

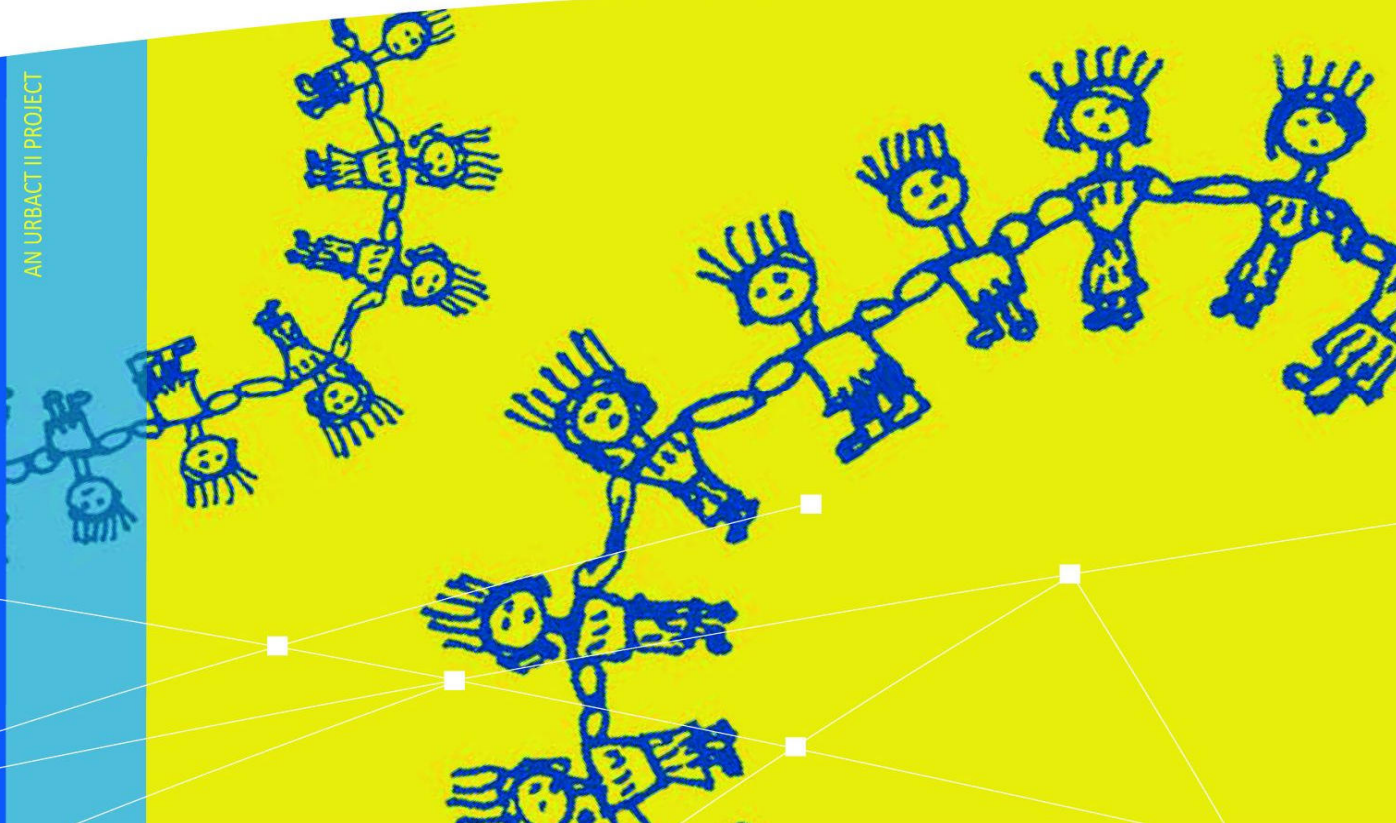


**TOGETHER**  
Territories of  
Coresponsibility

# Lead Expert's Report on Meetings in Braine-l'Alleud

December 2010

AN URBACT II PROJECT



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**The following is a summary note of the experiences of Braine-l'Alleud on the two well-being initiatives with which they are currently engaged. The note is based primarily on a meeting with Andre de Smet and Viviane Gonce held on 2<sup>nd</sup> December.**

## **1. Introduction**

The Braine-l'Alleud municipality situated on the outskirts of Brussels has been involved since mid 2009 in a project involving 15 local authorities within the Walloon region.



Its origins lie in the wish of the Walloon region to improve the statistical basis by which the region measures social cohesion within all of its 262 municipalities. Currently, the region uses a family of statistical measures based on seven categories with eighteen variables within them. These are collected and comparisons made between all the municipalities. On the basis of this data, the region makes its financial allocations to each municipality. Given the importance of these indicators the Walloon region believes that it is important to refine and modernise the basis of its statistical measures and has been interested by the approach being pioneered by the Council of Europe. Politicians have asked the National Institute for Statistics in the Walloon region to pursue this work in

collaboration with the Council of Europe and training sessions for officers in the fifteen Walloon local authorities have been organised. It was arising from their participation in this work that Braine-l'Alleud was invited to participate in the Urbact TOGETHER project. Thus, currently, Braine l'Alleud is engaged in two projects focused on well-being, each with very strong similarities but at the same time with their own distinct objectives. Over the last 18 months the municipality has been engaged in implementing the first stages of the 'well-being' methodology. It has set up a Local Support Group(LSG); undertaken a series of focus groups using the well-being approach; categorised and scored these results; and begun to explore some further work with other groups. Key elements of this work are described below.

## **2. Establishing a Local Support Group**

Both Andre and Viviane clearly see the establishment of a representative local co-ordinating group as the absolutely indispensable first step. In Braine-l'Alleud they were able to set up a group of twenty six people with good representation from across the public and social sectors, including significant representations from civil society associations e.g. youth groups, senior citizens groups and a women's refuge. It required detailed face-face discussions to convince people to join the group.



However, they have found it much harder to engage the private sector and business community in the well-being agenda.

Andre and Viviane have provided consistent policy support while they have administrative support to ensure agendas are circulated well in advance, meeting venues sorted and minutes prepared and sent out. They have a regular pattern to the group with meetings organised on a monthly basis.

From the outset the thinking of the two officers was to get commitment and active engagement from members of the LSG in the overall work of the well-being project. The key task was to get the LSG members fully engaged with the work of the project. Thus, they got 18 members of the LSG signed up for 2 half-day training sessions on the focus group method and then asked the LSG members themselves to organise relevant focus groups in their particular area of responsibility and knowledge. This approach was very successful and helped to establish a large number of focus groups reaching out into specific sectors of the local population.

### Lessons for other cities.

1. Make setting up the LSG your first priority.
2. Try to ensure there is a good mixture of organisations within your group
3. Make sure that the group has administrative support and meets on a regular basis.
4. Involve as many of the LSG members as possible in the work of the whole project and in the first instance the organisation and holding of the focus groups.

### **3. Holding the Focus Groups**

In total Braine-l'Alleud ran fifteen focus groups with three for young people and three for senior citizens, as well groups for recent migrants and for those women suffering from domestic abuse, plus one in a secondary school. Each focus group had around ten people with three extra people from the municipality and the LSG organising the meeting. The Council of Europe methodology was explained at the start of the meeting to each focus group. The three questions were posed in turn to the group and the participants wrote their answers on post-it notes. After each question, the notes were collected by the organisers and checked so that any uncertainties over spelling or meaning were clarified.



Quickly following the meeting, the organiser then typed the answers into the computer programme – Espoir. This was a simple typing task, with the computer programme giving an automatic attribution. The more difficult policy task was the second element of attribution which required one of the three organisers to synthesise the answers using the key, which describes the method of determination. This takes a considerable time, partly because the officials have to get used to the eight categories and forty variables within the attribution computer system. And in Braine-l'Alleud the fifteen focus group produced 2,137 post-it notes to categorise. One of the most important aspects of the process was to ensure that there was as short a time as possible between the first and second meeting of the focus group. Andre and Viviane managed an average of just a week between the first two meetings of the focus group. This is absolutely crucial so that members of the group are able to check accurately how all the various comments have been attributed. To have left a month between meetings would have made the process much less effective. At this second meeting, the focus group was also asked the fourth question about well-being and future generations.

### Lessons

1. Decide on the capacity of your municipality and your LSG. Do not try to organise too many focus groups.
2. Try to keep the time between the first and second meeting as short as possible, preferably around one week.

#### **4. Use of the computer programme**

As outlined above part of the data-inputting process is an administrative task, namely inserting the observations ('criteres') of the citizens. However, the second part of the attribution requires the policy input of the organising officers as does the allocation into one of the four character domains – condition, possession, quality and durability.

Following this came the task of writing indicators that flowed from this material. The officers had two main experiences here. Firstly, it took them a long time to prepare an indicator for each topic. Secondly, they wrote relatively lengthy indicators, perhaps of several sentences.

They then reconvened the focus groups all together. Around 70 of the initial 150 participants came to this third recall meeting and the organisers mixed up the participants into seven heterogeneous focus groups of ten people each. Each table looked at a set of six indicators that had been formulated. For many, the indicators that had been produced were too complex and unclear. The wealth of material had overwhelmed the officials. It was clear from the meeting that the indicators would need to be shortened and simplified, with perhaps a main indicator and a couple of supplementary ones for each issue. This work is now being done. The follow-up meeting to check the outcome of this work is due shortly.

The second half of the third meeting asked the groups to make suggestions for potential actions within the framework of co-responsibility arising from the indicators they had discussed. More than forty ideas were suggested ranging from the small and practical to the grand and rather idealistic. The emphasis was very much on where citizens could do things together. The officials are now distilling this material with a view to considering how a number of these proposals can be taken forward.

#### Lessons for other municipalities

1. The key elements of this programme require good policy judgement. This is not a technocratic exercise.
2. Recognise that especially at the start the attribution will take a considerable amount of time. The political backing for the Braine-l'Alleud project and its regional links meant that it got considerably more time allocated to it than will be the case for many other municipalities.
3. The real skill for officials will be to synthesize the collected data into short, clear indicators that members of the general population can understand easily.

#### **5. Pilot action**

In the spirit of the co-responsibility approach the municipality has already been encouraged to try this out with a group of sixty children aged between ten and twelve drawn from schools across the town. They held a meeting with them and asked the first three questions on well-being, etc. They categorised the responses and then held four workshops on the topics which had attracted most interest, namely health, respect and solidarity, culture and leisure and environment. The children were asked to agree on one particular action they wanted implemented from each workshop within some clear budget limits. This they did and the proposals are now being taken forward.

It is important to note a number of features at work here. The officials did not stick rigidly to the proscribed methodology. Rather they adapted it to fit the circumstances. Thus, they held just one meeting. They did not produce indicators from the children's observations but rather organised follow-up workshops on the topics that had attracted the most interest of the pupils. And then they asked for specific proposals directly from the children.

### Lessons for other municipalities

1. Streamline the procedures where necessary (cf. as Council of Europe had done in its work with the Skracel factory)
2. Recognise the importance of flexibility.

## **6. Conclusions**

This is a very open 'bottom-up' methodology. Therein, lies its real potential and interest. Viviane is clear about its 'added-value.' "The issues come from the citizens. The state and its officials would never ask about respect and how to develop it." For Andre, it also means that officials have to change their approach. "We already have an Action Plan for the municipality. We want to modify it by using the philosophy of well-being. From now on we shall work with the approach of co-responsibility. We won't be making actions on our own."

The corollary of the 'bottom-up' and comprehensive nature of the methodology is that it is a very labour intensive process. Andre and Viviane have spent around half of their working time for the past year and a half on these well-being projects with considerable additional support from a further officer, Fabrizio plus some significant administrative support. Many members of the LSG have also given up a lot of their own time. Clearly, each municipality needs to be realistic about the human resources and staff it has at its disposal and to adjust its TOGETHER work programme so that it fits with its available staffing. However, it is clear that there is plenty of scope within the overall methodological framework for each municipality to apply the approach in ways that fit its own circumstances.

Jon Bloomfield - 4<sup>th</sup> December 2010