

PAR4-B

Participatory Action Research
for an e-inclusive Smart Brussels

Title of the project: Participatory Action Research for an e-inclusive Smart Brussels

Acronym: PAR4-B

Topic: social participation and citizenship

Start date: January 1, 2018

Duration: 4 years (01/01/2018 – 31/12/2021)

Partner/subcontractor: Citizenlab

Mentors: CIRB_CIBG, Federatie Centra voor Basiseducatie vzw, ONICI, Stad Brussel, Telenet, Fobagra asbl, Samenlevingsopbouw Vlaanderen, STIB-MIVB, Atelier du Web – EPN de la Commune de Saint-Gilles et CABAN réseau des EPN Bruxellois, Cultuurconnect vzw, BE Central, VOCVO & Netwerk tegen armoede

Smart City solutions can, on the one hand, provide an answer to structural social problems in the city such as mobility, safety, dilapidation, illegal dumping or social isolation of vulnerable social groups. On the other hand, innovation and digitization processes within Smart City strategies lead to a Matthew effect where powerful social and digital citizens benefit these solutions more and faster than digitally vulnerable citizens. This is a concrete and realistic risk in the Brussels-Capital Region. Therefore, the PAR4-B project - Participatory Action Research for an e-inclusive Smart Brussels - aims to develop a widely supported e-inclusive smart city master plan for Brussels through a participative and action-oriented research process that (a) identifies the current challenges specific to a digital Brussels; (b) formulates solutions and actions for the realization of an e-inclusive digital Brussels; and (c) develops a future vision for tomorrow's digital Brussels. The PAR4-B project actively focuses on the offline and online bringing together of 4 stakeholder groups from the smart city domain and the e-inclusion field, in particular (1) policy makers; (2) private actors; (3) civil society organizations and public institutions; and (4) citizens of Brussels, including vulnerable social groups such as people in poverty, long-term unemployed, NEETs (not in training, training, or employment), existing civil society platforms, action groups, neighborhood committees, ...

When people do not have access to certain technologies or do not master the skills to use them, classically one speaks of the digital divide, but when this technology becomes invisible, ubiquitous and integrated into public space, this gap quickly becomes a fault line that no longer can be bridged. PAR4-B wants to provide an answer to this by positioning itself at the intersection of the domains of e-Inclusion and Smart City, in order to define a way forward that has a significant impact on all the actors in the long term. The PAR4-B project will lead to a sustainable and inclusive vision on tomorrow's digital Brussels.

The PAR4-B project is construed as an iterative process in which the six themes of the Smart City Wheel by Boyd Cohen (2013) are discussed according to the same pattern. The figure below shows the steps of this iterative process:

Figure 1 - 5 phases of the iterative research process



WP 1 (1 month): brief analysis of the state of the art of the Brussels policy to gain a better understanding of how the Smart City policy and the e-inclusion vision in the Brussels-Capital Region relate to each other.

- Questions: What emphases are made in the policies? Which priorities are set? Which projects and actions are funded, with which objective and which partners are involved?
- Methods: close reading of the current policy texts of the Brussels-Capital Region and quick scan of the various actions and projects that are organized in the Brussels-Capital Region.

WP 2 (0,5 month): mapping of all possible actors in Brussels (policy makers, public and private institutions, socio-cultural organizations or citizens themselves).

- Methods: desk research

WP 3 and WP 4 (3,5 months): development of a vision via face-to-face participation processes and via digital participation platform (Citizenlab).

- Goals: identification of the current challenges, the formulation of solutions and recommendations, and the development of a vision for the future of tomorrow's digital Brussels.

WP 5 (1 month): integration exercise in which the results of the various previous steps are brought together and processed into an accessible and concise document that sets out the most important challenges, solutions and visions. Each research year, one umbrella integration workshop is organized to bring together all stakeholder groups. Here, the results of the integration exercises are presented and further discussed and validated by the stakeholders.

- Methods: Deep Democracy principle

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