylckama is the artistic director of Theater Vonk, a socially committed theatre company which contributed in various ways to the wellbeing surveys that were organised in the square at the start of DNA. Vonk and the City of Antwerp have already been collaborating for several years, mainly for the programme which Erik Richart (Project Leader for Public Space) has been developing for the square (including the Cult 2060<sup>9</sup> cultural event). For DNA Erica developed pub crawls which establish contacts between the colourful crowd that populates the cafés around the square.

**Erik:** 'Erica and I met through 'Programma voor Stad in verandering' (PSV). The idea was to promote the square for and by the local residents. This neighbourhood is simply teeming with stories so theatre makers find it easy to work here. Every year PSV organises the Cult 2060 event in October. The aim is to put the neighbourhood in the spotlight for a whole day in a fun and accessible way. We thought that a theatre production was the perfect way of doing this and that's how Vonk developed its theatre walks.'

**Erica:** 'Theater Vonk employs two actors and relies on a group of amateur actors who live in the neighbourhood. We know a lot of people here. A young playwright gathered stories from the local residents, visiting the café in the Permeke library and Non-Stop, which used to be a café but has since become a community centre. The participants in the theatre walk visit several places, where an actor awaits them. He constantly explores the boundary between fact and fiction. As a result, the participants are constantly misled by the local residents (who are in on the joke). Stories include the history of a building, of a street, of a family... Warm yet surprising encounters, that is what we strive to achieve. Just imagine a bunch of people

who happened to visit the neighbourhood and spontaneously dance a polonaise with a bunch of Africans. They will leave the square with a totally changed perception.'

**Erik:** 'We launched the pub crawls, the actual DNA project, basing ourselves on the theatre walks, as a co-production by the local residents and the café visitors. The stories are not narrated, but acted out. Except you don't always know who's acting and who isn't. Our actors/local residents sit among the café visitors and do their thing. We have tried to get as many pubs as possible on board in the square: Murphy's Place, which attracts Africans for the most part, Café Kiebooms,... all with their own line-up of bands, one of the assets of this square. We also had these bands perform on each other's stage, which is not obvious. But even the Africans, who traditionally are reticent, now like to visit Café Kiebooms, which is predominantly 'white'.

What's nice is that a growing number of local residents are beginning to see the benefit of launching voluntary initiatives together without automatically receiving cash for this.'

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▲ 9. Cult 2060 is an accessible cultural festival in which various local associations and artists from '2060' Antwerpen-Noord participate.

## WINNERS!

## Hammering it home: a nail path in Lange Munte

**The Kortrijk projects ‘Spijkerpad Lange Munte’ and ‘Sparrenbosje V-TEX’ both won the European Ownership Award – a shared prize for the two neighbourhoods. The people who took the initiative for the project each received a cheque to the amount of 2,500 euros in Breda. With this prize they were able to finalise these two projects within the year. In Lange Munte residents started banging nails into the pavement...**

A nail path is a bike, walking or scooter trail that is indicated with nails in the ground. The story is somewhat similar to that of Hansel and Gretel. The objective of the trail: encourage residents to leave their house and sample what their neighbourhood has to offer. Or provide people who do not know the neighbourhood with a handy ‘guideline’. During an information meeting, the group of volunteers presented the concept to the local residents.

The project was developed based on the crowd-funding principle: residents could determine the direction of the path by purchasing a nail. As a result, you create a path through the neighbourhood which connects people, both literally and in a figurative manner.

An information board was installed at the start near the Lange Munte church, which outlined the trail, the distances and the objectives of the path. The neighbourhood’s logo was engraved in the nails. Eye-catchers were also installed by artists and organisations from Lange Munte (such as local schools, care centres and so on) along the path, which runs by meaningful buildings and squares - this is a relatively large neighbourhood that is home to a lot of artistic

talent. As a result, all the typical characteristics of the neighbourhood are highlighted. And the neighbourhood also learns more about its own residents thanks to the attractions. Or vice versa.

The local residents who took the initiative also wanted to give ‘external visitors’ the opportunity to get to know the neighbourhood better. This really is a good idea when you bear in mind that 650 new dwellings will be added to the neighbourhood in the foreseeable future. This future expansion, in turn, offers new opportunities to create new branches along the path.

The path was tailor-made for young families, old people and the disabled so it is both wheelchair- and stroller-friendly. The first nail was put in place in June 2014. All the local residents were invited to a local party to inaugurate the path.

The development of the path brought a new wind to the neighbourhood: residents of all ages and origins joined forces to develop a new ‘lifeline’ in Lange Munte.

## The National Health Service bus

### Health checks on wheels

The British national health authority defines the most important focus areas for health and wellbeing; these are then interpreted on a local level. Healthcare in Medway focuses on smoking, obesity, alcohol, sexual health and teenage pregnancies, mental health, check-ups and lifestyle coaching on an individual level. Vince Maple, Council Member for Chatham Central, and Luton resident Sue Kirk explain the DNA project Health Checks in Medway.

**Vincent:** 'One of the most important national healthcare goals is reducing health inequality. This is vital in Medway as the life-expectancy of men in some areas is up to nine years below that in others. One of the methods for restoring this balance is prevention. In Medway, a national programme for preventative health checks has been implemented for men between the ages of 40 and 74. This has not been terribly successful, however. As a result, the health authority investigated how this could be improved. One of the options to take the programme to the people, was to provide mobile health checks via a specially kitted out NHS bus. In other words, a medical centre on wheels. The bus is outsourced to an external organisation and their payments are based on results. For every free health check that they conduct, the nurses will be paid out of DNA funds. The checks primarily focus on those aged between 40 and 55, from the black community within the DNA areas as they very rarely have check-ups. The tricky question, however, is how you can approach people from these communities; this is where residents such as Sue Kirk are so important. She is chair of one of our residents' councils and is in touch with the professionals. She advises them where and when they should park the bus, i.e. which market, at

which church or mosque etc. For many people, the bus on their doorstep is the first and only time they've ever had a check-up. This can be life-saving for some so it is very important that the health authority remains convinced of the importance of this initiative.'

**Sue:** 'We have to divide the limited budget that we get from DNA cleverly to cover small projects that have an immediate impact. In my opinion, and certainly according to DNA project leader for Health & wellbeing Emma Parker, the Health Checks are one of the strongest projects. In my neighbourhood, Luton, they form an important step towards improved health. The fact that women more frequently and more readily go to the doctor meant it was very important to delineate middle-aged men as the target group. During our meetings with other local residents, we tried to convince everyone, in the hope that they would pass on the message to others too. In many cases, this is exactly what happened. The Health Checks in Medway have now been recognised nationally as a positive example.'

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## 8. Building a network

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We are social animals. Isolate us and we suffer. Our power lies in the alliances that we create, the networks we develop. The stronger and denser these networks are, the higher our chances of a meaningful and self-assured life.

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▲ Breda: the municipality, the police and residents join forces for 'Attentie Buurtpreventie' (Attention Neighbourhood Prevention) campaign.

## The birth of the V-TEX neighbourhood committee

### Observations of a co-founder

**What do you do when you realise that there is so much potential in your neighbourhood and nothing is being done with it because there is no structure available? You grab a pen and paper and start to knock on doors. The story of the V-TEX neighbourhood committee and a few ad hoc observations on co-production by Stefaan Delobelle who helped found it.**

**Stefaan:** 'Look, if you want something to happen in your neighbourhood you can either complain about it or do something. The previous community worker, who had developed a lot of actions for the programme, had opened our eyes. When the new town council was appointed and the 'Kortrijk Spreekt' consultation round was launched, each neighbourhood committee was given the opportunity to list its wishes. Because there was no real neighbourhood committee here I decided to establish one myself, along with two other residents of Stasegemstraat, by signing up and advancing ten points to make it a more viable neighbourhood. We distributed 300 copies of this list, from door to door. Everyone had to indicate three items that they thought were relevant for our neighbourhood. This helped us fine-tune our vision for the neighbourhood. We had 120 respondents, a good start for a solid dossier. We then organised a neighbourhood meeting, which enabled people to submit their candidacy for the neighbourhood committee. Unfortunately, only native residents joined. We recently met with the Mosque, which has a new young group of people in charge. They are willing to work with us and commit to the committee. We also work closely with the community workers, which really is necessary. Bruno, Valerie and I continue to take the lead or the flame might be extinguished. And we have already had our first successes. Something is finally changing in the

neighbourhood. But it's not easy. Most of the people here mainly focus on surviving.'

'Without a European grant we would never have been able to organise our first car-free playing street or the graffiti jam, which started the whole process. The community workers and I found each other there. But we want to continue after DNA. We don't really need much to organise a neighbourhood, as long as we find volunteers and get resources from the city.'

'Asking citizens about their opinion and giving them the leverage to take things in hand themselves is a positive story. But I do hope that the government realises that if it asks the residents for their opinion it should take this into account and make the necessary resources available. It is a double trenchant. While co-production may seem 'handy' and 'cheaper' to the government they need to know what they are doing by involving the population. The idea is to complement each other. The renovation of Stasegemstraat for example, the second most important concern (after safety), which was raised during the survey, exceeds the entire budget of 'Kortrijk Spreekt', for all neighbourhood districts. Such vital interventions in Public Space have to be considered separately from co-production and the participation of local residents. They are the responsibility of the city council.'

## Neighbourhood prevention and Flat Alert in Geeren

### Contacts for a greater sense of security

Neighbourhood prevention increases social control in the neighbourhood. In Breda, the 'Attentie Buurtpreventie' (Attention Neighbourhood Prevention) campaign focuses on burglary. The DNA areas are successful examples, showing to what community prevention can lead. The municipality of Breda works closely with the police and two wellbeing organisations. They get people to talk to each other again, which has a positive effect on the neighbourhood's viability.

#### Welzijnswerker Anouk Beekhuizen:

'Neighbourhood prevention is a responsibility of the municipality and works well in Geeren. The objective is to defuse and avoid conflicts and neighbourhood quarrels by making people talk to each other more. Groups of volunteers in the neighbourhood try to make people aware of the threat of burglary or convince them to report matters to the municipality's hotline or to the housing corporation. There is a street contact in every street where the neighbourhood prevention operates. It has a hotline to the municipality and the police. There are about fifteen active street contacts in Geeren-Zuid. This ensures that you maintain a dialogue with your neighbour.'

**City Marine Officer Frank Ewals<sup>10</sup>:** 'The Flat Alert prevention group is now also training to do this, with the support of the housing corporation. Flat Alert is a derivative of neighbourhood prevention for apartments. In every apartment building you have a contact, as you would in every street. We are currently implementing a Flat Alert pilot project in Geeren-Zuid. Here too the local residents are activated by the wellbeing organisations, joining forces with the housing corporation and the municipality. The residents no longer trust the municipality

that much, for example because litter is not removed in a timely manner. People first need to feel again that it is worth reporting something. It takes time. The municipality and corporation are doing their best to ensure more efficient litter collection and removal in exchange for the residents' commitment. If this basic service functions as it should then participation becomes an option. Thanks to the neighbourhood prevention the security figures have increased with leaps and bounds. Above all, the subjective sense of security is strongly enhanced by neighbourhood prevention, which ties in with the DNA objectives. We can see that it's working.'

**Anouk:** 'Neighbourhood prevention does not work in severely underprivileged neighbourhoods. It doesn't interest people to contribute to this. You need to take baby steps and try to connect with the world they live in. People who have problems in their own household have no interest in other things. That is why we went to talk with people behind their front doors. Because you always see the same people when you send out an invitation to come to the community centre. If you meet people halfway, if you visit them in their own home, you can find out what their actual concerns are.'

▲ 10. The City Marine Officer is the direct link between the city and citizens. He is responsible for the safety and management of nuisances in the neighbourhood, focussing on youngsters and preventing home break-ins, which are problems that cannot be managed by the police alone. That is why the City Marine Officer works together closely with the police, housing corporations, citizen initiatives such as 'Grote Broers', the neighbourhood committee and prevention teams.



## Women's studio Amalia / ONS community workshop

### Studying, cooking and sewing together

The development of networks that strengthen the respective DNA neighbourhoods is something that Breda is investing in on various levels and in different ways. This process involves the municipality, the housing corporations, the wellbeing organisations and the local residents. The ONS community centre in Geeren in that sense is a crucial hub, where all these connections come together and where the umbrella body, called Het Wijkavontuur, assures the necessary cross-pollinations. Lita Kalle of Surplus Welzijn explains one of the results in more detail: Women's Studio Amalia.

**Lita Kalle:** 'I work as a youth worker for the Surplus Welzijn wellbeing organisation. We do wellbeing work at the request of the Municipality of Breda in Breda Noord-Oost, of which Geeren is a district.

Our organisation's activities are founded on four cornerstones: talent development, stimulating volunteer work, networking and fighting nuisance caused by young people.'

'The Amalia Women's Studio is a nice project, which is housed in the Geeren community centre and which originated in 'Het Wijkavontuur'. In essence it is a meeting place where the women from the neighbourhood meet on a daily basis. The majority of these women only have a very limited social network that they can rely on. Here they can meet new people and learn new skills by taking part in various types of activities, like cooking, learning Dutch or learning to sew.'

'And this meeting place becomes an interesting place to launch new initiatives and ideas like 'Vrouwen in Beweging' health project (*see elsewhere in this publication*), which various

women of the Women's Studio participated in.'

LITA KALLE:

**'Here the women can meet new people and learn new skills.'**

'Another project that is linked to this is the ONS Community workshop, a sewing shop where vintage

clothes are repaired, sold and/or loaned. Even wedding dresses. The Community Workshop is one of those initiatives that originated in the community centre and are now becoming a neighbourhood undertaking.'

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## 9. Party

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**When all the work is done, when the work starts or when we are halfway... Having a party is part of the human DNA. Celebrating is a bit like dancing: it involves looking back, looking forward and spinning around. Celebrations bring us together: to eat, work, pray, fight. But always: Together. Because a party by yourself is not really a party.**

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▲ Antwerp: party in café Kiebooms at De Coninckplein (study visit June 2013).

## The multicultural 'A' exhibition in De Coninckplein

### Bob Marley and dancing dragons

Miaodi Shih of the Fo Guang Shan temple in Antwerp's Chinatown and her compatriot Sui Hong took the initiative for this multicultural 'A' exhibition De Coninckplein. Their proposal was selected for the final of the DNA European Ownership Award in Breda but 'A soundtrack of our Square' won instead. Ultimately, the idea was executed thanks to the collaboration of DNA. On 24 May 2014, a major festival was organised in the square which highlighted the neighbourhood's diversity in an assertive manner. Every last detail was devised by the local residents. What follows here is a chaotic group discussion with the happy organisers.

**Miaodi Shih:** 'At the meeting where the results of the focus groups in the wellbeing survey were presented we found out that DNA offered us the opportunity to participate in the DNA European Ownership Award. We came up with this project to add some colour to the neighbourhood. Various groups in this neighbourhood would present their own culture during a multicultural procession in traditional clothes. Chinese, Indonesian, Thai... but also Belgians, Dutch, Africans, Latinos... Bing Thé, who lives in this neighbourhood, came up with the idea of asking the local traders to participate. We flyered the neighbourhood and it soon became clear that the residents were warming to the idea. What a difference with three years ago! Then this really would have been impossible.'

**Bing Thé:** 'I organise Dutch conversation classes in the deBuurt community centre and I know a lot of people in Antwerpen-Noord. I am a member of a wide array of organising committees or non-profit organisations. I even managed to install a ger, a traditional nomad's tent in the square thanks to a Mongolian non-profit association in Antwerp.'

**Miaodi:** 'Besides the parade and the Chinese

lion's dance we also organised various workshops: Oriental massage, a Japanese dance workshop...'

**Michel Zaalblok,** a neighbourhood resident from Suriname: 'We also organised live music from Africa and Suriname. What was really nice is that some of the young people who gave dance demos were approached by another non-profit organisation to perform at their festival. So we also established new ties. And that was the purpose.'

**Els Aerts:** 'As an artist I work with houses a lot. We installed a Thuishuisje (A Home) in the square to symbolise that everyone needs to be able to feel at home in the city. The idea was to show the faces behind all the national flags on the roof of the house. The symbolism of the flags was put in perspective through a collage representing the solar system in which planet earth is only a small speck... Inside the house you could dress up and have your photo taken. We used these photos to cover the walls of the house. As a result, we gave the neighbourhood a face and showed visitors how colourful our community really is. We had the African children wear Chinese clothes and vice versa. This was a real hit. The idea behind my house instal-

lations is perfectly suited to the DNA project. The houses I make are like people: you think you know who they are when you look at the outside. But what really matters is what's inside. If you really want to get to know the house, you need to step inside and that takes time.'

**Riquita Castro:** 'It's also incredible how peaceful this whole celebration was. You have to bear in mind that the alcohol ban still applied. So I spent the whole afternoon preparing mocktails!'

## RESIDENTS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES >

**Riquita Castro, Transnational Taskforce on Wellbeing:**

**'If you respect yourself, you also respect the others.'**

Riquita Castro, a Portuguese-Angolese woman who has been living in Antwerp for over twenty years, is a member of the Transnational Taskforce on Wellbeing. An occupational accident, ten years of unemployment and problems with her allowances undermined her self-image and health. As a single mother with two sons, without any family, life is quite complicated in Belgium. Moreover, she suffers from a chronic illness, meaning she now has no choice but to live off a disability allowance, after a brief period in which she managed to find a job. But Riquita refuses to give up. Her active participation in the transnational taskforce, which allowed her to visit the partner cities of Breda, Medway and Kortrijk, her participation in the three-day seminar about Wellbeing and in the focus groups, have helped restore her self-confidence. And now she dares to hope again, for herself and for the community.

'I was involved in the DNA project from the start: I filled out the questions about wellbeing in the square. Everyone recorded their opinion on a wooden board. I had heard from a friend that the city was searching for participants. I'm an artist - I like to paint with oils on canvas - which is why she thought of me. I had written something about 'love', because we do not have enough of that in our society. It has almost become a taboo. People are afraid of love and life. Friendship and respect are part of this and so is gratitude. If you love yourself, then you love the others. If you respect yourself, you also respect the others. This also applies to the neighbourhood where you live.'

'I like to learn things and so I immediately decided to take part in the focus groups, but because I hadn't worked for quite some time I felt very uncertain. But when they asked me to participate in the Transnational Taskforce on Wellbeing I immediately agreed. My eyes really opened in the

partner cities. I saw a lot of potential in Medway but thought that poor food and obesity were big problems there. In the Netherlands they had to contend with a problem of aggression, I learnt. In Antwerp possibly there is more racism. But the new, younger generations suffer much less from this. I thought the people in Kortrijk were really open! I had interesting discussions with local residents in every city I visited. I always am in a good mood and I like to open up to others, that helps. The seminar on Health & Wellbeing in Kortrijk offered fewer opportunities to exchange ideas but it was interesting to listen and learn. I especially want to support this taskforce interaction in our neighbourhood and continue to exchange ideas. It really is worth it. The situation in our own square has improved vastly in just a few years! You now see children playing here. That makes you feel so much safer. DNA helped restore the hope for my own personal situation. Thanks to all the people I met I now understand that I am capable of something, that I do count. It got me out of a depression. I now visit the Community Centre more easily, I like to cook there for the visitors. The Permeke Library has an edible garden, where you also get to know people. Bing, who lives in the neighbourhood and who organises Dutch conversation sessions in the community centre, always restores your faith. I know them all now, they've all become familiar faces, which I consider the biggest advantage. I feel stronger and I dare to look ahead again.'

## De Coninckplein, welkom iedereen!

Op de 'A' fiets komt De Coninck naar de BIB  
Internetten, boeken lenen op elk verdiep.  
Dan krijgt hij goesting in een lekkere hap,  
Martino, saté frietjes of kebab!

### Chorus x2:

DE CONINCKPLEIN, DE CONINCK-PLEIN,  
WELKOM IEDEREEN!  
FEESTEN ALS DE BEESTEN,  
WE GAAN DAAR ALLEN HEEN.

Vuilnis kattenpis, het was wel eens een zoi,  
Maar een plein voor het volk houden we graag  
mooi. Dokwerkers en kruideniers die hadden  
er hun stek, Nu vindt heel de wereld hier een  
thuis, een plek.

### Chorus x2:

DE CONINCKPLEIN, DE CONINCK-PLEIN,  
WELKOM IEDEREEN!  
FEESTEN ALS DE BEESTEN,  
WE GAAN DAAR ALLEN HEEN.

Uit onze wijk zijn grote sterren gekomen,  
La Esterella, Kiebooms hadden er hun  
dromen.

Vincent van Gogh, Willy Van Der Steen,  
Met jouw talenten ben je hier niet alleen!

### Break:

FESTIVAL, BASKETBAL,  
SPORTEN, SAMEN SPRINGEN  
JONG EN OUD, EEN KLAPPEKE DOEN,  
DANSEN SAMEN ZINGEN

### Chorus x2:

DE CONINCKPLEIN, DE CONINCK-PLEIN,  
WELKOM IEDEREEN!  
FEESTEN ALS DE BEESTEN,  
WE GAAN DAAR ALLEN HEEN.

## WINNERS!

## A soundtrack for De Coninckplein

Composing a song. Setting lyrics to music, with words taken straight from the mouth of the local residents of De Coninckplein. In a nutshell that is what the project *De Soundtrack van ons Plein* sets out to do. And they were the winners of the DNA European Ownership Award for Antwerp. They distilled song lyrics during workshops and exchanges with children from the local schools, based on the stories of the senior citizens and visitors of the local care centre. It's an alternative survey if you like. The local band IciAnvers composed the song and created a video clip for social media. The square now has its own anthem, which creates a sense of community. Singer Patries Wichers and guitarist Giles Thomas explain.

**Patries:** 'IciAnvers is a musical trio. Our style? Some have described it as "electronic loops, world rhythms and jazzy singing". We are inspired by the whole world... you can hear Africa, a bit of Latin America and the Balkan in our music...'

'Music fosters ties and *De Soundtrack van ons Plein* was not our first endeavour. We have already often worked with children from various backgrounds. IciAnvers is just as colourful because I have Dutch/Indonesian roots, the guitarist Giles with whom I started IciAnvers is British and our percussionist is from Kosovo. We all feel a strong connection with the neighbourhood. We have already performed on several occasions in Café Kiebooms on De Coninckplein.'

**Giles:** 'Patries and I like to experiment as musicians. Gradually we became interested in composing songs based on memories. And so you end up working with old people. The people in the care homes near the square are often native Antwerpers who have lived here all their lives and so are an invaluable source of memories about the city.'

**Patries:** 'The idea for *De Soundtrack van ons Plein* dates from before the competition. But because of the diversity in our group we decided to up the ante and gather young people and children along with older people.'

'I am so glad that we participated in the competition because we were able to professionally record the song with the 5,000 euros we received. We have decided to donate the rights to the song to Permeke Library in the square, and the City of Antwerp.'

The 'anthem' will be played and sung live during events in the square, like on the occasion of the Chinese New Year or during cultural events and festivals like Cult 2060. The lyrics will be distributed in the square in some way or another, so that everybody can sing along. We hope that the song will ultimately become part of the square's cultural heritage.'



## Safe picnics and fake speed cameras

### Traffic safety week in Lange Munte

**Traffic safety was a major priority in Lange Munte in the results of the wellbeing survey. The neighbourhood is used as a bypass, which often results in dangerous situations. So the local residents and the local partner organisations joined forces. And what started out as an educational week ended on a festive note ...**

In the spring of 2014 (23 March), an entire week was dedicated to traffic safety. A traffic course was installed in the schools, a wheelchair course was set up and the police was on hand to label bikes to prevent bike theft. All in all, a carefully orchestrated awareness campaign which generated media attention but also made the town council think about this. A speaker of the Belgian Traffic Safety Institute was invited during an information event for local residents and a bike tour was organised along the major black points. The police visited the schools – because schoolchildren are the most vulnerable road users and one of the stakeholder groups. On the last day, the week ended on a festive note with a large car-free street so children could play and a street picnic which effectively closed off the main traffic route.

**On the last day, the week ended on a festive note with a large car-free street so children could play and a street picnic which effectively closed off the main traffic routes.**

The traffic safety week in Lange Munte also enhanced the effect of the Baking project, allowing the local residents to get to know each other better. The people and organisations that became acquainted during these events now tend to organise activities more easily. The preparations are also going more smoothly. There is a sense of trust and know-how is being shared. This is more important than the conclusion that traffic safety requires a top-down approach to improve the situation. What mainly matters here is that the neighbourhood took the initiative. They also organised several activities, including installing their own (fake) speed cameras, which they made themselves - a fun initiative which the town council would never get away with.

## The Karamblas vintage market

### Social entrepreneurship as an image builder

**Natacha Jaumain is a jewellery designer. One day she visited the V-Tex community worker and asked her whether it was 'possible to organise a vintage market in the neighbourhood'. Thanks to DNA, Karamblas originally started out as a one-woman project by an entrepreneurial young neighbourhood resident. The keywords for this successful example of social entrepreneurship are enthusiasm and passion. Meanwhile, the market also attracts new creative talent from outside the V-Tex neighbourhood.**

**Natacha:** 'I always had to sell my jewellery on markets outside of Kortrijk. But why couldn't I sell it here? So I decided to ask the community worker whether it was possible to organise a market in the gatehouse. She and I got the ball rolling. In 2014, we will be organising this market for the third year running.'

Karamblas (a combination of K(ortrijk) and Ramblas) gathers people with online stores, during a popular festival, which transcends sales and commerce. There is a circus tent, children's entertainment, food trucks etc. in the V-Tex inner courtyard. It is a real party, even if you don't have the means to 'buy' anything. The first year, we welcomed forty stallholders on one Saturday and 2,000 visitors. The next years, we had to organise the market in two locations on two days. We got help from Bolwerk, the association for social-artistic work, and Café Congo. Creative spirits organised workshops. Visitors could tell us how they had found out about Karamblas on a slip of paper. Often they replied "because of the crowds in the neighbourhood". So we do attract new people. The city has now given us support and we spread the Karamblas name by sticking posters in the window displays of empty store fronts in the local shopping centres.

We use the posters to encourage creative entrepreneurs to do something about these empty spaces. I now have a store of my own in the K shopping centre where we organise pop-ups under the Karamblas label. That is our way of providing support to young creative entrepreneurs.'

'The image of V-Tex has been enhanced thanks to this initiative. Even the regional TV broadcaster covers the market. And so Karamblas has started to help define the neighbourhood's image. This is a strong example of social entrepreneurship from the bottom-up that was facilitated by the DNA project grant. It guaranteed that the local residents would not have to invest their own cash, which is very important for this target group. Since then the market has become such a success that the social public wellbeing centre has started to ask questions about whether the 'commercial activity' of Karamblas is actually appropriate in the description of the Public Social Welfare Centre's tasks. After a few explanations they no longer were concerned. Ultimately the project is founded on bottom-up work and volunteers. Karamblas is a huge success as a 'neighbourhood activity'. What's more, it generates its own resources. All this has led neighbourhood resident Natacha to call herself 'an events manager of sorts.'



▲ Antwerp: relaxing at café Kiebooms, one of the colourful cafés near De Coninckplein.



▲ Antwerp: partying like crazy at De Coninckplein (July 2013).



▲ Kortrijk: a vintage dj during Karamblas.



◀ Kortrijk: festive end to Traffic Safety Week (March 2014).



▲ Antwerp: theatre walks by Theater Vonk (May-June 2013).

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▲ Kortrijk: Karamblas vintage market.



▲ Antwerp: transformation at 'Thuishuisje' during the multicultural 'A' exhibition De Coninckplein (May 2014).







A photograph of a street festival. In the foreground, a woman with a yellow scarf and a black jacket is smiling and raising her hands. To her left, a young boy in a red shirt is visible. The background shows a street with buildings, a street lamp with several colorful balloons (red, green, purple, yellow, blue) attached to it, and a building with more balloons (blue, yellow) hanging from its windows. The sky is blue with some clouds.

PART 4:  
INTERIM REVIEW OF A  
WORK IN PROGRESS

This ‘substantiated’  
knowledge and  
experience transfer  
across regional  
borders, learning from  
each other’s learning  
processes, is probably  
one of the strongest  
results of the  
entire DNA project.



A project like DNA is never finished'. The dialogue between 'sovereign' citizens and the governing authority is in perpetual flux; with constantly changing relationships. This publication provides a fragmented report on the start of that process in four partner cities.

This final chapter, therefore, takes a look at the interim state-of-play instead of providing a conclusion. We invited a number of DNA project leaders and key figures to look back on three years of DNA. They are ideally positioned to have a good overview of what this project has meant in terms of social cohesion in their cities.

We finish with a general review of the cross-border DNA project and, linked to a number of slogans, some dos and don'ts for professionals who are involved in this captivating world of social interaction.

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## Looking back

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### Antwerp

KRISTOF BAEYENS:

‘We need to steer clear from the paternalism of the past because it fosters laziness.’

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**Kristof Baeyens, Community Management Coordinator for the ‘Samen Leven’ (Living Together) city authority and DNA Project Coordinator for the City of Antwerp, initially was sceptical about the bottom-up changes by local residents in ‘difficult’ neighbourhoods. But after three years of DNA he understands the necessity.**

**Kristof:** ‘The City of Antwerp has always had a tradition of top-down decision-making although participation and attention to the various angles are always a part of this. A pure bottom-up approach, i.e. letting the city users fully take the initiative, was never considered. Participation is always part of the decision-making process in the form of participation through surveys and hearings, for example when a square had to be renovated. In a bottom-up approach the residents implement their ideas with the support of professionals and facilities. This is a great innovation for the City of Antwerp.’

‘In my current position bottom-up work is not that obvious. As the Coordinator for Community Management I manage the approach to societal issues such as nuisance. This involves more repression and increased supervision, as well as raising awareness and community building. In De Coninckplein the situation was insufficiently stable and secure to let the local residents, traders, library visitors and users of the square take initiatives themselves. This was only possible after the nuisance had largely disappeared and the new standards had been implemented by us, the city council.’

‘Once a basic level of safety was guaranteed, a whole series of positive, constructive initiatives designed to make the square more attractive could be implemented. From the outset the De Coninckplein Action Plan (*see elsewhere in this publication*) focussed on two tracks, with the baseline ‘t Plein is van iedereen (the square belongs to everyone). The fact that residents

would be involved in this plan was a basic requirement for tackling and implementing this in a durable manner. When DNA became part of the story and funds became available for the bottom-up approach our first task was to find organisations and residents who wanted to be part of this (continued) story. However, it was not always easy to launch this search as a city council. In a sense you could say that we had changed 'sides', engaging in dialogues with organisations like Activering Free Clinic, Doctors of the World and the Pleingroep, who thought of us as the 'repressive' government. Many of our discussion partners felt that 'nothing is allowed or possible in the square', there was a lack of trust in our good intentions. Moreover, my mindset was still partly geared towards the top-down approach at the time. An approach whereby you can direct and control matters for the most part, whereby you can set the pace. Letting go and giving the residents the initiative requires a huge change. We were also worried that what we had achieved until then would amount to nothing if we did not succeed in generating sufficient support among the residents to maintain this trend.'

'We had gotten the green light from Europe and the Mayor and Alderman gave us a considerable margin to operate but they also expected us to deliver results. The first brainstorming session was hesitant and exploratory: the residents and organisations were convinced that 'nothing was allowed' in the square. But gradually we succeeded in raising people's enthusiasm and inspiring trust. We banked on square users effectively using the square but expected them to also take ownership of it in return.'

'When we take stock of our DNA activities and method you might say that the city significantly

relinquished strict control of the 'building' aspect. We listened to the residents, provided a lot of support to them and also learnt a lot ourselves. In the case of DNA common sense always prevails: the residents correct 'unrealistic' proposals themselves and filter them. They know best what is possible. As a result, DNA has created more margin to try more and do more in the future. The square is doing much better nowadays and people from other neighbourhoods in the city even consider it an attraction. And that is the best possible evaluation of three years of DNA. In addition to the reduced number of incidents and interventions of course because ultimately we launched DNA because we wanted to improve security. How many volunteers and activities there are compared to your baseline measurement, how many more people attend these activities, how many more local residents commit to projects... those are all data you can register. How many more organisations and local residents use the community centre is another parameter. As long as this new dynamic is maintained and increased there is even more margin for positive things.'

'As far as I'm concerned the best achievement of DNA is the community centre. They really have the passion and the drive. But you also realise that such intensive initiatives are highly dependent on the handful of people who run it. If someone drops out, you really have a problem. So you need to create sufficient support. And continue to pay attention to this.'

'You need permanent, practical, accessible support in order to continue to motivate people. Besides this you also need organisations that constantly challenge people and stimulate them to take control. We need to steer clear from the paternalism of the past because it

fosters laziness, as in: *'the government will solve it'*. Professionals, frontline workers have to permanently give the initiative to the local residents. Without ever losing sight of their own responsibilities and assignments. 'The government should not reason based on a cost cutting logic. Bottom-up work is never an easy solution, on the contrary even. If you want to do things the right way then you will invest a lot of time and professional commitment to empower the residents in a deprived neighbourhood. They often lack the basic skills; so providing guidance to them takes a lot of time. As a government you must never forget that they are volunteers and that you cannot force them to permanently fulfil this role. But DNA has also convinced me that you have no choice but to place part of the responsibility with the local residents if you want to achieve durable results.'

'I don't think that the organisational structure of most of the cities I know are currently geared towards far-reaching or widely applied bottom-up work, but I don't think that they need to be either. A city can rely on and provide support to third party organisations - Opbouwwerk, Free Clinic, first line services at

the Public Social Welfare Centre – because they have the expertise and the network for this. On condition, however, that the local governments believe in the philosophy, the method, the challenges of bottom-up work. We always need to bear in mind that this is a specialised long-term job, especially in focus neighbourhoods. Currently, our neighbourhood director and the employee of 'Programma voor Stad in Verandering' (Changing City project, a unit that works intensively in neighbourhoods that are undergoing a radical change) have taken on this task but this is not so obvious for a second line worker like myself. At the same time, the success of a bottom-up approach is also highly personal. I think that a significant part of the success depends on the personal qualities, mindset, efforts and persuasiveness of the persons in charge. Naturally, as I already indicated, there has to be a desire and a framework to work like this. In other words, you always need to provide durable support and the roles of the 'players' have to be clearly defined. This certainly should not be underestimated.'

## Breda

BOY VAN EIL:

# ‘Social entrepreneurship is an important aspect of the success of DNA in Breda.’

**Boy Van Eil, the DNA Project Manager in Breda, takes stock after three years: ‘The objective of DNA – to further develop a district-centric approach – tied in perfectly with the work we had been doing for years.’**

‘In our DNA neighbourhood in Geeren there was no physical intervention involved like in the other two focus neighbourhoods. Instead, the emphasis was more social. We had to keep the national government paradigm in mind the entire time: how does the local government relate to the population? Where does the responsibility of the residents and governments begin and end? In the Netherlands the boundaries are shifting. The government’s task is not to solve the population’s problems. Instead it encourages, facilitates and suggests models. We have already made significant progress. The basic principle is the responsibility ladder: each time a citizen moves up one rung before requesting the government’s assistance. If it comes to that, governmental assistance will initially consist of proposing general facilities. Custom solutions are the very last option, but these are very rare and specific. So we need to ensure that as many people as possible have problem-solving competences and learn to take ownership of certain problems. In that sense the DNA approach tied in perfectly with our vision of administration.’

‘In this framework we chose not to communicate that ‘a European project would be organised’. Instead, we told local residents that we could invest professionals and resources in matters that affect them directly - things that would result in *quick wins*, within the year for example. Will their primary schools merge with another one? Does there need to be playground? A zebra crossing? You should not burden them with long-term questions. The local residents were also rarely confronted with the DNA ‘brand’. Naturally what matters here is the process and the final result. Initially, the residents and the community council were very suspicious. Because people in deprived neighbourhoods do not necessarily trust the government and politicians. You need to gain their trust. The activities of ‘Het Wijkavontuur’ played an important role in this context: letting people decide to which project resources are allocated and then implementing it.’

‘Projects have been launched in Breda in the framework of DNA but there is always a threat that they will fizzle out. That is why we decided to change tack with DNA and pay attention to perpetuating the projects after the DNA period. The ‘Grote Broers’ project (see Community Safety) was an existing project but thanks to DNA we were able to give it a major boost. It is fully operational now and has also been launched in a non-DNA neighbourhood. The city

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will continue to give grants to it. DNA provided the required impulse for this. It was not the basic ingredient but an important part of the current result. Buurthuis ONS, the community centre, also only became a success thanks to the DNA survey. The urban farmers of Buurtuinen, who won the DNA European Ownership Award, will deliver their produce to the community restaurant. The building represented a big investment, and DNA was only a small part of this. But the decision-making processes were the big difference, compared with the past. The existing initiatives received a big boost thanks to DNA. And they are here to stay.'

'Social entrepreneurship is also an important aspect of the success of DNA in Breda. This community centre needs to continue to be the home base of 'Het Wijkavontuur'. The community undertaking now has a certain reputation: *'It is exciting and you can't predict how it will end.'* It is a collaboration between the municipality, the cooperatives and residents, who encounter one another and pick up on and facilitate the ideas in the neighbourhood. Residents make decisions themselves. The participants in 'Het Wijkavontuur' decide how part of the government grants will be used. Het Wijkavontuur also decided which projects would represent Breda for the DNA European Prize. The local residents were the jury members. Incidentally it is worth noting that valuable projects which did not make it past the pre-selection also received support in Breda.'

'During the DNA period, I think that Breda has shown that you really can give residents responsibility for Community Safety through 'Grote Broers', community arbitration and community prevention. In terms of Public Space we are moving away from the vision of urban planners, and evolving towards a shared, multi-

functional Public Space where you can walk on lawns instead of just looking at them.

I hope that our partners also think this, thanks to the exchange with DNA. Some partners have taken over certain aspects of our approach. I thought it was very interesting to find out more about other political traditions, which had not yet evolved as far as we did in terms of a neighbourhood-oriented approach. The community workers in Breda do not solve residents' problems as this only fosters dependence. We do explain to people, however, how they can solve their problems themselves. Another difference is that we have no Public Social Welfare Centres in the Netherlands. Here we work with a directive government. Our policy objectives - to promote wellbeing, to reduce crime or unemployment - are incorporated in tenders aimed at professionals, such as wellbeing organisations (foundation or a non-profit organisation), which can thus also be evaluated. The client and the contractor have a contractual relationship which prevents any conflicts of interest from occurring. It enables us to deal in a business-like manner with these contractors.'

'I do not think that the neighbourhood has structurally changed after DNA. I do think that a trend has been initiated, with a number of structural effects on health, security and Public Space. 'Giving the initiative to the residents' has thus become a familiar approach. If 'Het Wijkavontuur' continues to be a meeting point for active local residents, who receive support from professionals and take ownership of the problem, then this is the greatest merit of DNA. The residents are stimulated by the community centre instead of by the municipal office.'

**The team of the Public Social Welfare Centre and the community workers are unanimous:**



## Kortrijk

BRUNO VANDENBERGHE:

‘The emphasis in communication has to be on the residents’ initiative.’

**DNA has had a very positive impact in Kortrijk. The initial overload which the community workers felt when taking on a ‘European project’ on top of their other work was compensated for by the enthusiasm of the local residents who were happy to take the initiative themselves. ‘We do not have more work, we mainly work *differently*.’** Community Development Coordinator Ruben Degryse and DNA Project Manager Bruno Vandenberghe talk about how and why the Kortrijk DNA experiment was such a success.

**Ruben:** ‘From the outset we filtered several ideas after a day of brainstorming with the Public Social Welfare Centre team. Ultimately, we decided that the main objective of DNA in Kortrijk would be social cohesion. We believed that we could bridge the gap to the other three DNA activities, i.e. Health & Wellbeing, Community Safety and Public Space, based on this. And ultimately, we did succeed in doing this.’

‘We were not that familiar with Community Safety given that we are a Public Social Welfare Centre, so we received a lot of input from Kortrijk’s security coordinator. Breda, the lead partner for Community Safety, also gave us a lot of input during our study visit. We then transposed these data into a policy that we proposed to the Mayor. He responded positively to this, facilitating a number of quick changes in

the field, such as the focus on strong community policing in focus neighbourhoods. In Kortrijk we also strived to establish real area teams with the local police officer. These teams are now in the start-up phase. In terms of Public Space the emphasis is mainly on projects for green areas. There have already been guerrilla gardening campaigns to draw attention to Public Space. All these projects will be grouped under the ‘Buurt Zoekt Tuin’ (Neighbourhood Seeks Garden) project.’

**Bruno:** ‘Of course being a ‘government worker’ is always a balancing act. To which extent can you support the local residents during DNA pilot projects that are fully managed by the residents themselves? In a project like DNA you play on both sides of the fence. The residents do not want to be taken over by the government. So you need to clearly indicate in all the communication that DNA provides support but that the residents need to develop these campaigns themselves. That is why we deliberately chose not to emphasise the name DNA. The emphasis in communication has to be on the residents’ initiative. Karamblas has become a strong brand as a result. If you were to do this differently then you would nip the spontaneous initiative in the bud. In practice there is a lot more involved for the community workers than just *facilitating* matters. In the beginning, we still tended to organise a lot ourselves. The local residents

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like the fact that we took part of the organisational side of things off their shoulders but that is not the objective. As the project progressed, you could see that the local residents were taking more and more responsibility themselves. It is a long drawn-out process but the benefits outweigh the trouble.'

**Ruben:** 'A lot of people propose new ideas and these all merit attention. DNA primarily means relinquishing one method to implement a new one. This pays off in the long term. This European project generates strong involvement among the residents, it presents major added value. In Kortrijk we already earmarked a limited budget for 'neighbourhood budgets' in the operating funds of the Public Social Welfare Centre when DNA started: 10,000 euros for our five neighbourhoods to provide support for such projects. The community centres as a result have funds to provide support for positive residents' projects and to facilitate

co-production. This is an important shift: from an operating budget that facilitates community work to a budget that facilitates the implementation of the local residents' ideas. What is even more important is that the city established a new Wellbeing Directorate with representatives of the city and the Public Social Welfare Centre. In this framework community work and the local service centres will be merged into an integrated community teams service. Co-production will serve as the guideline for the service's activities - a direct consequence of DNA. DNA is thus embedded in the new organisational chart. A new political constellation with a desire for change, new attention to social entrepreneurship and citizens' initiatives, improved Community Safety and strong triggers in the neighbourhoods created the right climate for this.'

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## Medway

VINCE MAPLE:

# 'Making Public Space accessible for everyone.'

Local Councillor **Vince Maple:** 'DNA was welcomed with open arms in Medway with regard to a number of city-centre based issues, including the 'green points' along Chatham High Street. This is all about genuine community involvement and the sense of ownership has expanded thanks to the DNA project. We have been able to share many *good practices* with the

partners and then compare the corresponding effects. Making Public Space accessible to all, as achieved by the DNA partners, impacts upon safety and wellbeing and was a genuine inspiration for us. Because, even more important than subsidies from a European project, is the opportunity to exchange experiences that are associated with this type of project between

residents, community leaders, professionals and policy-makers. You also learn a great deal from what does and doesn't work. Pilot activities such as AIR Football were certainly successful on the levels of health and social cohesion. The mural in Chatham High Street was also a fantastic symbolic project. Art and culture are only evident here at very isolated locations. This was exactly what was needed for the heart of our community and was an excellent *quick win* in the short time span of

DNA. Now, we must build on this in the High Street, with traders, the town centre forum and other partners. They are essential. The flower baskets that were placed in the High Street were partially paid for by DNA and partially by the town centre forum, a group of traders, councillors and residents who then take over from a catalyst such as DNA. When projects have such a wide basis of support, they can't be anything other than successful.'

NOREEN RYAN:

'The exchange of international expertise and experiences is hugely inspiring.'

DNA project manager Medway **Noreen Ryan**: 'I took up my role as DNA Coordinator in October 2012. The residents working party on Public Spaces was already up and running and had carried out consultations with all sections of the community to find out what people thought of the High Street and how it might be improved. All of the improvements in the High Street which were delivered during the lifetime of the DNA project are based on that consultation. We quickly set up a working group on Health and wellbeing and carried out a small-scale survey in Luton to find out residents feelings on wellbeing and how they felt their neighbourhood could be improved. In April 2013 residents, police and Medway Council Safer Communities staff participated in the study visit to Breda. Meeting the residents and professionals from Breda and seeing the projects in action was very inspiring for the

Medway group. We all returned feeling very determined to work together to develop some positive actions for the DNA neighbourhoods in Chatham and Luton. Spending time together travelling to the study visits and sharing meals was an opportunity to build relationships and this definitely breaks down barriers between professionals and residents.'

'Work on setting up community food initiatives was slow to take off because for many residents eating healthy food is not a high priority. In Luton we were hampered by lack of a community centre. Luton Library provided a place to meet and to run healthy food activities and in the past six months healthy eating events have become popular with residents who are 'hard to reach'. The residents involved in planning and organising the healthy food activities have been committed and hard working and although DNA

is coming to an end they have got to know the professionals from the public health team and will be able to call on them to provide courses and activities and hopefully build on the work started by DNA.'

'Our achievements in DNA work in Medway are due to the passion and commitment of the residents and their willingness to get involved in their neighbourhood, the commitment of

the professionals and their willingness to listen to the residents and to work with them as equal partners. Medway Council has an important role to play in responding to the needs and issues of the community and in facilitating residents to achieve their aspirations for a better community. Funding is obviously essential to deliver projects but equally important is the right kind of professional support.'

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## In conclusion

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### **DNA: bird's eye view of a landscape with peaks and valleys**

The DNA programme, which reinforces social inclusion by restoring the social fabric in deprived neighbourhoods, was rolled out in four very different neighbourhoods and cities. The elaboration of the project in the different partner cities was heavily influenced by the physical urban fabric of the selected neighbourhoods. In Breda it was implemented in a vast urban district with high rises and low buildings. In Kortrijk two small working class neighbourhoods were chosen for the project. Medway is an urban region in itself, with four selected areas including a historic centre and a social housing estate. In Antwerp the DNA area was limited to a square and several adjacent streets.

The embedding of the DNA idea – stimulating the ownership of local residents through a bottom-up approach – was largely defined by the various political policy contexts in which these partner cities operate. For several years, Great Britain has used '*The Big Society*' concept as a guideline, phasing out the public sector and opening it up to citizens and private initiatives. In the Netherlands the local government is downsizing its role as a *problem solver* with a Community Approach that transfers the responsibility to the local residents. The local government's role focuses on facilitating the initiatives of local residents. For the time being, Flanders has made the least progress in terms of an umbrella policy for neighbourhood ownership and bottom-up work. And yet here too a wide range of citizens' initiatives was developed in districts and neighbourhoods. So it is

high time that Flanders makes this a priority too.

In view of the differences that we listed, a cross-border collaboration on three common themes (Community Safety, Health & Wellbeing, Public Space) also entailed several challenges. In terms of Public Space the municipality of Breda found it difficult to work with the other partners. The cross-border nature of DNA projects relating to Public Space and infrastructural changes is rather limited: for example, interventions like the one in Antwerp's De Coninckplein were not relevant in a town like Breda. But at the same time, there were also several strong coalitions that could be established. It was much more obvious for all the partner cities to collaborate to improve Health & Wellbeing and Community Safety. The *good practices* which the partners developed in this field through pilot projects, study visits and during seminars, led to cross-pollinations and new insights. Copy/paste was never an option in this frame due to the heterogeneous nature of the DNA areas. The cross-pollination was more strategic. The activities relating to the Kortrijk initiative of the Transnational Taskforce on Wellbeing and the Neighbourhood Monitor that resulted from it, led to fruitful cooperation agreements between Antwerp and Kortrijk in terms of wellbeing. Breda's specific Neighbourhood Approach without a doubt was an inspiring benchmark for all the partners, allowing them to compare it with their own approach. Kortrijk, meanwhile, was interested in seeing how Breda tackled Community Safety.

The positive effects on the professional and policy level were also very different. During the past three years, the City of Antwerp has acquired a lot of experience with *empowering* residents through creative and in-depth survey techniques – a process that has generated a permanent dynamic in the neighbourhood as well as being the cornerstone of the ultimate cross-border bottom-up action: the DNA European Ownership Award. The opening of a community centre, an initiative that was devised and developed by several local residents, also proved a valuable experiment for Antwerp. Kortrijk's Public Social Welfare Centre continued Antwerp's survey dynamic, gathering the wellbeing surveys in one cross-border working group and arriving at a European wellbeing definition. Another remarkable *outcome* in Kortrijk was the decision to permanently embed the co-production principle in the city's policy, following DNA. Medway, which embarked on its DNA journey with a very *open mind*, for its part gained a lot of experience and strength thanks to a number of specific projects that deserve to be perpetuated because of the obvious positive impact they had on the quality of life in the selected DNA areas. We are thinking in the first place of the interventions in the Public Space of Chatham High Street, the AIR football project and the National Health Service Bus. Breda, finally, could continue to focus on encouraging local entrepreneurship in deprived neighbourhoods (through 'Het Wijkavontuur' and the new ONS community centre) as well as on the empowerment of leadership in neighbourhoods ('Grote Broers') in the framework of Community Safety – as we previously mentioned this was an *eye-opener* for the other partners.

Representatives of the various target groups and professionals of the partner cities took part in cross-border study visits, local workshops and pilot projects to learn from one another and mainly

to apply *best practices* for one or more of the three DNA areas to their own city. The partners jointly organised seminars (for regional, national and European governments, public and non-profit organisations), the representatives of other cities, members of academia, students, professionals and local residents. As we have already indicated in some cases this cross-border approach has cemented lasting ties.

One of the most remarkable aspects of these specific DNA cooperations was that the *empowerment* of the local residents was consequently extended to all the operational levels. During study visits, seminars and transnational working groups the delegations always consisted of a balanced mix of policy workers and local residents, which helped firmly embed the DNA projects in society. This ‘substantiated’ knowledge and experience transfer across regional borders, learning from each other’s learning processes, is probably one of the strongest results of the entire DNA project. The international platform which the local residents were offered on this occasion often had a healing influence on the perception of their own identity – a feeling that they passed on after the study visits and workshops to other local residents.

The differences between the various partner cities may be substantial but the similarities in terms of what the local residents really want for their neighbourhood are equally substantial. This conclusion was formulated in several places in this publication and also came to the fore during all kinds of surveys and community projects. We refer to the wide range of projects and actions in the Story Box, which in addition to the three main themes of Community Safety, Health & Wellbeing and Public Space, also contained several other common themes – often basic human needs – that unite them in terms of content and add a universal dimension to the projects (see the Story Box categories). In other words, working to improve social inclusion is working to improve the ‘human condition’.

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## Some recommendations for policy workers...

**... about bottom-up work in lieu of a conclusion. Call it a shopping list for future use. Thanks to Project Leader Erik Richart, Community Coordinator Barbara Thys, and Workers’ Coach Goele Leyder for their valuable input.**

### **- Create a permanent framework**

A bottom-up approach involves much more than you think. To successfully implement it you also need to assure permanent support. Community projects are more likely to succeed if they have a clear framework. This framework might outline the financial support, or the boundaries of its scope, or may consist of a few educational sessions or effective planning and organisational support. Moreover, community groups often need perspectives, which can be created by incorporating groups in a structural existing framework: the government or a third party organisation that is already up and running.



### **- Invest in people rather than in resources**

Meanwhile, the local residents with potential and motivation also require permanent coaching to become more responsible and take ownership. There are a lot of similarities with leadership. People need to become more skilful and be able to motivate themselves. This is an intensive process. Then the policy-makers need to step in: they need a clearly defined government partner. You cannot leave everything to the local residents. Letting go does not mean leaving behind. The government can search for interesting triggers, with a distinctive social role. If these are stimulated and strengthened in an ulterior phase then the government can let go of the project and subsequently act as a facilitator to maintain continuity. If the government merely programmes projects then the neighbourhood will not take any responsibility. You need to invest in people rather than in resources. You also need sufficient time to launch and perpetuate a bottom-up process. Two to three years per phase at least.

### **- An Achilles' Heel**

Bottom-up work has a lot of advantages but there are also a lot of pitfalls and challenges involved. On the credit side we see that the outcome is durable and receives local support. The local residents are involved and they are proud of what they have achieved themselves. Taking responsibility increases their self-esteem. Moreover, bottom-up work also leaves some margin for *trial and error*. The disadvantage of bottom-up work is that the social capital (the number of people who want to take up a triggering role in the neighbourhood) is sometimes limited. It is very time-consuming. It requires financial support and although the results preferably need to be visible in the short term you always need to make a long-term effort. You cannot change a mindset in just one day. Moreover, the result is uncertain. On the government side, bottom-up processes imply facilitating and providing support rather than organising. This requires a new way of thinking which might generate resistance. Bottom-up work squarely gives the initiative to the residents. The process, which is just as important as the end result, always involves a balancing act between residents and policy-makers.

### **- The importance of being transparent**

Several government employees have already indicated in this publication that promoting ownership to the local residents as a professional can be quite challenging. Especially if you have to combine this task with a position that is more top-down oriented. This can generate counter-productive confusion. Clearly defining the roles and the mutual agreements about what is/is not to be expected from each other is highly recommended. The appointment of a professional who is the focal point for all bottom-up work or co-production, as was the case in Kortrijk, is an interesting option in this respect. The story of Breda is also interesting in this context: there the clearly defined minimal government objectives and the relationship between the contracting authority/the corporation/contractor provide an objective framework.

**- Gaining people's trust**

This point is strongly linked to the previous one: transparency generates trust. At the start of their programme, several DNA professionals had to contend with a similar issue: overcoming the deeply rooted distrust of all things government – especially in deprived neighbourhoods. A government that first acts repressively towards vulnerable groups and then extends a hand to these groups involves a transition process that is very time-consuming, requiring a lot of patience. In any event, this process consists of several stages. The more the resident is confirmed in his feeling that he has to make the next move, the more constructive his attitude will be. On the government side working as much as possible with 'interesting triggers' (*see above*) may be worth considering in the initial stages.

**- Stay in the background**

Two partners – Breda and Kortrijk – already explicitly mentioned this: be careful and diplomatic when communicating. Minimum visibility of the government partner is key in this process to stimulate ownership and bottom-up work and ensure consistency. It is crucial that the neighbourhood resident that you are approaching is respected. This cannot be reconciled with a government that positions itself as taking the initiative in a top-down fashion. *Less is more* in this respect.

**- The power of 'wild' ideas**

Often you can generate additional clout and impact by daring to build on ideas that fall just outside of the traditional thinking patterns. One of the strongest examples in this context is the way in which the original surveys of Antwerp's local residents were organised (with focus groups, working groups, using boards and so on). Whereas a traditional survey would have mainly yielded a paper result this approach generated a community-wide dynamic which resulted in a wide array of actions. This is also a good way of establishing contact with target groups that are difficult to reach. The Children's Neighbourhood Parliament and the baking project in Lange Munte in Kortrijk have succeeded involving the immigrant community as well as the neighbourhood's children in the DNA process.



▲ Antwerp: two Antwerp 'community leaders' give their all at a concert in De Coninckplein.



▲ Antwerp: residents and professionals learn how to make a comic book during a workshop led by Steven de Rie in deBuurt community centre (study visit, Public Space, June 2013).



▲ Medway: policymakers and local residents are ready to tell their story for 'Graffiti, Greenery & Goal-getters' (study visit April 2014).



◀ Kortrijk: opening of the V-Tex playground (2012).



▲ Breda: social team Breda Noordoost.

- ▶ Antwerp: new fashion awareness emerges during the multicultural 'A' exhibition De Coninckplein (May 2014).



▲ Breda: cleaning crew Geeren.

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