



D2.2 – Living lab report Brussels

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Executive summary

This is a report of the Living Lab activities in the Brussels context. It relates to the application of the tools developed in WP1 and their evaluation (WP3). The urban Living Lab focuses on participatory urban planning approaches, integrating both digital and analogue tools to enhance public engagement, mobility, and urban accessibility. During this period, key activities included the test of digital tools (Placetoplan and Streetmeter), alongside analogue tools such as MOBIL, Stakeholder personas, Storytelling game, rich pictures.talk and a Co-Design Game.

The project's major intervention in Brussels – namely the week of events in Ropsy Chaudron Street and the activities on Wednesdays in Boulevard de la Révision, and the closure event during the Cultureghem Festival – demonstrated the impact of participatory urban planning and temporary street redesigns. By engaging residents, businesses, and policymakers, the project fostered discussions on sustainable mobility, public space reallocation, and consensus-building among diverse stakeholders.

Challenges included resistance to mobility changes, stakeholder fatigue due to prior consultations, and difficulties in coordinating institutional and non-institutional actors. However, adaptive strategies such as targeted engagement through Cultureghem's local network, providing ample time to invite more people, hybrid digital and physical tools, and informal community-building activities helped mitigate these obstacles.

Preliminary results indicate increased local engagement, valuable insights into community needs, and the emergence of shared visions for street improvements. Despite earlier participation fatigue, prior protests enabled renewed dialogue. The project concluded in 2024, with a handover to the municipality in September. Moving forward, the project will focus on refining participatory methodologies, strengthening collaboration with municipal authorities, and exploring long-term policy integration.

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1. Introduction to the Brussels Living Lab

The Living Labs are in the neighbourhood of Cureghem in the municipality of Anderlecht, just outside the most central area of Brussels, the 'Pentagon'. Nearby is the Brussels South Station, the largest railway station in Belgium with international trains and buses. This is a dense area with a broad mix of activities: residential, industrial, and tertiary uses. The transportation available in this area is diverse: several public transport stops (tram, train, bus, and metro), shared mobility services, roads, parking spaces, and increasing cycling infrastructure. This living lab consists of two streets: Ropsy Chaudron street and Boulevard de la Revision.

From a socio-economic point-of-view, this can be considered a disadvantaged neighbourhood. It is one of the most densely populated parts of Brussels, with more than 20,000 inhabitants per km, almost threefold the regional average. The median taxable income in Cureghem is around 15,500 €, more than 4,000 € below the regional average. The unemployment rate stands at a staggering 27 %, and almost 20 % of Cureghem's minors grow up in a family in which none of the parents has an income from labour. It hosts more people without Belgian nationality (European Union, Turkey, Northern Africa, Sub-Saharan) than the regional average. On top of that, figures for the municipality of Anderlecht as a whole indicate that around 47 % of the residents that has a Belgian ID-card, has non-Belgian origins. Given Cureghem's migration history and its role as an arrival point for migrants, it is very likely that the share of Belgians with non-Belgian roots is even higher. The share of people above 25 with a higher education degree, is also much lower than the regional average, 16 % in Anderlecht compared to 28 % for Brussels as a whole. Parking pressure is among the highest in the Capital Region (due to the high population density). The location's proximity to some of the major roads in Brussels has repercussions for the neighbourhood as well: data regarding the concentration of nitrogen dioxide – an emission gas that is traditionally linked to traffic – are among the highest in the region, being twice or thrice as high as the levels defined by the World Health Organization.

As a part of the GoodMove mobility vision of the Brussels Capital Region, new circulation plans are being implemented in the capital. The goal is to develop 50 'mailles apaisées' or low-traffic zones in which transit traffic is reduced as much as possible and directed towards the main roads, outside of the neighbourhood. GoodMove aims to increase the liveability of residents and increase traffic safety for active modes. Cureghem was one of the first neighbourhoods in the capital in which a circulation plan was implemented. It was designed by a technical committee consisting of municipal and regional mobility administrations and transport operators. Residents have been involved in the process as well: on-street meetings were organized at several locations; the testimonies of the local citizens allowed the administrative bodies to identify the significant mobility-related issues; and different

scenarios of mobility plans were presented to citizens through online and on-street meetings. The municipal council approved the plans in February 2022, and a one-year test phase started in the summer of 2022. The relevant topics of the living lab relate to some of the transformations proposed in the circulation plan and other similar transformations in the neighbourhood.

The first location is the North-Eastbound part of the Ropsy Chaudron street. This street runs along the northwestern edge of the "Abattoir", which gets its name from Brussels' old slaughterhouse and cattle market area. The street has also been a valuable link to the Charleroi canal, which allowed for the transport of goods along waterways. Nowadays this part of the Cureghem neighbourhood boasts an open market along with other community and cultural activities.



Figure 1 Photo: testing of Placetoplan, © VUB



Figure 2 Photo: final event, construction with Mobil, © VUB

The second location is the Boulevard de la Révision, a wide urban boulevard with a central pedestrian zone, aligned with a double row of trees and some greenery providing shade to people walking along it. In the past, the boulevard provided a much wider promenade space to pedestrians. Today, however, large parts of the boulevard's median have been dedicated to parking space, as can be seen in the image above.



Figure 3 Photo: building the tower with Mobil, © VUB



Figure 4 Photo: discussion on Révision, © VUB

Both of these locations were part of the sustainable urban mobility plan (GoodMove) that attempted to rethink Brussels' mobility priorities. The implementation of the plan countered protests and became a political issue that received a lot of attention in the press (fall 2022-autumn 2023), and divided opinions on the plan in the neighbourhood. But during the StreetForum activities in 2024, we succeed to organize a constructive dialogue with all the participants regarding streets and transport planning in the area.

Cultureghem is a non-profit organisation based in Anderlecht, Brussels. It was initiated in September 2012 and, with Cultivating Urban Space as its tagline, actively sharing space with anyone who wants it. They organised the mobile kitchens of KOOKMET, the playground of KETMET and the vegetables of COLLECTMET to bring people together in public space.

Cultureghem employs an arsenal of mobile tools to turn (semi-)public spaces into meeting places as well as a team of volunteers (DREAMTEAM) that continues to grow day after day and is an example of the wonderful diversity that makes Brussels so attractive.

1.1. Overall goals and task description

1.1.1. Goal

With the support of the StreetForum tools we tried on both streets to open the minds of participants and users of the streets for consensus building on how the street or boulevard could have been more adapted to the users of this place.

- We wanted to open the discussion and awareness with our interventions in the street, on a positive and accessible way.
- We wanted to receive the input of participants about a plan to renovate it, how it can change and what the change could have looked like. So, we could have gotten closer to an agreement to change something.
- Elements to discuss with the participant: to what extent can this aim be achieved, agreement, how the space should be divided, agreed on ideas. For example, can Ropsy Chaudron become a one lane street and one lane bicycle?
- The main topics circled around the mobility plan and space re-allocation. We aimed to reopen the discussion and to raise awareness that street transformation could be a good idea, more specific in each Living Lab we discussed:
 - Boulevard de la Revision: The street layout offers the potential to be transformed into a multifunctional boulevard (picknick benches, tables, pétanque, swing...)
 - Ropsy Chaudron street: GoodMove aimed to change the street in a one-way direction by the Good Move plan. There was a lot of resistance towards these plans.

1.1.2. Role of the Stakeholders

The participants of both Living Labs:

- They participated at the consensus making activity and testing the tools.
- Depending on the living lab, the group composition varied (see below). The participants included for example shop owners, school or daycare representatives, volunteers from Cultureghem, residents, and politicians.
- VUB as :
- observer

- leading the evaluation process
- and advisor.

VUB and Cultureghem are

- advisor on planning of activities,
- co-organising the activities
- co-facilitating the activities
- engaging stakeholders for participation

1.1.3. Task of Cultureghem

• The personal contact of our Space Invader (local neighbourhood worker) with the neighbourhood and the implementation of Cultureghem for 12 years was crucial for the participation of the stakeholders in the neighbourhood. He provided a personal approach to the participants. Thanks to the trust that both Cultureghem and he, as a person, have with these people, they were more quickly motivated to take part in an activity that was unfamiliar to them.

• Cultureghem is an organisation of place workers and always starts with local cooperation and preserving the reality of a place. The activities were embedded in the already existing reality: on a market, on a street, ... Existing dynamics should never have been stopped for our activities. We enrolled in its reality and provided connections that were not there before.

• So, Cultureghems' strength is to bring people together in an organic and informal way. We installed our mobile kitchens, and it attracted people to participate by the action on its own. Cultureghem's activities were familiar to many people in the neighbourhood, which made it easier for them to engage with and test the StreetForum tools.

• It was a challenge to motivate participants to return for several sessions, but we always found a way to organize this in collaboration with VUB and the stakeholders.

2. Living Lab activities

2.1. Notes on the planning process of activities

In 2024 we planned a series of activities on both of our living lab streets.

In Ropsy Chaudron street we organized during 3 consecutive days one activity per day. We chose to organize it on Tuesday the 25th, Wednesday the 26th and Friday the 28th of June 2024. On Friday there was an extra activity in this street: the market who takes place every weekend.

We used the following StreetForum tools:

- rich pictures.talk – Used both in the open-air market hall and once in the offices of Cultureghem.

- Placetoplan – Tool was used in multiple, hybrid formats: links were sent to partners, workshops were organised and additionally Cultureghems' volunteers went to meet shop owners for place-interviews.

- Storytelling Game

- Stakeholders Personas

- MOBIL - The structure was used in multiple formats: on its own as a teambuilding activity, as a support for organizing the workshop rich pictures.talk, to grasp attention of passersby and to host an exhibition.

In boulevard de la Revision we organized during 3 consecutive Wednesdays, so during 3 weeks, in July 2024. These were the following activities:

- Design game

- Storytelling Game

- Stakeholders personas

- Streetmeter

- MOBIL - The structure was used in multiple formats: on its own as a teambuilding activity and to grasp the attention of passersby.

- Additionally, the Vadrouille kitchen created a pleasant environment where everyone and especially kids from the local crèche and school were invited for free pancakes.

As a closing activity during the festival of Cultureghem, on Tuesday the 17th of September, we organized an handover-moment.

- MOBIL – The structure was used to organize an exposition and a discussion room, see picture above.

- rich pictures.talk was held in the discussion room.

With this activity we reached participants of the workshops and visitors of the festival, but also the city guards, and politicians. Two groups we didn't reach before. One of the participants from previous workshops in June, presented their results of the rich pictures.talk, which were visualized in the exposition.

2.2. Communication

Cultureghem has been working in this neighborhood for 12 years, and learned from experience that it is important to invite this neighbourhood through in-person and individual communication: spreading flyers in the neighbourhood or using a mobile kitchen to meet people and invite them afterwards.

For StreetForum, we went a step further and invited the residents of both locations by going door-to-door inviting them personally.

Over 12 years, Cultureghem has also built a large partner network of diverse organizations from various sectors and from the neighbourhood that know and trust Cultureghem, and already work together. This base of mutual trust also made it easier to invite them to the StreetForum activities.

VUB supported the communication towards stakeholders by mail invitations, reaching out on neighbourhood platforms like Hoplr, through local WhatsApp groups, social media and by calling up street actors individually to on their turn invite their networks.

We also used Cultureghem's communication channels (social media and WhatsApp groups), the municipality's and partner organizations'. Those who indicated they wanted to participate received a personal reminder afterwards via WhatsApp or verbally.

We should not underestimate the role of the volunteers, the Dreamteam, of Cultureghem who are also stakeholders. They are the best ambassadors for these activities because they know our neighbourhood and its users. They form a highly diverse team, collectively fluent in many languages and backgrounds. In such a highly diverse area, this is a major asset. They are involved in both promotion and organization of this activity under the guidance of team Cultureghem. The Dreamteam was often also involved as a participant in the tools since they know and use the streets. Many of them are also living in the neighbourhood.

Communication channels used:

- Flyers
- Door to door
- Through partners Cultureghem and local neighbourhood organizations
- WhatsApp groups

- The communication channels of the municipality
- Social media
- Mailing lists and other channels of VUB

2.3. Implementation of activities

In Ropsy Chaudron street, it was a challenge to engage the intended stakeholders in the living lab, particularly shopkeepers, the municipality, and the regional government. Nevertheless, we were able to involve several stakeholders in the project, such as the Abattoir (the company that coordinates the economic site where Cultureghem is located), the coordinator of the local elementary school (GBS Kameleon), the local organization Gilbard NGO (Artist collective formed around a public recycling library and is also a local meeting place), and the volunteers of Cultureghem, who are connected to the street and neighbourhood in various ways. Among them were:

- R., whose child attends the local school GBS Kameleon,
- A-C, whose children come to KETMET – the playground of Cultureghem who find place each Wednesday to play,
- M-G, who lives next to Ropsy Street,
- G., who frequents the local African café,
- and L., who does her shopping at the African stores in Ropsy Street.

During the living lab, we noticed that institutional stakeholders were highly solution-oriented and focused on identifying what needed to be done, whereas the volunteers were more concerned with envisioning what their ideal street should look like and how it should function. For example, one participant proposed creating a children's play and relaxation area where kids could play while their parents visit the market, while another suggested a picnic bench where people could eat their lunch and rest after a long day at the market. Glodi expressed his wish for part of the street to be closed off—similar to the 'Good Move' initiative—to create a terrace for African cafés during the summer.

The rich pictures.talk tool proved to be instrumental in helping participants present their vision for Ropsy Chaudron Street. It was truly insightful to see how proud and happy they were to design their dream street. There was a minor conflict of interest when one participant suggested installing a street camera for safety and to monitor car speed, while another opposed the idea due to privacy concerns. Eventually, we reached the conclusion that additional pedestrian crossings and speed bumps would effectively address the issue.

The living lab in Révision boulevard was highly successful. We were able to reach key stakeholders, but it required significant effort. Participants included the municipality, the regional government, local politicians, organizations, school coordinators, street residents, and shopkeepers. The situation in this street differed from Ropsy, as there had been previous workshops and activities in Révision with promises of change, yet no actual improvements had materialized. As a result, tensions and conflicts arose, particularly between shopkeepers and street residents, concerning waste management, speeding vehicles, and young people engaging in drug-related activities in Révision.

During the living lab, we attempted to address some of these conflicts using various living lab tools.

One key takeaway was that the holiday period was a significant factor in the difficulties we faced in reaching a larger number of people. In Ropsy, the living lab took place over three consecutive days, whereas in Révision, it was held weekly. This provided ample time to invite more people, which proved to be a success factor in Révision and allowed us to engage a broader audience.

2.4. Short description of (selected) activities

2.4.1. After-lunch activities at the market of Abattoir

During the activities for the Ropsy Chaudron street, which is located in front of the working space of Cultureghem, we set up the workshops and tool testing underneath the big market hall. Since CG is cooking lunch there every weekday, accessible for the neighbourhood by free contribution, our aim was to link our activities to these lunch gatherings. Activities were organised in the afternoon, after the lunch, and a series of 2 or 3 tools were tested by the same group of stakeholders.

The aim was to test multiple tools and gather stakeholders from different groups. The difference in time availability made it often difficult for stakeholders to commit a full afternoon to the tools, since testing one tool/workshop quickly takes up 1-2 hours of time.

A first conclusion of these kick-off activities was that the tools should be organised in a certain order: teambuilding, in-depth discussion, reflection and that timing and planning should be communicated well-beforehand. With this in mind, after the first activity, we adapted the following ones accordingly. The last afternoon, we tried to extract our participants from the chaos in the market and move activities to the basement of CG's workspace. This ensured a quiet and focused environment, but led to a participating group of exclusively volunteers, thus already engaged stakeholders.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Tools</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Location and weather</i>
25 June 2024	Storytelling Game	6	market hall, windy
	Placetoplan	5-6	
26 June 2024	Storytelling Game	5	market hall
28 June 2024	MoBil	9	Indoor basement
	rich pictures.talk	9	
	Placetoplan	9	



Figure 5 Photo: first day of activities under the market hall, © VUB

2.4.2. Summer activities on the Revision Boulevard

The boulevard consists of two lanes with a large space with some greenery in the middle, not accessible for cars. At this time, school holidays had started, and we set up a program on Wednesday afternoons during the month of July. Having a weeks' time in between the activities ensured that we could improve our approach and invite additional stakeholders.

Since we were not linked to the working space of Cultureghem in this location, a MoBil tower served to raise awareness and invite passersby. Cultureghem's mobile kitchens were employed to attract stakeholders by offering food and creating a pleasant environment welcoming neighbours and children. The games (Design Game and Storytelling Game) were used for in-depth discussion on the boulevard. Being in the street proved very helpful for the discussions on the current issues as participants could visually check how it was and didn't have to solely draw from the memory. Design Game includes a map of the street, which was designed and printed on the size of the table, making it possible for a big group to participate comfortably. Stakeholder personas and Streetmeter were used as a reflection round at the

end of activities. Activities were organised from 2 p.m. and onwards. A different series of two tools were tested by the same group of stakeholders.

Date	Tools	Participants	Location and weather
3 July 2024	Design Game	7	On-street, rainy, loud
10 July 2024	MoBil	6-7	On-street, clouds to sun
	Design Game	8-9	On-street, windy
17 July 2024	Design Game	4-7	On-street, sunny and warm
	Stakeholder personas	6	
24 July 2024	MoBil	3-5	On-street, good weather
	Storytelling Game	3	



Figure 6 Photo: second series of activities on the street, © VUB

2.4.3. Place-interviews by Cultureghem volunteers with shop owners on Ropsy

Due to the ongoing interim evaluations throughout the process, VUB could track which stakeholder groups were being involved. For each group that turned out difficult to reach, a strategy was made to include them. Business owners with little time available were consulted in place interviews. Cultureghems volunteers visited the shops at Ropsy Chaudron street and filled out the Placetoplan app with the shop owners, which made sharing their opinion convenient and time-efficient.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Tools</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Location</i>
August 2024	Placetoplan (interview)	34 (in total)	Ropsy Chaudronstreet shops

2.4.4. StreetForum Expo and Closing at Abattoir, during the Cultureghem Festival

After the summer activities, we wanted to share the collected insights from inhabitants, local organisations, businesses, and authorities on the future of Ropsy Chaudron street and Revision boulevard. As a closing event, we organised a last workshop and discussion during the three-day festival of Cultureghem, where we presented the results of StreetFroum in an expo. The aim was to communicate insights to the participants and local municipalities and to empower participants by bringing them together with local decisionmakers.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Tools</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Location and weather</i>
17 September 2024	MoBil (expo)	5	Market hall, good weather
	rich pictures.talk	20	

2.4.5. Overall outcome

We set out to link our tool testing to existing happenings and activities. Food turned out a great incentive for participation. In summer holidays, providing children's activities during the workshops helped parents engage.

Due to the ongoing interim evaluations throughout the process allowed for the initial plan to be adapted along the way. The main outcome is that we reached all stakeholder groups and a considerable amount of people. Taking notes after each session allowed to create tangible output at the end expo (poster, illustrations...) rending the process visible.

In both living labs we encountered participation fatigue, since a lot of the (engaged) citizens were already part of previous consultations for the mobility plan (GoodMove) and were either not satisfied with the outcome or distrustful. We heard that the insights that we collected were mostly already known but not taken into account by the municipality. On the other hand, in the light of the previous protests, we saw an opening for a new discussion on the future of the streets in this neighbourhood.

A follow-up might be to publish the expo materials online or to display them at Cultureghems' workspace.



Figure 7 Photo: final StreetForum Expo and discussion, © Rick Van Oss



Figure 8 Photo: final StreetForum Expo and discussion, © Rick Van Oss

2.5. List of tools & timetable

Name of the tool	Initiator of the tool / method	Living lab street	Period of implementation	Notes & Comments
rich pictures.talk	Space and place	Rue Ropsy-Chaudron	Friday 28-06-2024 Tuesday 17-09-2024 (see below)	Use of Mobil to support the facilitation of the tool. Visual Garden did the visual facilitation of the workshop.
Placetoplan interview	Spacescape	Rue Ropsy-Chaudron	August 2024	We went to shop owners to invite them for an interview and do it together. Hybrid form of this tool
Storytelling game	Mobilise, VUB	Rue Ropsy-Chaudron	Tuesday 25-06-2024 Wednesday 26-06-2024	Visual Garden did the facilitation of the workshop.
Mobil	Cultureghem vzw	Rue Ropsy-Chaudron	Friday 28-06-2024	Used as an independent activity building the support, helpful for teambuilding, and used as a support for the visualization and facilitation of rich pictures.talk
Mobil	Cultureghem vzw	Boulevard de la Revision	Wednesday 3-07-2024	Used as an independent activity building the support, helpful for

			Wednesday 10-07-2024 Wednesday 17-07-2024 Wednesday 24-07-2024	teambuilding, used to attract attention in the street and used as a support for the visualization and facilitation of the tools
Mobil	Cultureghem vzw	Market Hall	Tuesday 17-09-2024	Used to create an exhibition from the outside of the construction, inside we create a room to organize a discussion
Design game	TUW	Boulevard de la Revision	Wednesday 3-07-2024 Wednesday 10-07-2024 Wednesday 17-07-2024	Visual Garden did the visual facilitation of the workshop.
Storytelling game	Mobilise, VUB	Boulevard de la Revision	Wednesday 24-07-2024	Use of Mobil to support the facilitation of the tool. Visual Garden did the visual facilitation of the workshop.
Stakeholder personas	Mobilise, VUB	Boulevard de la Revision	Wednesday 17-07-2024	Use of Mobil to support the facilitation of the tool.

				Visual Garden did the visual facilitation of the workshop.
Streetmeter	Spacescape	Boulevard de la Revision	Wednesday 3-06-2024 Wednesday 10-06-2024 Wednesday 17-06-2024	Information as input for the tool was gathered by the VUB, the results were presented during the StreetForum Expo and hand-over moment.
Mobil	Cultureghem vzw	Boulevard de la Revision	Wednesday 3-06-2024 Wednesday 10-06-2024 Wednesday 17-06-2024	Used as an independent activity, helpful for teambuilding or to raise attention to the workshops happening on the boulevard.
StreetForum Expo - Debate & Closing Moment with rich pictures.talk	Cultureghem vzw and VUB	Under the covered market of Abattoir	Tuesday 17-09-2024	Closure moment. Use of Mobil to create an exhibition and a discussion room.

2.6. Challenges

2.6.1. Trust and communication

Gathering people around the table is usually the most difficult and time-consuming part. The negative connotation of the urban mobility plan (Good Move) also made people not immediately willing to participate. Thanks to Cultureghem's long-standing presence in the neighbourhood and their good reputation, appropriate communication and the diversity of Cultureghem's team and Dreamteam, we managed to get people around the table.

2.6.2. Evaluation method

In the workshops where we integrated and communicated the evaluation task beforehand, people were willing to fill out the evaluation forms. However, combining multiple tools and thus multiple evaluation forms can become too time consuming and require too much engagement from participants.

2.6.3. Language and digitalization barriers / difference in context.

The digital tools and evaluation required assistance when differences in language capacity are present within the group.

2.6.4. Difference between non-institutional and institutional actors

Non-institutional actors started reflecting on very individual problems that slowed down the process. The institutional actors had already given their solution framed within their ideology and were less open to other solutions. A learning was though that repetition works. Ultimately, through the use of diverse engagement strategies, we succeeded in bringing all the relevant stakeholders to the table. While mutual listening and dialogue were achieved, consensus was not reached on all points.

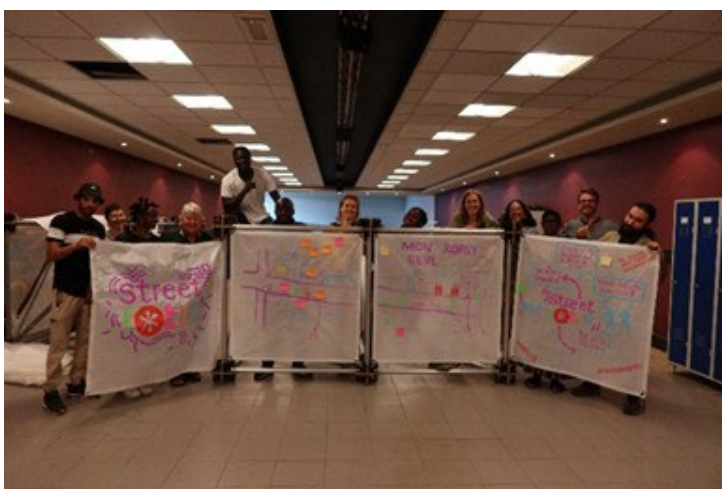


Figure 9 Photo: Ropsy, rich pictures talk, © VUB



Figure 10 Photo: Revision, stakeholder personas, © VUB

2.7. Preliminary Results

2.7.1. Tangible results

Sharing a common dream - The final drawing of both rich pictures.talk workshops in the Ropsy Chaudron street were visually quite similar, even though the groups participating comprised of very diverse stakeholder groups.

Storytelling posters - With the reports and notes from all activities, VUB made a summary of the reflections, concerns and opinions shared by stakeholders for both living labs. Through the use of AI-generated images, this resulted in four posters depicting semi-fictional characters and their narrative in the streets.

2.7.2. Surprising learnings

Considerable outreach - We reached a large number of active participants. Overall, more than 50 people joined the activities. The group was quite diverse, ranging from citizens to institutional stakeholders.

Structural participation - While Cultureghem usually works based with an informal, pop-up and organic way of gathering participants, they had to change method and reach participants in a structured way for these living labs. This more structured approach required time. The staff of Cultureghem needed to convince people to commit to tools that demanded more of their time (ranging from 1 to 2 hours or even several days). To support this process, VUB assisted with communication and engagement efforts. We succeed to convince a different range of stakeholders.

2.7.3. Unexpected happenings

Back to the start - While the question of the urban mobility plan was focused on how to change the streets, these living labs had to follow the consequences of the (negative) reactions on the plan and go back to the question "Do you want to change your street?" instead of "How do you want to change?".

Finding quiet inside the basement of Abattoir - We needed to move the workshop rich pictures.talk inside a building instead of on the street because Ropsy Chaudron street is too noisy. Organizing workshops in a quiet indoor setting can enhance focus and productivity, especially when participants are easily distracted by external noise. This controlled environment often leads to more in-depth discussions and better outcomes. However, moving activities indoors can also reduce visibility and accessibility, limiting spontaneous engagement from passers-by and diminishing opportunities for broader public interaction.

2.7.4. Our pursuit of consensus

All around the table - We reached 3 categories of participants: individuals (like residents and shop owners) , indirectly their network, and institutional stakeholders. Because we conducted regular interim evaluations throughout the process, VUB could track which stakeholder groups were being involved. For each group that turned out difficult to reach, a strategy was made to include them. Business owners with little time available were consulted in place interviews. Cultureghems volunteers visited the shops at Ropsy Chaudron street and filled out the Placetoplan app with them, which made sharing their opinion convenient and time efficient. Politicians, institutions and city administration require a timely invitation, therefore personal email invitation for the final event were sent out to make sure of their presence.

Time for action - In our living lab, there was significant tension between what people want and what has already been implemented. Stakeholders expressed a strong sense of urgency, feeling that something needs to happen in this area. in our living lab a lot of tension between what people want and what already has been realised.

Power imbalance - In the living lab of Brussels we reached very different people with different power. There was a big difference in trust, awareness and empowerment. So, the facilitation of the workshop was very important. We are proud that one of the volunteers presented with proud and satisfaction their result during the finishing workshop. They invented the name "Ropsy Révée", it means that it is the Ropsy Chaudron street they dream off.

2.7.5. Our lessons learned

A repetition of activities over a specific period maintains engagement and a momentum.
 - Key stakeholders were present at the handover moment. Groups that were difficult to reach were approached in person with the place interviews.

Different groups sometimes bring the same solutions - Quick visual results from rich pictures.talk illustrated that different groups gave the same dreamed picture of the street. And the use of AI / Personas gives visuals results of detailed discussion.

Use of hybrid version of digital tools - Since the process was monitored through the evaluation, VUB could track which stakeholder groups were being involved. For each group that turned out difficult to reach, a strategy was made to include them.

Importance of facilitating - A good facilitator is key to the success of a participatory activity. Cultureghem hired an external facilitator that they have been working with for years. Due to her extended experience and knowledge of the local context, there was a trusted relation with participants and dynamic, engaging workshops.



Figure 11 Illustrations: Revision, stakeholder personas, © VUB

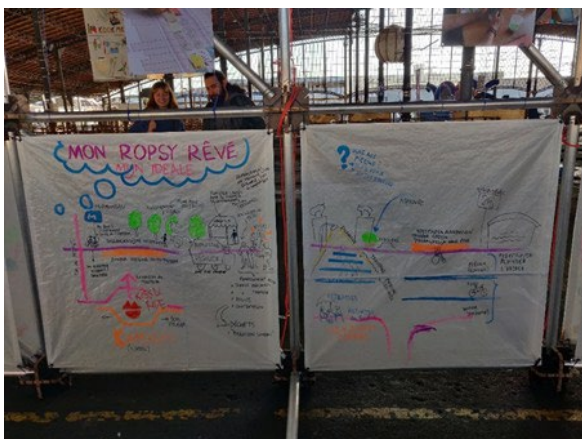


Figure 12 Photo: Revision, stakeholder personas, © VUB

2.8. Follow-up planning 2025

The activities have been finalized in 2024. The hand-over moment to the municipality was organized in September 2024, at the season closure.

3. Conclusion

The Living Labs in Brussels successfully demonstrated the potential of participatory urban planning by fostering dialogue between residents, businesses, and policymakers. Through interactive tools such as the rich pictures.talk, Storytelling Game, and Placetoplan, stakeholders were able to articulate their visions for Ropsy Chaudron Street and Boulevard de la Révision. A key achievement was the engagement of a diverse group of participants, ranging from local volunteers to municipal representatives, leading to a broader understanding of shared challenges and opportunities.

Despite initial resistance due to prior experiences with urban mobility plans, the project managed to reopen discussions about street redesigns in a constructive way. Major barriers included scepticism from residents, differing perspectives between institutional and non-institutional stakeholders, and logistical constraints such as time availability. However, by combining informal engagement strategies—such as door-to-door invitations and community meals—with structured workshops, the project bridged these divides and facilitated meaningful participation.

The use of creative tools played a crucial role in consensus-building by visualizing possible futures and providing a neutral space for dialogue. While tensions remained, shared aspirations for improved public spaces, traffic safety, and enhanced pedestrian accessibility emerged as common ground. There was clear interest in sustainable mobility solutions, though long-term commitment from authorities will be necessary for lasting impact.

Looking ahead, follow-up efforts should focus on maintaining stakeholder engagement, translating insights into actionable policy recommendations, and further integrating participatory planning into municipal decision-making. The results of this living lab highlight the importance of inclusive urban development and provide a foundation for future projects aimed at enhancing public spaces in Brussels.

4. References

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