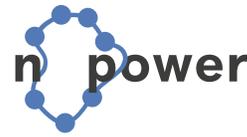




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SITE VISIT REPORT: N-POWER
Tuesday 31th of AUGUST from 9:30 to 16:30 at
Nomadland/ La biomista, GENK

Present:

HABILS Dirk, Stad Genk
WILLEMANS Sien, Stad Genk
Annick, Stad Genk
VAES Jens, Stebo
BARG Alexander, Städt Aachen
BÖTTCHER Cyriëlle, Arebs
SWINNEN Leen, Uhasselt
FLEIG Benjamin, Stadt Eupen
MASQUILLIER Dirk, RISO Vlaams-Brabant
VAN DOOSSELAERE Stéphanie, University of Liege
KETELAAR Ineke, Hogeschool Zuyd

The aim of the "N-POWER" action-research project is to improve the spatial, social and economic quality of "excluded" neighborhoods by stimulating citizens' initiatives through real co- production between local authorities and inhabitants. In this context, a training program is organized including site visits. The last one took place on 31th August 2021 in Heerlen.

On the foundations of the mining past and the old zoo of Zwartberg (Genk) evolves a project that takes you into the unique vision of artist Koen Vanmechelen and his life's work on identity, fertility & biocultural diversity. A garden of order and chaos, an arena of culture and nature. Vanmechelen's wonderlab.

LABIOMISTA also creates new life. It inspires and fertilises the environment with energy and initiative in numerous cultural, social and economic areas. This creates a profound and unique cross-pollination between artist and city, man and society.

Right next to LABIOMISTA is Nomadland, the pre-eminent meeting place connecting the neighbourhood with LABIOMISTA. Near the allotments and picnic areas are various colourful gypsy caravans offering local food & drinks. The wagons were built by the neighbourhood, based on a concept by Koen Vanmechelen and realised in cooperation with the city of Genk. The neighbourhood runs the initiative itself, so welcome to soak up the unique atmosphere.



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Program

09h30: Welcome with coffee and croissants *Nieuwe Kempen 52, 3600 Genk, free parking space*

09h50: Introduction, explanation of the New Kempen district and explanation of the Nomadland start-up in cooperation with N-Power.

10h30: Visit to Nomadland with a general explanation of how it works and three residents involved tell their own story.

12h15: What does the future hold for Nomadland?

12h40: Lunch

13h30: N-power practical information by Stephanie Van Doosselaere & Leen Swinnen

14h00: On the road with a "Kruisbestuiver" (guide) in LABIOMISTA.

16h00: Closing drink in a local pub.

Presentation 1: Dirk Habils, stad Genk

History of neighborhood policy in Genk:

SUN was the previous Interreg-project and was a success which motivated the city of Genk to collaborate again in this N-power project.

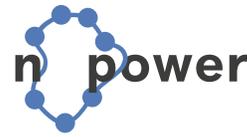
The choice for the pilot project 2 was the connection between neighborhood "Nieuwe Kempen" and LABIOMISTA .

LABIOMISTA landed on a former Zoo and villa of the mining director. The site was thus very important for the neighbourhood. Therefore, the aim of the pilot project is to connect that big city project that landed like an 'alien' in the neighborhood, with its surroundings . The spot was used by a lot of citizens to walk through.

Therefore, there's a constant search for added value for the neighborhood, and the connection with the project of the artist (Koen Vanmechelen).



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Presentation 2: Sien Willemans, Neighbourhood manager, stad Genk

- Genk North consists of 6 neighborhoods, together they form one city part (Genk North).
- Koning Boudewijnlaan was a former street with a lot of economic activities but is now deteriorated with not much economical activities.
- There's a high population density and a lot of foreign nationalities.
- Koning Boudewijnlaan is core of the neighborhood with particular problems: high population density (people living close to each other), poorly maintained houses and high vacancy rate, a lot of temporary living (if people get more money they want to move to other quarters), waste problems, unsafe traffic situations → on the outside it may look fine but a lot of poverty on the inside
- Opportunities for the neighborhood:
 - o see diversity as a positive thing
 - o well-developed community life
 - o LABIOMISTA brings a lot of economic opportunities
- A lot of seasonal workers in the neighborhood so they are not willing to be integrated but can be by the company they work in.

Presentation 3: Jens Vaes, social worker "STEBO"

How to connect the community and LABIOMISTA?

How to make sure LABIOMISTA is an added value for the neighborhood?

To do so, community consulting was organized to inform them about La Biomista and to see what should be done on the empty spot next to La Biomista. Meeting and workshops were organized with entrepreneurs of Koning Boudewijnlaan, industry park, citizens of neighborhood → 110 ideas came out of this (for example Christmas fair on the mainstreet). The aim was not only to get ideas but also to hear who could be involved and "how much"?

An priority idea came up which was building a pavilion on the site. Therefore, a group visit was organized in Parckfarm, Brussels.



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Unfraternally, building that green house was too expensive and too difficult administratively.

A working group was formed and the idea came up to build gypsy wagons that were built by the community itself. The community formed later on a non-profit organization (10 people) called "Friends of Nomadland".

Question: no vandalism in the place? Not really, only one time → a lot of social control

The new name of the site "nomadland" and the concept came from Koen Van Mechelen but the idea behind it, came from the community.

Koen works with co-creation, he listens then translates it, he uses new words to create a reality. Nomadland = creation from community and Koen. Nomad = open spirit, open to new people and new ideas, spirit of sharing... which is the main idea of Koen. But Nomadland can't exist with his nomads.

People came but the challenge is to involve other nationalities (but that's an ongoing process).

Regular events are organized in Nomadland.

Lessons learned:

- Message nomadland = everyone is welcome and some streets weren't involved (Kong Boudewijnlaan). Difficult to involve the most vulnerable people (is the challenge when it's really bottom up, but here the city decided to work on that project so it's a balance of bottom-up and top-down).
- Structural meeting to communicate and set things straight (what can be done and what not).
- Bring different cultures and people together (bring other VZW to the site)
- Mix of different communities that will do things on nomadland

Something to offer to tourists coming to LABIOMISTA but also for the citizens of the neighborhood → everyone happy in the end

Nomadland is also open to other non-profit organizations, there is thus a good mix from partners and communities.

A lot of people want to get involved → this is a dynamic to thrive on and to make Nomadland even a more beautiful place

Visit 1: Nomadland

The Gypsywagons (One for food, one for drinks and one multifunctional.)



The community garden which offers fruit and vegetables too cook for the event on Nomadland:



The local “farm” opened by a Danish mn who wanted to bring his culture into the neighbourhood and and let the inhabitants benefit from the animals



Visit 2: La biomista

Guided tour in La biomista. Central to the work of Koen Van Mechelen is the concept of bio-cultural diversity, which he investigates through the domestic chicken and its ancestral species, His works are inherently cross-medial and interdisciplinary wich can be explored in the whole site



