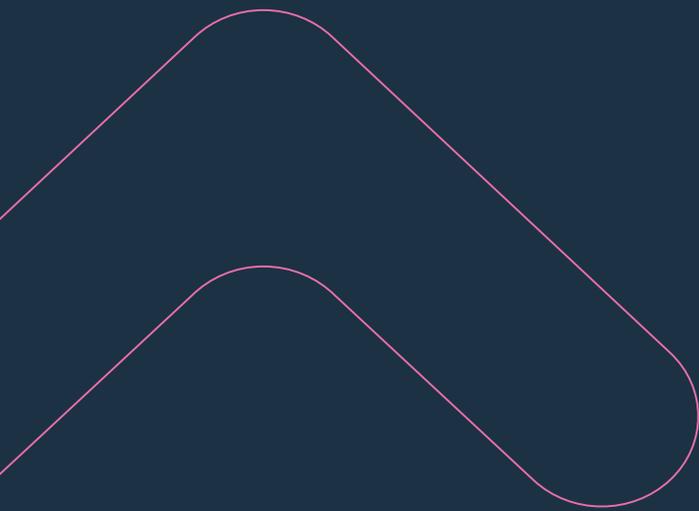




European Capital  
of Democracy

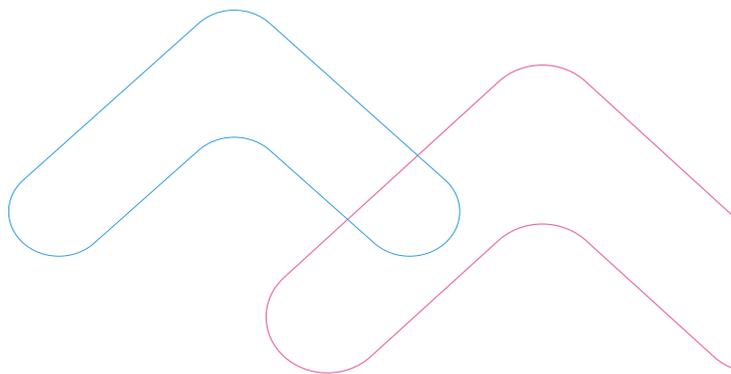


ECOD 2027 APPLICATION

# Brussels

Submitted: November 2025

# Content



## Mission statement

Teaser .....	4
Summary.....	4
Democratic Ambitions.....	5
Achieved Successes .....	6
Future Challenges .....	7

## Projects

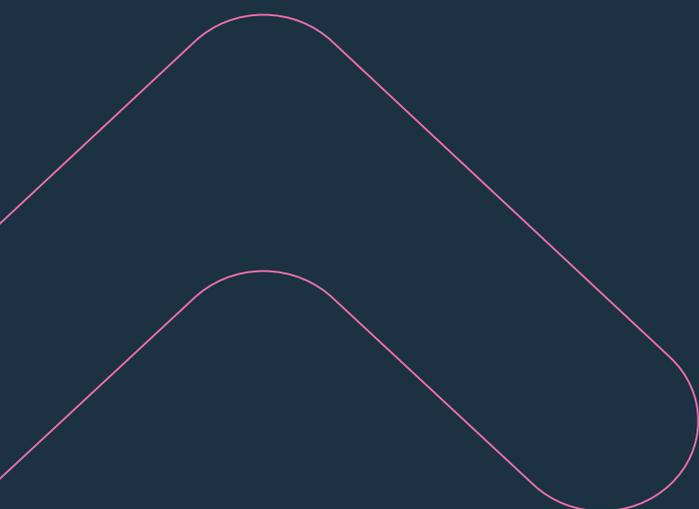
„Shout Out BXL“: Co-Creating Brussels’ Dutch-Language Cultural Framework .....	9
Bockstael Open Jury: Citizen Panel for the Redevelopment of Boulevard Emile Bockstael .....	12
Your Ideas, Our Actions: A Participatory Budget for Laeken .....	15
MADE IN - Citizen Call for Projects: When Residents Shape the Future of Their Neighbourhood .....	17

## Project Ideas

Participatory Evaluation and Update of the City of Brussels Climate Plan .....	21
Brussels Neighbourhood Assemblies .....	24
Chrono-Urbanism: Opening Public Equipment Outside Usual Hours .....	27
Exploiting the Potential of Vacant Buildings in the City of Brussels .....	29

ECOD 2027 APPLICATION - BRUSSELS

# Mission statement



# Mission statement

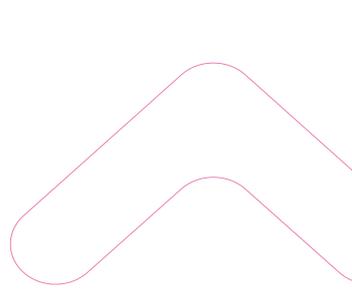
## **Brussels must be DemoCrazy! Empowering Democracy in Europe's Most Diverse City.**

### Teaser

In a changing world where authoritarian forces are rising and dissatisfaction with democratic representation is growing, we must be bold, yes, even a little crazy, to defend and empower democratic values. And yes, Brussels is crazy about democracy! By focusing on shared spaces, equal representation, transparency, and inclusiveness, Europe's most diverse city is becoming a living laboratory for democratic resilience, fully embracing its role as the true capital of the free world.

### Summary

In today's uncertain and rapidly changing world, it may seem almost "crazy" to stand up boldly for democratic values. And you know what? Maybe we are, because we're crazy about democracy! Brussels wants to show Europe that the European capital unapologetically defends democratic ideals. Our mission is clear: to expand our role as a freedom fighter, starting in our neighborhoods, in our streets, and with our citizens. As a minority-majority city, Brussels is known for its creative energy and structural complexity, but also deep social challenges: high demand for housing, healthcare, and welfare, limited space and citizens' needs that are evolving rapidly. Brussels is also one of the most linguistically diverse cities in Europe. We embrace this linguistic diversity and ensure communication is clear, accessible, and inclusive. A new digital platform will gather representative input and improve analysis, preventing feedback from being ignored. Accessible and inclusive public communication is a necessity for a vibrant local democracy. This is why we chose the title "Brussels must be DemoCrazy", playful, universal, and breaking barriers through simple, engaging communication. Budget constraints demand innovation. Alongside traditional tools, we created a new engagement plan: Fix, Flex, Reflex. Fix strengthens neighborhood councils, Flex offers temporary, project-based participation and Reflex fosters openness among decision-makers. This new culture flows from city hall to the streets, between citizens at the local level, and from the streets to city hall. Relying on citizens who take initiative. Space is precious. Schools, cultural centers, sports facilities, and even temporary sites must be shared and transformed into shared spaces. These are democratic gestures, prioritizing connection over fragmentation. Same thing for Public spaces. Our co-creation approach for projects like Boulevard Bockstael involves citizens as full jury members, ensuring ownership from the start. Limited budgets sharpen our appetite for smart, targeted solutions. Small, tailor-made initiatives can deliver big impact. Brussels is committed to climate neutrality by 2040. Sustainability requires collective engagement. Through participatory processes and a new Climate Assembly, we renew our promise: climate solutions must include civic action. Our Climate Plan, co-created with 700 citizens, includes ambitious projects like joint investments to reduce flood risks. Citizen participation matters most when ideas lead to real change. Limited budgets challenge us to innovate smarter. Diversity challenges us to listen better and multilingualism asks us to communicate clearer. The vibrancy



of our city challenges us to remain flexible and responsive. Unlike distant national politics, city governance is immediate and personal. It rebuilds trust through transparency and shared responsibility. That is how we prove democracy delivers. We must be crazy. And yes, we most certainly are.

## Democratic Ambitions

On May 6, 2010, in an address to the plenary chamber of the European Parliament, then U.S. Vice President Joe Biden declared that Brussels had a “legitimate claim” to the title of capital of the free world. His message was clear: America sought a strong partnership with Europe in defending democratic values. Fifteen years later, in a world marked by uncertainty and rapid change, we must confront a sobering truth: democratic principles are eroding, even in places where we once felt secure. European democracies stand at a crossroads. Geopolitical tensions, democratic backsliding, growing polarization, and a deep crisis of trust between citizens and their representatives reveal that our cherished democratic systems are under pressure. Even in our cities, confidence in public institutions is shrinking, and people increasingly feel disconnected from the decisions shaping their daily lives. In this fragile landscape, cities must rise as resilient and responsive guardians of democracy. Throughout history, cities have been the cradle of democratic aspirations, beacons of freedom, and engines of civic engagement. As Europe’s capital, Brussels embraces this responsibility. Our ambition is not only to defend democratic values but to renew them, positioning Brussels as a laboratory for democracy and a proving ground for innovative frameworks. Brussels is the continent’s most diverse city. Three-quarters of our residents have non-Belgian roots. Multilingualism and cultural diversity are woven into everyday life. This makes Brussels an ideal testing ground for democratic innovation and citizen participation. Our democratic ambition rests on a clear conviction: democracy must be continuously renewed, expanded, and shared. Together with the Brussels Region, we are advancing democratic experiments such as deliberative commissions in the regional parliament, citizens’ climate assemblies, neighborhood councils, city renewal contracts with citizens and shared spaces. By creating more opportunities for citizens to deliberate and co-create their living environment, we will build a city that is more equal, more resilient, and more prosperous. Encouraging active citizenship means diversifying opportunities for involvement and responsibility. Brussels is developing new frameworks, named Fix, Flex and Reflex, that strengthen civic competencies, empower residents, and ensure decision-making power is shared more equally. We invest in methodologies that support inclusive multilingual participation, from accessible information and broad consultation to co-decision, co-development, and continuous evaluation. Participation is never one-size-fits-all: our approach is tailored to neighborhoods, housing blocs, and targeted audiences, like young people. Especially for them, a key priority will be making public infrastructure and spaces shareable. Schools, cultural centers, sports facilities, community hubs, and even temporary sites hold enormous potential for multiple uses.

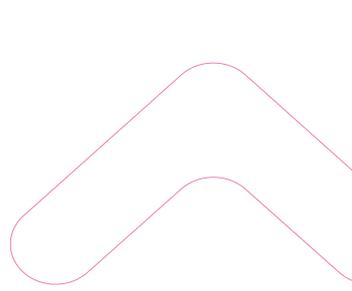


## Achieved Successes

Brussels has developed a strong tradition of citizen participation, especially in recent decades. The city, together with the region, has long experimented with public consultations and neighborhood involvement, becoming an experimental ground for participatory budgets, citizen climate assemblies and grassroots initiatives. Movements such as Picnic the Streets, which led to the pedestrian zone or ‚Cafe filtre‘, advocating for clean air around schools show how civic engagement is reshaping democratic processes. New forms of collaboration between communities and city authorities are transforming public spaces. Place Saint-Lambert in Laeken, once abandoned, was reimagined by residents as a welcoming square to meet and relax. After the Pavillon Omer Vanaudenhove in Cinquantenaire Park was damaged by fire in 2021, locals proposed its restoration using a participatory budget, and the city allocated €300,000 to make it happen. Mobility projects have also benefited from citizen input. The new Tram 10, connecting Neder-Over-Heembeek to the city center in just over ten minutes, is now in service for a year and is considered a success. It followed participatory events that placed citizens “in the cockpit” from the start. Panel members even became ambassadors for the project, engaging with neighbors and shopkeepers. To strengthen dialogue, Brussels introduced the ‚Babbeleir‘, a mobile meeting table on a cargo bike. Now a recognizable feature in public spaces. In Europe’s most diverse city, ensuring all voices are heard remains a challenge. Redevelopment projects, whether squares like Nouveau Marché aux Grains, parks such as Verregat, or school streets, share a common goal: listening to diverse opinions and addressing needs where people live. Two neighborhood facilitators play a key role by approaching residents, creating trust and explaining why their input matters. The citizens’ budget takes participation further. Three neighborhoods; Haren (8,000 residents), Neder-Over-Heembeek (22,000) and Laeken (64,000), have jointly managed €3.5 million. Anyone can submit a proposal, from renovating playgrounds to installing fitness equipment or creating tiny forests. This empowers residents to shape their environment in tangible ways. Today, Brussels enters a new chapter. With growing budgetary constraints, creativity is essential to keep local democracy vibrant and inclusive. Building on lessons learned, the city is developing a sustainable participation model based on three pillars: from City Hall to the streets, between citizens at the local level, and from the streets to City Hall. The mission remains clear: keep diversity alive and all profiles on board in shaping Brussels’ future.

## Future Challenges

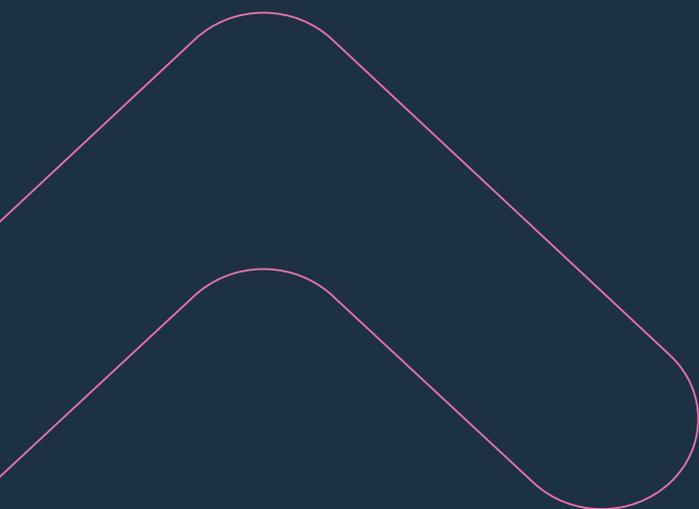
Brussels, Europe’s most diverse city, faces democratic challenges that are complex and interconnected, requiring a local democracy that is resilient and inclusive. Space is limited, budgets are tight, and citizens’ needs evolve rapidly. To respond, the City of Brussels is launching the Fix-Flex-Reflex Plan, a framework designed to make governance more agile, accessible, and future-proof through new participation models and neighborhood-based networks. Digital disruption and climate change are among the fastest-growing risks for cities worldwide. Artificial intelligence and digital mobilization challenge democratic systems, making it essential to expand digital participation channels and ensure



technology strengthens dialogue, transparency, and collective decision-making. On the other hand, Brussels will implement these innovations to create digital backbone with AI-driven analysis, integrated reporting, and intuitive tools to improve efficiency, maintain continuous citizen engagement, and share public buildings and spaces. The climate crisis calls for an updated Climate Plan and a just, climate-social urban transition that prioritizes support for those most affected; young people anxious about the future, newcomers lacking formal channels, and residents facing poverty or social exclusion. Brussels will launch a Climate Assembly to revise the Climate Plan, reaffirming our commitment to sustainability, social justice, and resilience. We believe that collective engagement is the only way to build a sustainable future. As Belgium's youngest region, Brussels will also create a 'council of future generations' with the Region, giving young people a voice in shaping the city's vision and climate goals. Brussels is one of Europe's most linguistically diverse cities, which calls for a pragmatic approach to language. Clear and accessible communication from public authorities is essential for democratic participation. Our multilingual engagement strategy will remove language barriers and make participation more inclusive. Multilingualism is fundamental to democratic life in Brussels. This is why we chose this applications' title "Brussels must be DemoCrazy", a playful, universally recognizable name that conveys accessibility and enthusiasm while overcoming linguistic barriers. Co-creating Brussels requires investment in inclusive governance, transparency, and socially conscious urban projects. Dialogue and collaboration are key to bridging socio-economical divides. The greatest challenge is fostering a strong participation reflex within City Hall while managing expectations. The Fix pillar will embed sustained participation in neighborhoods through a renewed vision for Neighborhood Assemblies, integrated into organically developed participatory networks. The Reflex-pillar stands for a cultural shift within our college and administration to actively share decision-making with Brussels residents and to invite them at the city's drawing table.

ECOD 2027 APPLICATION - BRUSSELS

# Projects



# Brussels – Project 1

BEST PRACTICE | ONE-OFF | 01.05.2025 – 27.11.2025

[HTTPS://WWW.FREDERIK.BRUSSELS/L/SHOUT-OUT-BXL-SCHEPEN-FREDE-RIK-CEULEMANS-VRAAGT-BRUSSELAARS-MEE-TE-BOUWEN-AAN-CULTUUR-BELEID-MET-GROTE-CULTUURBEVRAGING/](https://www.frederik.brussels/l/shout-out-bxl-schepen-frederik-ceulemans-vraagt-brusselaars-mee-te-bouwen-aan-cultuur-beleid-met-grote-cultuurbevraging/)

## „Shout Out BXL“: Co-Creating Brussels’ Dutch-Language Cultural Framework

### Detailed description

Shout Out BXL is an initiative led by Alderman Frederik Ceulemans to actively engage Brussels residents in shaping the city’s new Dutch-language based cultural policy. This policy encompasses a network of Flemish government-subsidised cultural venues, community centres, and theatres, alongside financial support for artists and cultural associations. This project reflects a strong commitment to participatory governance and cultural democracy, ensuring that the voices of citizens, artists, associations, and cultural organisers are central to defining the city’s cultural future. Brussels is a vibrant, multilingual city with a rich cultural fabric and history. Cultural policy must evolve to meet changing needs and expectations. Shout Out BXL was conceived to answer essential questions: what cultural experiences do residents value most, how can we make culture more accessible and inclusive, and what priorities should guide investments in cultural infrastructure and programming? By engaging directly with the community, the initiative aims to create a policy that is not only visionary but grounded in real-life experiences and aspirations. The project combines physical outreach with digital engagement to reach as many voices as possible. At the heart of this approach is the Babbeleir, a mobile culture cart that travels to five cultural venues across Brussels. At each stop, residents can complete the cultural survey on-site, engage in conversations about their cultural needs and ideas, and learn about the city’s cultural ambitions while sharing feedback. This hybrid model ensures inclusivity, bridging the gap between online participation and face-to-face dialogue. Every interaction reinforces the principle that cultural policy is not made behind closed doors but co-created with the community. The participatory process includes survey responses collected via the Babbeleir and online platforms, brainstorming sessions hosted on the Culture Platform, this is a Culture Council, which will continue to sustain and develop the participatory cultural network, and collaborative writing workshops where stakeholders refine ideas. Together, these steps have led to four strategic pillars that will guide the next policy cycle. We are building a Brussels where culture is tangible, shareable, inclusive, and adaptable. We make space for creation, foster connections, celebrate heritage, and embrace innovation. We connect people, strengthen networks, use music as a universal language, and dare to experiment. These pillars form our compass for the future: a city where culture is experienced, shared, carried, and shaped by everyone. Twice a year, Het Cultuurplatform serves as an open forum for networking and inspiration. This event is accessible to anyone interested in the socio-cultural sector. Each edition takes place in a unique location, offering informal

# Brussels – Project 1

opportunities to meet and exchange ideas, updates on local cultural policy, and a space to influence policy through dialogue. The platform is more than an event; it is a cross-roads for collaboration, where creativity meets governance and where new partnerships are born. Shout Out BXL is a collaborative effort supported by the City of Brussels Cultural Service, the Flemish Community Commission (VGC), and local cultural organisations. Funding is provided primarily by the City of Brussels and VGC, through dedicated resources for Dutch-language cultural programming.

## Collaboration

The project ensures inclusivity by bringing the Babbeleir to all neighborhoods in Brussels, including underserved neighbourhoods. All citizens are invited to participate, and outreach targets diverse groups including cultural associations, artists, and residents who are not regular participants in cultural life. This guarantees that perspectives from across the city are incorporated into the cultural policy.

## Target Group(s)

The project is aimed at all Brussels residents, with particular attention to Dutch-speaking communities and cultural organizers.

## Communication

Communication is ensured through on-site events with the culture cart, social media, newsletters, and local cultural partners. Residents can participate by attending one of the five neighborhood locations or completing the bilingual online survey.

## Description

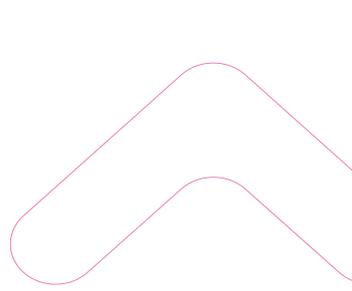
Civil society organisations (local cultural associations, neighborhood organizations and artist collectives) were particularly targeted.

## Democracy Year integration

During the European City of Democracy Year, the Shout Out BXL project will be showcased by presenting the full participatory methodology used to co-create Brussels' Dutch-language cultural policy. The process, from the traveling culture cart „the Babbeleir“ engaging residents in all neighborhoods to the bilingual online survey and final cultural platform event, will be highlighted as a best-practice example of citizen participation in policymaking. This approach can serve as a model for other cities seeking to involve citizens directly in shaping cultural strategies.



# Brussels – Project 1



Democracy  
dimension

Participation

One-time costs  
(planning and  
preparation)

2.000 EUR

Operational costs  
(per year)

10.000 EUR

Funding provided  
by the City (%)

100%

# Brussels – Project 2

BEST PRACTICE | ONE-OFF | 15.05.2025 – 01.01.2031

## Bockstael Open Jury: Citizen Panel for the Redevelopment of Boulevard Emile Bockstael

### Detailed description

The Bockstael Open Jury is an innovative participatory governance mechanism developed for the redevelopment of Boulevard Émile Bockstael, a major axis in Laeken of approximately 2 kilometers long, facing significant mobility, environmental and public-space challenges. The City of Brussels aims to transform a car-dominated boulevard into a safer, greener and more inclusive urban space. The project addresses three core challenges: (1) improving safety and mobility by slowing down traffic and enhancing conditions for pedestrians and cyclists; (2) strengthening climate resilience through new greenery, shade, and sustainable rainwater management; (3) enhancing public space quality by creating vibrant, accessible areas that support local commercial life. Given the boulevard's three distinct segments, each with its own historic urban identity, the City opted for a coherent yet adaptable design strategy. To ensure that the redevelopment reflects real needs and lived experience, the City integrated a citizen panel directly into the official jury, giving residents a genuine voice alongside institutional stakeholders in selecting the design team. Given that the diverse neighborhood of Laeken faces a lack of green space and significant socio-economic challenges, where one in four children grows up in a household without employment income, it was essential to ensure that this panel reflected as much diversity as possible. The participation model is based on a dual structure. The first part is the Ambassador Group, a representative panel of residents and local actors who engage in in depth dialogue with designers throughout the project. These ambassadors relay information, build continuity, and ensure perspectives from diverse demographic groups including youth, seniors, families, people with reduced mobility, and underrepresented communities are integrated. The second part is Public Engagement Moments, open sessions designed to inform, consult, and involve the broader community at key phases of the process. The methodology was developed collaboratively with the City of Brussels and Beliris. A preliminary study mapped out existing participation histories, neighborhood dynamics, local power imbalances, and barriers to engagement. This included interviews with institutional partners, local organisations, schools, and commercial stakeholders. A public diagnosis phase was carried out before presenting any design sketches, avoiding early polarization and signaling openness to citizen input. Throughout the preliminary and final design phases, ambassadors participated in two structured sessions to discuss scenarios, test ideas, and propose uses for shareable and flexible public spaces (gardens, play areas, rest zones). Public events, such as interactive World Café workshops, Streetmix design exercises, and mapping activities, helped residents understand spatial constraints while contributing meaningful ideas. Digital tools complemented in-person activities: online surveys shared via offi-

# Brussels – Project 2

cial channels allowed a broader demographic to participate, especially those unable to attend physical meetings. Once the design team submitted the permit plans, the City maintained transparency through newsletters, An open forum with the city's college (the mayor and aldermen), visual summaries, and an optional information market with panels illustrating the final project. This multi-layered participatory framework elevates the redevelopment into a shared democratic experience. It strengthens trust, empowers citizens, and ensures that the final design, by combining professional expertise with lived knowledge, reflects collective aspirations. The Bockstael Open Jury sets a new benchmark for inclusive and democratic urban governance in Brussels. That's how we want to keep diversity alive and all profiles on board during the next steps of this process.

## Collaboration

The project is designed to ensure inclusiveness and fairness at every stage. The Ambassador Group is composed through targeted outreach to reflect the diversity of the surrounding neighbourhoods, including families, seniors, youth, people with reduced mobility, newcomers and residents often absent from traditional participation processes. Flexible meeting hours, childcare-friendly venues, and multilingual facilitation lower barriers to participation. Public engagement moments are organised in accessible locations within the broader Bockstael area to ensure that neighbouring districts, Laeken Centre, and environs are equally involved. Collaboration with local associations, schools, and community organisations helps reach the "silent majority" and ensures that perspectives from different social and cultural groups are incorporated.

## Target Group(s)

The project targets neighbourhood residents, local businesses, families, seniors, young people, civil society groups, and underrepresented communities.

## Communication

Communication is tailored to reach both engaged residents and harder-to-reach groups. Ambassadors receive direct communication and participate in structured workshops with designers. The wider public is engaged through open information sessions, neighbourhood flyers, outreach via community organisations, and postings on City of Brussels channels. Online surveys allow broad participation, while visual panels and an information market provide clear explanations of design choices. Interactive tools, such as mapping, role-playing, World Café and Streetmix, make the project accessible and understandable. This communication strategy ensures inclusivity, transparency, and continuous dialogue with all target groups across the redevelopment process.

## Description

Beliris, a partnership between the Belgian Federal State and the Brussels Region, together with Common Ground, an external consultancy, and the City of Brussels' Participation Unit are involved.

# Brussels – Project 2

## Democracy Year integration

The methodology and the accompanying materials can be presented in detail during dedicated events, including a meeting with the steering group and the external participation consultant, as well as a site visit in Laeken led by the alderman and/or local ambassadors, together with the City of Brussels' participation administration.

Participation

## Democracy dimension

871.000 EUR

## One-time costs (planning and preparation)

20.000 EUR

## Operational costs (per year)

20%

## Funding provided by the City (%)

# Brussels – Project 3

**BEST PRACTICE | ONE-OFF | 10.09.2023 – 31.12.2027**

**[HTTPS://FAIREBRUXELLESSAMEN.BE/PROCESSES/BP-LAEKEN](https://FAIREBRUXELLESSAMEN.BE/PROCESSES/BP-LAEKEN)**

## **Your Ideas, Our Actions: A Participatory Budget for Laeken**

### Detailed description

The Participatory Budget of Laeken, one of the laureates for the 2025 Innovation in Politics Awards in the Local Development category, is a democratic mechanism through which residents directly decide how a portion of the municipal investment budget is used. With up to €1.5 million available, citizens and associations can submit ideas for improving public space, mobility, culture, cleanliness, and social cohesion. These ideas are then analysed, developed into concrete projects, evaluated, and finally selected through a public vote. A participatory budget allocates a share of public funds whose use is determined by the residents themselves. Investment projects may concern public-space improvements, equipment purchases, furniture, durable installations, or infrastructure. Only expenditures that produce long-lasting benefits are eligible, excluding communication campaigns, training, operational or running costs, and salaries. The process unfolds through six stages. The first stage is a call for ideas. Residents submit proposals within a defined period. Brussels Participation and the neighbourhood council verify compliance with eligibility criteria. The second stage is eligibility and feasibility analysis. Competent municipal departments assess technical and legal feasibility and estimate costs. Submitters may be invited to refine their proposal with support from City services. The third stage is the presentation of selected ideas at the Projects Festival. The fourth stage is the voting phase. Residents vote for their preferred projects. The fifth stage is the decision by the College. It validates results and submits the selected projects to the municipal council for approval. The sixth stage is implementation. Projects are carried out within three years by the City or by project leaders who can receive up to €20,000 in subsidies. For the 2023–2024 cycle, project selection is guided by four thematic pillars: Culture, Public Space, Social Cohesion and Mobility. Additional priority is given to areas of Laeken that have not recently benefited from urban-renewal investments. These themes were defined by the Laeken neighbourhood council, which consists of 17 residents chosen by lot and eight local associations. Following a comprehensive needs assessment, the council established priority themes and plays an active role in evaluating project proposals. Residents aged 16+ and associations can participate. Ideas must serve the public interest, concern the designated area, align with the four themes, fall within the City's competences, involve investment costs, and be feasible within three years. Eligible submitters receive tailored support (costing, partnerships, feasibility, resident involvement) from Brussels Participation. The process culminates in a Projects Festival and a vote. Selected projects are then implemented within three years, strengthening local democracy and improving the neighbourhood's living environment.

# Brussels – Project 3

## Collaboration

The participatory budget is designed to be inclusive and equitable by enabling all residents aged 16+ and associations to take part. Ideas must serve the public interest and directly benefit neighbourhood users. The neighbourhood council, composed of residents selected by lot and local associations, plays a central role in ensuring fairness: it identifies needs, analyses ideas, and advises the City. Tailored support from Brussels Participation ensures that groups with fewer resources can access guidance, partnerships, and technical assistance. Priority is given to Laeken areas not covered by recent urban-renewal programmes, ensuring a balanced distribution of investment across the district.

## Target Group(s)

The initiative targets Laeken residents aged 16+, neighbourhood collectives, and associations active in the district.

## Communication

Communication focuses on inclusiveness and broad outreach: clear information on the website, multilingual materials, neighbourhood flyers, info sessions, social-media campaigns, and direct outreach through local associations and the neighbourhood council. The Projects Festival and voting phase are actively promoted to encourage wide participation. Communication also highlights successful past projects to inspire new ideas and show residents the tangible impact of their involvement.

## Democracy Year integration

The Participatory Budget of Laeken can be showcased during Democracy Year as a flagship example of citizen-driven investment. Activities may include presentations, workshops, or exhibitions illustrating the different project stages, from idea submission to implementation. Videos, maps, and testimonies can be shared in ECoD events, demonstrating how residents directly shape public spending. Documentation will be made available in multiple languages, providing a replicable model for other European cities and reinforcing Brussels' leadership in participatory democracy.

## Democracy dimension

Community

## One-time costs (planning and preparation)

1.500.000 EUR

## Operational costs (per year)

Human resources within the capacity of our administration

## Funding provided by the City (%)

100%

# Brussels – Project 4

BEST PRACTICE | PERMANENT

[HTTPS://WWW.BRUSSEL.BE/WAT-EEN-PROJECTOPROEP-MADE](https://www.brussel.be/wat-een-projectoproep-made)

## MADE IN - Citizen Call for Projects: When Residents Shape the Future of Their Neighbourhood

### Detailed description

Together with the Brussels Region, the City of Brussels implements several Sustainable Neighborhood Contracts in underserved areas where direct citizen participation, urban renewal, and socio-economic initiatives converge. These contracts are a powerful instrument in both the city's and the region's urban policies, channeling significant resources to develop projects with lasting impact. Renovating Brussels' most vulnerable neighborhoods begins with participatory, operational, and inclusive urban initiatives. These programs, carried out in close collaboration with local residents and civil society, aim to improve living conditions through targeted projects such as the redesign of public spaces and parks, as well as the construction of housing and public facilities. They also encompass a wide range of actions to combat precarious and unhealthy housing, implemented by numerous associations. Each Sustainable Neighborhood Contract requires the establishment of a Neighborhood Commission. This commission helps define the objectives of each intervention, both in terms of program development and its implementation. One of the most comprehensive participatory tools is 'Made In'. It empowers residents to shape the future of their neighbourhood through annual or biannual citizen calls for projects. Over a 24-month cycle, residents collectively identify priority themes, propose ideas, and select projects that strengthen social cohesion, solidarity, culture, environmental sustainability, and overall quality of life. Made In is a tangible model of direct democracy, giving citizens real decision-making power over how resources are allocated. The process follows a clear and inclusive methodology. Residents, associations, schools, or childcare centres can submit projects after a preliminary consultation with the socio-economic coordination team. Projects must be non-commercial, must align with priority themes, must involve residents, and must respect a realistic budget ranging from five hundred to eight thousand euro. An advisory committee made up of residents, the City, the Region, and local associations evaluates relevance, feasibility, social impact, inclusion, and innovation, and selected applicants present their project orally. Subsidies are paid in several phases, with strict financial justification, and the shared use of purchased materials is always ensured. Projects must start within six months, and they require interim and final reporting as well as regular monitoring by the City. Made In also highlights the human dimension of participation through the video series People at the Heart of the Project. One example is the Open Air Cinema, a resident led initiative that brings neighbours together through collective film selection and screenings, strengthens intergenerational connections, and celebrates cultural diversity. This model reinforces democratic legitimacy, supports local talent, and creates sustainable impacts, and it is fully replicable in other neighbourhoods and cities while contributing to the role of Brussels as a European laboratory of democratic innovation.

# Brussels – Project 4

## Collaboration

Made In ensures inclusion and fairness by opening participation to all residents, associations, schools, and local structures within the Sustainable Neighbourhood Contract (SNC) perimeter, with strong outreach to youth, seniors, and minorities. The process requires active resident involvement at every stage, theme selection, project design, and final voting, ensuring equitable representation. Communication tools (flyers, social media, local networks) are adapted to reach diverse publics. Surrounding areas and partner associations are systematically involved through shared events, neighbourhood celebrations, and collaborative spaces that encourage exchange beyond the project perimeter.

## Target Group(s)

Made In targets neighbourhood residents (individuals and collectives), local associations, and underrepresented groups such as youth, seniors, and minorities.

## Communication

Communication aims to showcase citizen participation, highlight project leaders, and position Brussels as a hub for democratic innovation. A multichannel strategy ensures wide visibility: a strong visual identity (#MadelnHeliport), a dedicated webpage with practical information and project profiles, social media posts with videos and visuals, local information panels, flyers, and dissemination via partner associations. Immersive videos and project-leader participation in neighbourhood events strengthen community engagement. Visibility is measured through video views, social media interaction, and participation in ECoD events.

## Description

Civil society organisations active in the neighbourhood, local associations and schools, are targeted and encouraged to participate.

## Democracy Year integration

Made In will be showcased throughout Democracy Year via presentations, webinars, and participation in ECoD events. The project's democratic process, videos, and testimonies will feature in thematic programmes on citizen participation. A dedicated exhibition or screening of People at the Heart of the Project will highlight resident-led initiatives, while project leaders will be invited to events on democratic innovation. Documentation and videos will be available in multiple languages, offering a replicable model for European cities and strengthening Brussels' role as a leader in participatory democracy.

# Brussels – Project 4

## Democracy dimension

Empowerment

One-time costs (planning and preparation)

Project-based. CACI = 265.000 EUR; Versailles = 161.000 EUR and Héliport = 210.000 EUR

Operational costs (per year)

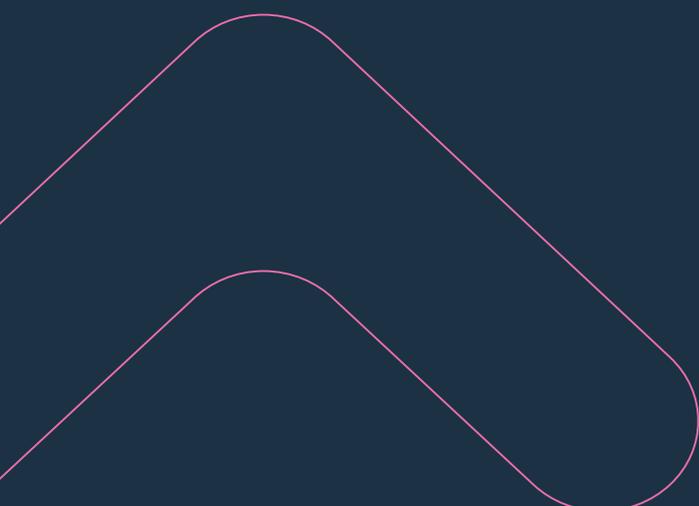
See above. Once a year for 5 years duration of the program

Funding provided by the City (%)

30%

ECOD 2027 APPLICATION - BRUSSELS

# Project Ideas



# Brussels – Project Idea 1

## Participatory Evaluation and Update of the City of Brussels Climate Plan

### Challenge

With the launch of the world's first permanent Citizens' Assembly on Climate, the Brussels Region aims to involve citizens on a structural basis in shaping climate policy. The City of Brussels also intends to follow this path by introducing a collective review of its climate plan and road-map every two years. Brussels society is set to undergo profound changes in the coming decades. To involve as many residents as possible in this transformation and to strengthen social cohesion, it is essential to address the wide range of urban climate challenges facing the city, such as heat islands, air pollution, energy inefficiency, and unequal access to green spaces. These challenges are experienced differently across the city depending on neighbourhood and socio-economic context, which makes it difficult for residents to feel directly involved in municipal climate actions. The most significant challenge is that citizens and local climate actors currently have limited opportunities to actively participate in evaluating and updating the Climate Plan, which reduces engagement and limits the adaptation of policies to local realities. This project connects with the democratic trend of participatory governance, where citizens, associations, experts, and entrepreneurs collaborate directly in shaping public policy and ensuring that diverse perspectives are integrated into decision-making.

### Solution

This project offers a unique participatory process that actively engages citizens and key climate actors, including civil society organisations, scientists, entrepreneurs, and neighbourhood representatives, in evaluating and updating the Climate Plan. By participating, citizens gain a direct voice in assessing current actions, identifying gaps, and proposing new measures that reflect local needs and priorities. If citizens choose not to participate, they risk missing the opportunity to influence decisions that directly affect their neighbourhoods and their daily lives, leaving climate actions guided primarily by administrative perspectives rather than by the knowledge, experience, and energy of local communities. Nearly 700 citizens and 46 working groups will review the more than 300 actions, ensuring the update of the Climate Plan will be build collaboratively, not imposed. This approach fosters collective responsibility and genuine democratic buy-in through transparency.

# Brussels – Project Idea 1

## Impact

Citizens and climate actors will become part of the project by participating in interviews, thematic workshops, focus groups, and online consultations. Engagement will be particularly targeted in neighbourhoods that have been underrepresented in previous climate initiatives, ensuring inclusivity and diversity. Based on previous participatory processes, it is expected that the project could directly involve three to five hundred participants, including youth, civil society representatives, and entrepreneurs, while public reporting and online engagement could reach thousands across the Brussels-Capital Region. Existing data from the first participatory process demonstrates strong interest and feasibility, as over seven hundred residents contributed through street interviews, workshops, and neighbourhood meetings, highlighting the clear demand for a structured evaluation and update of the Climate Plan.

## Implementation

The project will be rolled out in a phased approach. It will begin with targeted interviews and consultations with associations, experts, entrepreneurs, and local leaders to gather input on the existing Climate Plan. This will be followed by thematic co-design workshops where participants will collectively evaluate current actions, identify gaps, and co-create proposals for updating the plan. Finally, public validation sessions will be organised to ensure transparency and inclusivity, supported by online engagement tools to broaden participation. The project can be implemented within existing municipal budgets dedicated to civic engagement and sustainability initiatives, with additional support from partner organisations and climate networks. The nearest milestone will be the completion of the first evaluation, resulting in a set of citizen-informed recommendations, which will then be used to update the Climate Plan and submit it for public consultation and formal adoption by the City Council.

## Support

The project requires expertise in participatory facilitation and climate policy, partnerships with civil society organisations, local associations, scientists, and entrepreneurs, and communication support to reach residents across all neighbourhoods, age groups, and language communities. The implementation of the project will be ensured through structured project management, clear timelines, continuous monitoring, and the integration of citizen and stakeholder input into the updated Climate Plan, guaranteeing meaningful participation and tangible outcomes.

## Democracy dimension

Sustainability

# Brussels – Project Idea 1

Images



# Brussels – Project Idea 2

## Brussels Neighbourhood Assemblies

### Challenge

Brussels has built a strong tradition of citizen participation, particularly in recent decades, and the City of Brussels has been a pioneer in neighborhood engagement. The Neighbourhood Councils, introduced in previous years, were designed as spaces for dialogue between residents, local actors and City Hall. To maintain this pioneering role and inject new energy into this participatory backbone, especially in times of limited resources, the format now requires an update. We have noticed that over time, participation declined as members gradually withdrew, discussions became repetitive, the limited visible outcomes over time made it harder to sustain engagement. Moreover, only a limited number of neighborhoods were able to benefit from these councils, and the resources and staffing needed to extend the model across the entire territory are not currently available. After a thorough evaluation, we chose to rethink our approach and create a participatory framework that reflects the needs of a dynamic and diverse local democracy, building a strong bridge between residents and City Hall to ensure community-specific priorities are addressed effectively. This new 'Fix' framework is designed to embed robust, long-term participation in our neighborhoods. It reimagines Neighborhood Councils by integrating them into organically developed participatory networks, establishing a pragmatic yet permanent structure for citizen engagement.

### Solution

Brussels aims to create a lighter and more inclusive participatory mechanism that encourages broad citizen involvement across all ten neighborhoods of the city. To achieve this, Brussels Neighbourhood Assemblies will hold a general meeting twice a year, in the presence of multiple aldermen or the mayor, and maintain a direct link with City Hall. In addition, on-demand and flexible meetings will be organized as needed. This approach creates a scalable mechanism that ensures all ten neighborhoods of our city are effectively covered. Known as the Neighbourhood Assemblies, these gatherings will identify local challenges and co-create concrete solutions to be submitted to elected officials. The process unfolds in four stages. First, a multichannel communication campaign ensures that every resident is informed and invited to take part, either by joining the consultation or volunteering to become an assembly member. Second, a citywide consultation gathers concerns through a dual approach combining online participation via the digital platform with in-person outreach to ensure accessibility and inclusion. Third, a citizen assembly is formed through a random selection of volunteers, who work with the City to translate consultation results into actionable proposals. Finally, after a last round of citizen feedback, the most relevant recommendations are reviewed and submitted to local elected officials for feasibility assessment and potential implementation.

# Brussels – Project Idea 2

## Impact

For citizens, this process offers greater involvement in local decision-making, fostering a stronger sense of belonging and empowerment. Transparency at each stage, consultation, random selection, and formulation of recommendations, helps reinforce trust in public institutions. It ensures that local concerns such as mobility, cleanliness, safety, and green spaces are directly addressed, while the co-created solutions remain closely aligned with the realities of each neighbourhood. For the City of Brussels, the mechanism provides elected officials with an accurate and up-to-date understanding of citizens' perspectives to guide their decisions. The structured recommendations generated through this process support both strategic and budgetary planning. Finally, by creating a dedicated space for dialogue, the city reduces tensions and strengthens social cohesion across its neighbourhoods.

## Implementation

The first wave of assemblies will begin in 2026 and will focus on the Brussels city centre, specifically on the neighbourhoods that did not benefit from previous councils. This initial phase will consist of three assemblies held over a period of two and a half to three months. During the first month, a communication campaign will be carried out alongside an open consultation, both online and in person. The second month will be dedicated to preparation and assembly sessions, ensuring that participants receive the necessary information to develop concrete recommendations. In the third month, proposals will be prioritised and presented to local elected officials by the Alderman for Citizen Participation. Subsequent waves will follow, with the aim of organising assemblies in all ten neighbourhoods before the end of the year.

## Support

The Mayor and Aldermen are committed to following up on the recommendations put forward by citizens. The Citizen Participation Service is responsible for managing the entire process. The various City departments provide essential information on the topics discussed during the assemblies. Local associations help relay the initiative to their audiences and encourage residents to take part in the life of their neighbourhoods.

## Democracy dimension

Community

# Brussels – Project Idea 3

## Chrono-Urbanism: Opening Public Equipment Outside Usual Hours

### Challenge

In Brussels, a large portion of public infrastructure as schools, administrative buildings, sports halls, meeting rooms, IT labs, cultural facilities remains unused during evenings, weekends, and holidays. This under-utilisation represents a lost opportunity in a city where neighbourhoods increasingly lack accessible local equipment. Despite having developed an inventory of building stock, the city does not yet have the tools or processes needed to enable multi-functional use or shared management. Several obstacles prevent progress: building inventories lack detailed information on internal equipment and configurations, responsibilities remain siloed (e.g., a school sports hall cannot be used by the Sports department without complex coordination), and no transversal operational or political model exists for co-management. Security constraints, insurance issues, and concerns about nuisance add to the complexity. Additionally, no unified digital system exists for room booking, risk management, tracking usage, or applying fair pricing rules. The result is a major gap between citizens' needs for accessible local facilities and the actual availability of public indoor spaces.

### Solution

According to Brussels' proposal to design a new chrono-urbanism model (10-minute city), we will launch a pilot project in one selected building (e.g., a school with a gym and multi-purpose areas) to test the new governance model, community integration, security solutions, and digital tools. The solution consists of several components. The first component is a comprehensive mapping of public building stock, including indoor layouts, equipment lists, and usage patterns to identify and prioritise buildings with the highest potential. The second component is a new transversal governance model, built jointly by key departments including education, sports, culture, administration, buildings, IT, and finances, defining co management rules, responsibilities, and decision making procedures. The third component is a secure and user friendly access system adapted to different user groups and building types. The fourth component is a digital tool for bookings, monitoring, and pricing, enabling citizens, associations, and city services to reserve spaces based on transparent rules. This approach transforms public buildings into flexible, multi purpose assets supporting neighbourhood life.

### Impact

For residents, the first impact is access to nearby facilities during evenings and weekends, reducing travel time and strengthening the ten minute city. Residents also gain expanded opportunities for sports, culture, digital learning, social activities, and community initiatives. Access becomes more inclusive for workers with non standard hours, young people, families, and local associations. This approach also fosters a sense of belonging through increased use of local public spaces. For the administration, the model provides a tested transversal operating framework for multi functional building

# Brussels – Project Idea 3

management. It increases trust and cooperation between departments and allows for more efficient use of public assets, reducing the need for costly new infrastructure. A data driven understanding of usage patterns informs future investments, while budget allocations and cost sharing mechanisms for maintenance and security are clarified. For the city as a whole, the impact includes progress toward the Mayor's vision of a poly-centric ten minute city. It reduces environmental impact by avoiding new constructions and limiting mobility needs. Local activities are strengthened, supporting neighbourhood cohesion, and transparency and efficiency in public asset management are improved.

## Implementation

The project begins by selecting one pilot building that combines different functions and user groups. Implementation starts with a technical and spatial audit (create a detailed indoor mapping, catalogue equipment, analyse current occupancy, and assess security conditions), then continues with co-design workshops that bring together building managers, departments, associations, and residents to define governance, rules, scheduling, and pricing. After having tested a prototype (installing digital access systems, testing evening openings and evaluate security measures), we'll launch our pilot project, that will allow us to evaluate and scale strategy : identify lessons learned, refine the model, and prepare a roadmap for expanding chrono-urbanism across additional sites.

## Support

The success of the chrono urbanism challenge requires high level political alignment, given that school buildings and sports and facilities management involve multiple aldermen and directorates. It also depends on innovation expertise from the i team, especially in design, stakeholder engagement, and organisational redesign. Close collaboration with IT and security teams is needed for digital access management. Legal expertise is required to define contracts, insurance rules, and liability frameworks. Input from neighbourhood residents is essential to understand needs, anticipate potential nuisances, and validate mitigation measures. Financial modelling ensures transparent allocation of costs and revenues across departments. Finally, a clear communication strategy supports trust, awareness, and proper use of the system.

## Democracy dimension

Community

# Brussels – Project Idea 4

## Exploiting the Potential of Vacant Buildings in the City of Brussels

### Challenge

The City of Brussels faces a persistent and costly issue: a significant number of vacant buildings remain unused despite urgent needs for affordable housing and socio-economic infrastructure. The city counts 281 vacant residential buildings, representing around 900 unused housing units, in addition to large non-residential properties that remain idle. These unoccupied spaces deteriorate rapidly, generate nuisance, reduce the sense of safety among residents (due to the lack of animation in the neighbourhood), and push development pressure outward, contributing to urban sprawl, land artificialisation, and increased resource use. Several structural obstacles currently prevent effective action: the property inventory is incomplete and not continuously updated, data sharing is fragmented due to administrative silos, and departments act independently (urban planning, property management, finance, public peace) each addressing the issue through their own mandate but without joint decision-making. Current approaches have also struggled to balance regulatory constraints (e.g.: GDPR, access to utility data), the difficulty of mobilising private owners, and the lack of coordination with external partners such as utilities or regional agencies. The result is a costly loss of opportunity for the city and its residents.

### Solution

The proposed solution is to design and test a new transversal operational model for identifying, assessing, and reactivating vacant buildings, using a pilot site as a real world experiment. The i-team would work across departments to co create a shared process built on five components. The first component is a strengthened, continuously updated inventory enriched through new data sources including utilities, neighbourhood reporting, and digital tools. The second component is a cross department workflow model and a unified decision making framework defining roles and responsibilities for evaluating building potential including housing, commercial, cultural, and community uses, and selecting the most appropriate reuse options while balancing social, economic, environmental, and legal criteria. The third component is new partnership modalities tailored to the type of building, including temporary occupations, public management rights, collaborations with cooperatives or NGOs, Community Land Trust models, and low threshold solutions for short term uses. The fourth component is a citizen oriented approach allowing residents to signal vacant buildings, contribute ideas, and participate in programming future uses. This new model transforms the vacant building issue into an opportunity to enrich neighbourhoods without consuming new land.

# Brussels – Project Idea 4

## Impact

For residents, the impact includes better neighbourhood conditions through upgraded buildings, reduced dereliction, and more activity at street level. They also benefit from increased availability of fair priced housing, cultural, community, and commercial spaces. Transparency is improved through a shared public inventory, allowing residents to signal vacant sites and follow project progress. Neighbourhood cohesion is strengthened through co creation and participatory programming. For the administration, the model provides a tested and replicable transversal process for detecting, assessing, and reusing vacant buildings. Data governance is improved, enabling continuous inventory updates and shared insights across departments. New internal collaboration practices break down silos and build trust between departments. The approach also demonstrates how design based, iterative innovation can address complex urban issues. For the city as a whole, the impact includes reduced urban sprawl and land artificialisation. Socio economic diversity in neighbourhoods is enhanced, and local attractiveness is improved. The city gains a stronger capacity to deliver on strategic priorities including housing, sustainability, proximity, and inclusion.

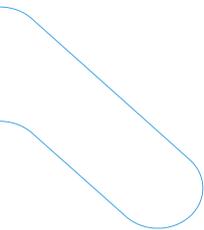
## Implementation

Implementation begins with selecting one vacant building as a pilot, chosen for its potential to test collaboration between multiple departments and neighbourhood actors. The next steps will include complete data consolidation, field assessment, stakeholder mapping, and identification of constraints, followed by a co-design phase including the several involved departments, residents, and potential operators to frame possible reuses and operational models. Thereafter, we test our new workflow elements and implement a temporary occupation or phased reopening of the building to test governance, contracts, security procedures, and communication. To monitor and evaluate our process, we will collect lessons learned, refine the transversal process, and prepare guidelines for wider roll-out.

## Support

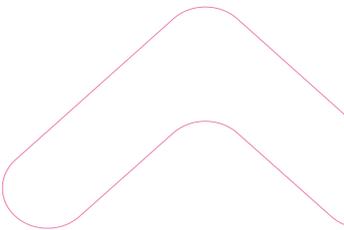
This challenge requires strong political backing to foster cross department alignment. It also depends on dedicated innovation capacity through the creation of an i-team dedicated to managing the process and designing new governance models. Legal expertise is needed to explore flexible partnership modalities and clarify regulatory pathways. Data and IT support is essential to strengthen the inventory, manage data flows, and enable safe citizen reporting tools. Engagement with local partners including neighbourhood associations, cultural actors, utilities, regional agencies, and social economy stakeholders is required to ensure feasibility and legitimacy. Clear communication channels are necessary to build trust, keep residents informed, and encourage participation. With these supports in place, Brussels can turn its vacant buildings into catalysts of urban renewal and social inclusion.

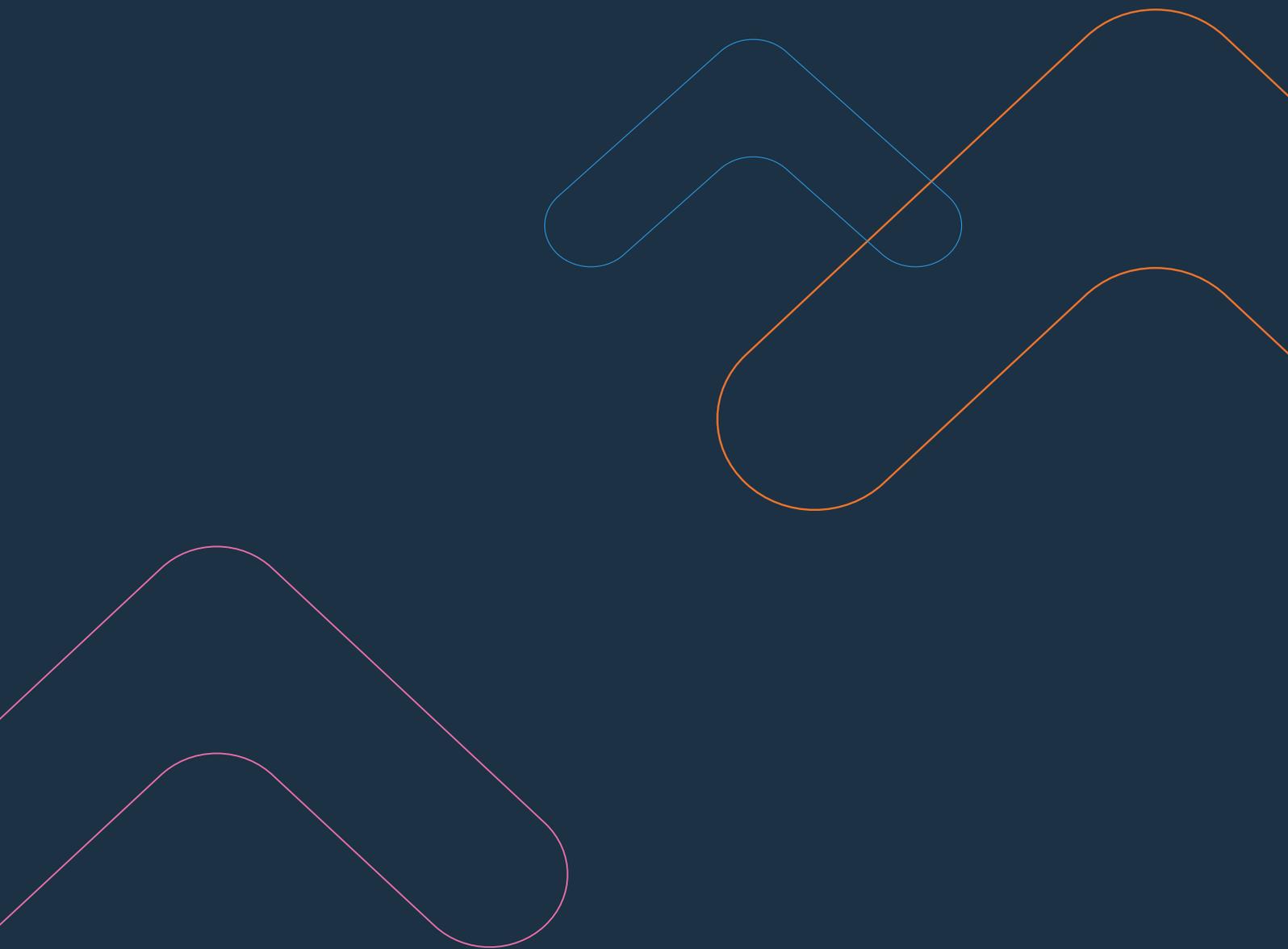
# Brussels – Project Idea 4



Democracy  
dimension

Community





**European Capital  
of Democracy**