

Promoting Sustainable Neighbourhoods in Brussels



21/01/2014

Residents and users of more than 40 separate districts in Brussels (Belgium) have embraced a sustainable, citizen-led initiative, '*Quartiers durables citoyens*', aimed at improving their neighbourhoods.



The initiative is being run by the Capital region administrative authority for the environment, Bruxelles Environnement. Since 2008 it has launched annual calls for a diversity of local community projects. The idea is to encourage those living or working in Brussels' districts to become collectively involved in projects promoting various environmental or urban improvements. Among others, these issues cover energy conservation, waste reduction, air quality, more efficient use of spaces, greener areas and strengthening social cohesion.

Greener and more friendly

To date, around 40 Brussels' districts have signed-up to the process, which is open to all citizens of a particular neighbourhood, as well as representatives of the public and private sectors locally. There are various types of support for the projects. Neighbourhoods can, for instance, benefit from the services of a professional coach to help them develop a collective approach or to establish an action plan. Communication tools and financial support and/or expertise are also available.

Neighbourhoods are supported in different ways, depending on their needs, over a period of approximately 24 months.

Examples of actions include a neighbourhood trading and recycling centre, a shared facility for bread-making as well as a variety of schemes to encourage 'urban walking' and the shared discovery and exploration of local areas. Elsewhere, there have been projects to develop greener spaces through, for example greening of roof areas, meeting areas or various improvements to social housing – saving energy, or transforming a into a vegetable garden promoting organic produce.

Collective action

The neighbourhood projects are typically managed by a group of five to 10 highly motivated local residents. This core team is then usually extended by a further 20-50 people who are regularly involved at different stages (e.g. the call for tenders for projects, mobilisation phase, project development etc). Collaboration is actively encouraged e.g. developing projects with public partners, local associations, cultural centres local shopkeepers etc. Such partnerships are a key element of the call for proposals for projects. Moreover, the shared involvement of as many stakeholders as possible will help to assure the sustainability and stability of actions and to generate innovate and creative ideas.

Finally, in order to ensure support for the maximum number of initiatives within the limits of available resources, a participatory budgetary system has recently been introduced for the exploration and allocation of available financial resources and other aid to the districts. Every year this process is enriched by the sharing of experiences and best practices of previous projects.

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