

ZWARTBERG NEIGHBOURHOOD TOUR: AN EMPOWERING COMMUNITY TOOL

Regional Test Case Documentation

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Reporting Period 5



PP8, Stebo



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0. Abstract

As part of the InduCCI Project, Stebo saw the potential to set up a connection between the neighbourhood of Zwartberg - a place that is today mostly linked to poverty and drug use - and the new developments that have taken place there in recent years. With the support of the CCI sector a trajectory was organized to add the inhabitants' perspective as an integral part of the development towards today's Zwartberg. The result of the test case is a guided tour with 17 meaningful stops defining the living environment of youngsters and other inhabitants. It was created by a now empowered community of youngsters which have truly become ambassadors of Zwartberg, saying: 'This is also our story!'.

1. Introduction

For the last decades, Zwartberg (city of Genk, B) has been subject to a lot of changes. After the closing of the mines in 1966, the welfare of the neighbourhood decreased. In 1970 the Zoo of Zwartberg was founded on the old mining grounds. This brought a lot of visitors to the neighbourhood. After 29 years it closed down, leaving an empty space in the area. The once prosperous street of the *Koning Boudewijnlaan* did not receive any more visitors and traders moved away. Then, in 2019, artist Koen Vanmechelen and the city of Genk opened the art park LABIOMISTA. It's a meeting place which inspires and invites you to think about identity and diversity. It aims to connect with the community around. Every year there are many (international) visitors coming to LABIOMISTA. The organizers want the neighbourhood to also reap the rewards of its success.

Community members are therefore involved in projects that are going on around LABIOMISTA and Zwartberg. However, youngsters were not yet involved properly in this process. They were a forgotten voice in the community that needed to be heard. As the living environment can sometimes be precarious, it is important to also hear their story. They feel at home in Zwartberg, but indicated that outsiders perceive their neighbourhood in a more negative way, due to drugs and poverty. In showing their community through their own eyes, they hope to change that perception.

As part of the InduCCI Project, Stebo saw the potential to set up a connection between the neighbourhood and the new developments. With the support of the CCI sector a trajectory was organized to add the inhabitants' perspective as an integral part of the development towards today's Zwartberg. So the community can proudly state: 'This is also our story!'.

2. Objective

With this action Stebo aimed at tackling a triple social challenge: 1) converting the image problem of Zwartberg by exposing the positive narratives of the neighbourhood; 2) disseminating these stories as a valuable component of the Zwartberg development; 3) engaging youngsters as creators and ambassadors of the narratives.

The Stebo community workers considered the youngsters as the most important target group of these challenges as they are - more than other inhabitants - situated in the grey zone between three currently unconnected time/identity frames. In the middle there are their own stories and today's meaningful places, aligned with the current family companies active at the industrial part of Zwartberg. At the other sides of the spectrum there are 1) the past mining identity to which most of their (grand)parents still connect and 2) the future CCI identity fully embodied by LABIOMISTA. The youth grew up in a piece of no

man's land where not much effort was put in giving meaning to their neighbourhood and environment. By giving them the chance to tell their part of the story they are assured of not being forgotten in this grand project being planted over their heads in an ever-changing environment.

A guided tour developed by the youngsters and connecting all these narratives was considered a promising objective to tackle all three social challenges. CCI methods play a large role in the design and implementation process, both as methodological support mechanisms and in changing the youngsters' mindset.

The innovative character lies in searching for unusual partnerships (youth, entrepreneurs, local residents matched with the support of CCI), and in setting up a bottom-up approach. Both aspects have become a common Stebo practice after 30 years of working in the field.

3. Applied approach

We have developed a concise storyboard. In each of the steps focus was on cooperation and co-creation in order to guarantee sustainable results and to respect the wishes of both stakeholders and youngsters. Peering with the InduCCI partnership has proved valuable in defining the format (e.g. European best practices) and in sharing tips and advise on how to cope with the restrictions laid down by the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. online brainstorm methods, staying in contact with target groups,...). The InduCCI process that was set up for each of the test cases - from defining the idea towards developing a concept and actual implementation - provided an interesting frame for exchange, planning and evaluation. It has enabled us to monitor the steps taken and to adapt our storyboard accordingly.

Step 1 - March 2020: Clearly defining the objective and its answer to a particular social challenge.

As Stebo has been active at Zwartberg for 30 years, community workers have good insights in the issues of the neighbourhood. The objective (see ch. 2) was further shaped by peering with those InduCCI partners who were also engaged in test cases guiding the community through the current industrial transformations.

Step 2 - April 2020 - May 2020: Gathering a relevant partnership to support in the development and implementation of the guided tour.

We have set up a short enticing pitch (A4) of our objective which was used at events and bilateral meetings. As a result cooperation was set up with 1) Gigos (a youth organization through which participating youngsters were reached), 2) Villa Basta (a CCI collective specialized in creative workshops for youth), and 3) LABIOMISTA (the atelier of Koen Vanmechelen which is now the starting point of the guided tour). In a second phase we connected with the Regional Landscape Kempen en Maasland (tourist organization specialized in setting up hiking routes) and Marijn Carton (designer who created the layout of the tour together with the youngsters).

Step 3 - June 2020 - February 2021: Defining methodology, format and planning + Implementation.

Digital storytelling was chosen as the format for the guided tour. It is an attractive and sustainable CCI method for the end users, and allows youngsters to collect stories and connect with inhabitants of the neighbourhood. So both their practical CCI skills (e.g. use of media technology) and creative mindset were stimulated.

After we clearly defined the goal, methods and the desired results, Gigos set out to find youngsters that were willing to participate.

5 workshops with the youngsters were organized during the development/implementation phase. Most workshops took place during summer time (most suitable moment: no school obligations):

Workshop 1: Who? Visiting LABIOMISTA and getting to know the youngsters

Workshop 2: How to? Media skills and further acquaintance

Workshop 3: How to? Designing neighbourhood testimonials - interview questions and list of interviewees

Workshop 4: In the field! Interviews with community members/inhabitants of the neighbourhood

Workshop 5: In the field! Images and photographs for editing purposes

Step 4 - March 2021 - June 2021: Graphic development of the route and online availability / Evaluation

Together with the youngsters the look and feel of the route was developed with the support of a graphic designer who was in charge of the final branding of the tour. This process was spread over three workshops during which the name of the tour was decided on: 'Hear me - See me'.

The route was set out in the field and made available at the LABIOMISTA website. In the meantime Villa Basta edited the interviews.

As an end workshop the youngsters were interviewed to evaluate the project.

Step 5 - June 2021: Opening of the route for the public

Stebo sent out a press text to relevant media and contacted local policy makers to do a short welcome at the opening of the walking route. Inhabitants were offered a sneak preview of the route on 26/06/2021. 23 people attended the opening (number had to be restricted due to COVID-19).

Step 6 - August 2021: Reflection/Evaluation

An evaluation meeting took place with Gigos and LABIOMISTA to discuss the cooperation and possible continuation of the action (e.g. expanding the route and interviews towards the northern part of Zwartberg).

A closing moment was organized with the youngsters to further reflect on the project and thank them for their efforts.

4. Results

The key physical result of the test case is a guided tour with 17 meaningful stops defining the living environment of youngsters and other inhabitants. The guided tour is an extension of the existing tours/offers organized by and within LABIOMISTA. QR codes at each stop direct the visitors to video interviews with inhabitants. These provide insights on how they perceive and have contributed to the development of today's Zwartberg (<https://www.labiomista.be/wandelroute-hear-me-see-me>). In total 23 inhabitants were interviewed (including three videos with the youngsters).

The main result of the test case is the existence of an empowered community of youngsters which have truly become ambassadors of Zwartberg. During the evaluation process that was done after the opening of the guided tour they mentioned to have learned a lot about the different time/identity layers present in Zwartberg. They feel proud that there is now also a stage for the places and stories that matter to them. In that way the guided tour is also an empowering community tool.

The guidance by CCI collective Villa Basta has raised awareness for community developers and planners on the valuable role CCI can play in tackling social challenges together with the community. It has also changed the youngsters' mindset by introducing creative and design methodologies which they could actually practice in the field.

5. Goal Achievement and Lessons Learned

The action has proven that the digital storytelling methodology, combined with the unusual partnership of youth, entrepreneurs, inhabitants and CCI enabled presenting a neighbourhood that is mostly known for decline, as a dynamic place with a strong basis of local competences and ideas to build on. The youngsters created something which really reflects the process they've been through making it. They showed a different side of Zwartberg to the outside world.

During the trajectory we have learned that a balance between a planned storyboard and spontaneity during the workshops induces a stimulating creative process. Giving them space to create and exchange ideas with an experienced CCI enabled them to keep the youngsters on board.

To create this tour different kinds of expertise had to be bundled. The common factor is that all expertise is found in the neighbourhood itself, revealing and stressing its potential right from the beginning of the project. We learnt that we need to search for existing leads with organizations and key persons in order to connect with actual issues and initiatives of the neighbourhood. It makes the stories understandable, authentic and recognizable.

The Stebo community workers have gained new insights in the dynamics and characteristics of a peripheral industrial community. It has been intriguing to involve the youngsters in a creative process addressing the transition and changes in their living environment. The results and lessons learned offer a good basis to continue this approach in future challenges in Zwartberg and other neighbourhoods where Stebo is active. The community workers are very willing to cooperate with CCI in the future and have already developed a reflex to spot such opportunities during their daily work in the field.

If other organizations are triggered to set up the test case in their own region, it is recommended to limit the number of workshops. We have found out that it is difficult to keep the youngsters fully involved and engaged in a series of 9 workshops.

6. Outlook, Sustainability and Transferability

The guided tour is permanently available on the website of LABIOMISTA (<https://www.labiomista.be/wandelroute-hear-me-see-me>). Plans are made with the supporting stakeholders to expand the guided tour with stops in the northern part of Zwartberg.

Methodological findings are shared with community developers and planners (a.o. during a focus group meeting and in the action plan chapters of the regional policy paper). The digital storytelling methodology will be applied by Stebo community workers in other projects (e.g. Buddy project).

The storyboard and stakeholder network structure can serve as a blueprint for other peripheral industrial regions who wish to tackle a social challenge together with the community. This can be done via digital storytelling or by other CCI methods such as theatre, music,.... Basic factor is the empowering role of a CCI actor as a mentor for the community.

7. Annexes

7.1 Relevant links

<https://www.labiomista.be/wandelroute-hear-me-see-me> *

<https://www.labiomista.be/hear-me-see-me-view-stories>*

*Information is published in Dutch, videos are subtitled in English.

7.2 Images





TOUR IN ZWARTBERG

