

Final version of a Cross Border Action Plan to integrate participative adaptation in local climate strategies (Feb 2020)

Introduction

The Sponge 2020 project had the aim to integrate a participative approach in realizing climate adaptation measures – i.e. involve various stakeholders throughout the process that would otherwise not be engaged with climate change adaptation. Therefore the 10 partners, together with the 3 observers, carried out several projects to practice with this approach. The journey the different partners had, varied widely. Sometimes the scope had to be modified under influence of the involved stakeholders (Antwerp), sometimes the approach had to be modified (Rotterdam). In the process we learned that measures not only work technically, but also enhance the usability of a place and the well-being of the visitors (Basildon). A description of the projects carried out can be found on the website <https://www.urbangreenbluegrids.com/sponge/pilots> .

All in all, we can say that a participative approach can help implementing the adaptation measures and help obtain support for those measures. It also helps sustaining the measures that are built, especially when they are realized in the private domain, outside of the public area, because of the joined ownership of the problems of climate change as well as its solutions.

At the end of the Sponge 2020 project (end of 2020) the question remains how to implement the participative approach into future projects. Sponge 2020 itself can be seen as a pilot, but how do we stimulate the use of a participative approach in upcoming projects? And how can you ensure that this is actually and effectively being implemented? That's what this Cross Border Action Plan is about.

Three steps towards implementation

The Sponge 2020 project was aimed at densely built areas, where climate change hits hardest: the most heated areas, the most paved areas and areas that can retain very little water. This is mainly due to the fact that previous policy in densely built areas was to discharge all the surplus of rainwater as quickly as possible. But when drought strikes, like in summer of 2018, critically low water levels put a strain on the livability of our neighborhoods and parks.

Another factor to take into account is that these densely built areas house the largest number of inhabitants, making each of them a stakeholder. There has been increasing support over the last 2 years to really take measures to mitigate - or adapt to - foreseeable consequences of climate change, converging with an increase in organizations and private stakeholders taking steps to do their part and participate. Since the reach of local governments to implement measures is limited to the public domain, public-private partnerships are becoming an increasingly important tool to achieve city wide sponging initiatives.

This is easier said than done. How can local authorities effectively and systematically integrate participation with local stakeholders in their daily climate adaptation policy making initiatives. We see a three step method for this, on which we elaborate below:

1. Encourage and enthuse

2. Quick wins through pilot projects
3. Implement in your policy

Step 1: Encourage and enthuse

Participation per definition requires engagement by third parties, so it is paramount to enthuse them and/or support them when they come up with a good idea. We also highly recommend collecting 'best practice' examples of successful projects: better to steal a good idea than to make your own mistakes.

These two combined offer some leverage to influence management and policy makers, because all the right ingredients are already there: "*we have a good idea, enthusiastic stakeholders to participate and it has been shown to work in the past*". An enthusiastic dweller will have much more influence than you as project leader.

And most of all: show the many advantages like the success rate of this approach, lower costs, less procedures, potential side effects e.g. more social cohesion and more support from stakeholders.

Within the Sponge project we have collected a large number of examples for you to study and visit. You are more than welcome to take a better look at these projects on the toolbox website: <https://www.urbangreenbluegrids.com/sponge>. Besides the Sponge projects you will also might find other examples of climate adaptive projects and measures on this website.

Step 2: Quick wins through pilot projects

Go for the low-hanging fruit. Start with small pilot projects if there is not much support within your own organization: smaller projects are usually simpler and easier to make a success. They don't cost much and take less time to implement, so you will be able to show results within a short timeframe.

After a pilot ran its course, you've gained useful insight in the advantages and disadvantages of your approach. For the Sponge 2020 project, we collected our best practices, based on our own experiences, which might prove useful in order to avoid some of the situations we have encountered (<https://www.urbangreenbluegrids.com/sponge>).

Step 3: implement the participative approach in your policies.

To really embed a participative approach into the organisation, you need to embed it in your policy. That sounds easy, but it is not. First of all, going through step 1 will help convince reluctant decision makers. If you feel there is some ground to work on for implementation into policy, we will show you an example of how such a policy statement might look like:

Climate adaptation involves solutions being found in all aspects of the urban environment that make it possible to alleviate the water system and make it more resilient. In addition to the current system, small-scale measures will be taken in the 'arteries of the city', in public and private property. Green roofs and water squares are good examples of such small-scale solutions.

Maintaining the current robust system is and will remain the duty and responsibility of the government and local authorities. But this is not enough; even a robust system cannot cope with heavy downpours. The urban development needs to be adapted in order to deal with these climate effects. Furthermore, climate change adaptation requires cooperation with other parties. Adaptation concerns the urban environment, therefore inhabitants, businesses, universities and colleges and interest groups can all participate and actively contribute to making our city/area climate proof.

The goal of a participative process in climate adaptation is to achieve shared ownership and a common acceptance of plans or policies and programmes of action which will resolve conflicts and achieve a co-produced decision-making.

Through investing in participation, we stimulate the initiatives of inhabitants in the field of climate adaptation. Through this we enhance the connection with our inhabitants and the awareness that climate adaptation is a common responsibility.