

Setting up a local environmental health action plan (LEHAP) around an industrial site in Beerse (Belgium - Flanders) through a cooperative, non-adversarial, constructive engagement process

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History

- +/- 1900: Kempen area was poor, sparsely populated, with little agricultural activity: ideal for polluting activities
- 3 companies settled around the canal in Beerse
 - Two produced heavy metals (copper, lead, antimony, ...)
 - One production site of bricks/ clay mining activities
- Heavy pressure on the surrounding environment



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History



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Social context

- Growing urbanization around the canal: conflicting interests starting to appear
- 70's, 80's, 90's: 'social outbreaks' → several ad hoc initiatives:
 - ✓ Soil investigations
 - ✓ Vegetable investigations
 - ✓ Information on the environmental health risks of heavy metals and precautionary measurements: social resistance
- Perceived as an easy solution for the government/companies
- Residents felt not responsible, had no kind of influence in the decision making process: 'victims'
- A general atmosphere of indifference, dissatisfaction, frustration, distrust

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Social context ('05)

- No collaboration, no cohesion
- No satisfying, sustainable, effective approach
- A great need to bring all parties together:
 - How?
 - Who?
 - When?
- No experience nor expertise with facilitating interactive processes, group dynamics, ...
- Change of role of local environmental health worker: from 'environmental health expert' to a 'process facilitator'

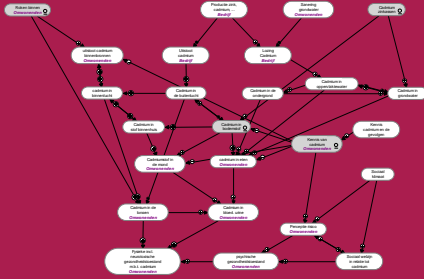
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Why a multiparty partnership?

- Local environmental health hot spots are complex
- Different levels of actions, different parties need to act and collaborate



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Start of the partnership

- 2006: a biomonitoring campaign to collect more detailed data
 - about the human exposure to toxic metals (cadmium, lead) in the neighborhood
 - About the perception of the environmental health risks
 - About the needs in the neighborhood concerning participation in a future decision making process
- = A concrete project that provided an opportunity to start the collaboration

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Start of the partnership

- A three level collaboration:
 1. Project team: Flemish health administration, local environmental health worker
 2. Steering group: + school, local government, local health advisory, GP's
 3. Consultation group: + residents, other administrations, factories, ...
- A split of roles:
 - Flemish health administration = 'experts'
 - local environmental health worker = 'facilitator of the process'
 - ✓ Information
 - ✓ Consultation: rather simple interactive working methods

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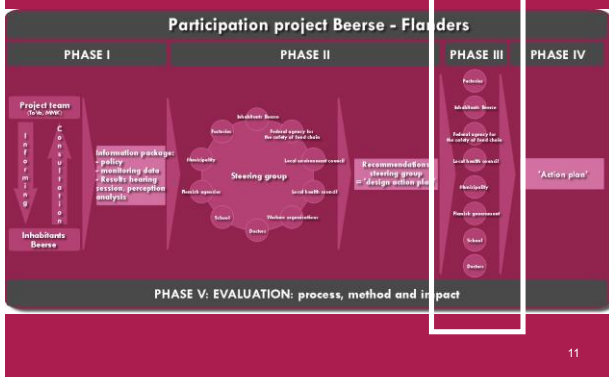
Intensifying the partnership

- 2007: biomonitoring campaign finished
 - Results were not extremely worrying: no crisis situation
 - Growing mutual trust and appreciation
- ➔ Together with all parties: decision to intensify 'the partnership':
 - to translate the results of the biomonitoring campaign into concrete policy measurements: One common local environmental health action plan
 - One large steering group instead of a 'consulting group': coproduction instead of consultation
 - Robust plan for interactive process

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Process design

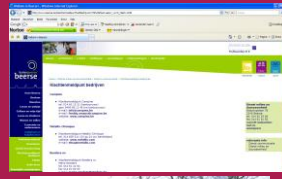


Results

- Local environmental health action plan (2007-2012)
 - Divers (other focusses)
 - Cheap
 - 'consensus'
 - Distribution of tasks and accountability
 - Increased engagement
 - ...
- Mutual respect, understanding, trust, satisfaction...

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Results



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Legitimize the partnership

- No legal basis, no procedures: legitimacy?
- Solutions:
 1. Compete in Awards:
 - Wyeth health&environment Award 2007
 - European public sector Awards 2007 (diploma)
 - Belgian Energy & environment Award 2008 (nomination)
 2. Academic interest in the process - Scientific research
 3. Declaration of Engagement
 - List of the major agreements
 - Signed by all the parties
 - 'Gentlemen's agreement'
 - Explicit mutual appreciation



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Lessons learned

- Mutual trust is key, building trust takes time
- Continuous input of impulses needed to keep everybody going
 - On site visits
 - Application of interactive working methods (brainstorming, metaplan, priorities grid, ...)
 - Different hosts for every meeting
 - Informal drinks
 - ...
- Monitoring of expectations: on individual as on group level
 - Anticipate evolutions, coaching, 'shepherd'
- Facilitator:
 - Explicit about your role, neutral
 - A great will to bring all parties closer together, accepted by all parties
- Process design:
 - As simple as possible: transparent, accessible
 - Roles/impact are more clear
 - Less chewing

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Lessons learned

- Consensus:
 - Not necessary
 - Takes too much time
 - Creative ideas get lost
- Labour/time intensive:
 - For both participants as facilitators
 - Participation fatigue: sometimes too intense
 - Repeatable in other hotspots?
- ➔ Better preliminary division/analysis of the subject/policy space is desirable
- Limited interest/engagement from policy makers
 - Delay
 - Unclear legitimacy
 - More freedom, space and time to experiment/learn
- Policy makers do not share common values and sometimes ignore agreements

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