Brussels demands Clean air
How cycling movements can start a clean air (r)evolution?

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Session 5A - Air Quality and Congestion

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Who are we?
Who are we?

• **Groupe de Recherche et d’Action des Cyclistes Quotidiens**
• We represent and defend the interests of cyclists in French-speaking Belgium since 1975.
• Members organization
• 8 staff team
• > 500 volunteers
Basics air pollution facts
Air Pollution

- “Air pollution is the single biggest environmental health risk in the world” (WHO, 2018).

- 9 million premature deaths/year in the world. 3 times more than the combined deaths linked to AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, 15 times more than war or violence-related deaths (WHO, 2018).

- In 2012, 97.8% of the EU population was exposed to concentrations above the WHO recommendations (EEA, 2015).

- In Belgium, it has been linked to 12,000 premature deaths/year, and this without accounting for the widespread non-lethal health impacts such as asthma, bronchitis... (EEA, 2018).

- In EU and Belgian cities, air pollution is strongly correlated to the transport sector, and in particular to car use.
Air Pollution

You can’t stop breathing, but you can move differently.
What did we do?
In the beginning...
How to start a citizen movement?

• Mobilizing & supporting our members to address air pollution issues

• Creation of the Bruxsel'air collective, with 3 mains objectives:
  1. **Raise awareness** among Brussels residents of the impacts of poor air quality on health and the environment
  2. **Draw media attention** to this issue.
  3. **Lobby politicians**, through citizen action, to take concrete and ambitious action in this area.
How to start a citizen movement?

The GRACQ support them:

• human resources
• small financial grant
• conference room
• mobilization through its communication channels
• ...

First initiatives...
Be informed

Measurement of air pollution « in my backyard » through scientific and citizen devices
Understand and discuss

Conferences with academics and doctors, to better understand what we measured.
Raise awareness among our policy-makers

Measurements with our policy-makers. Are they aware that they, too, breathe this toxic air?

Minister Smet (Transport)  EU Commissioner Vella (ENVI)  BE Minister Fremault (ENVI)
Citizens ACTIONS
Make our voice heard

The « statues » action

Air pollution masks on more than 100 statues in Brussels.

Massive impact in both the media and public opinion.
Thank you for smogging
The « stroller parade »
Clean Air For Brussels

• Another flash mob

• To support five citizens who have sued the Belgian state for failing to comply with the EU Commission's air quality standards and requirements.
#DAILYHEROES

RÉVOLUTION' Air

bruxselair.org
An increase in the number of citizens' initiatives!
What did we get?
Result n°1: school streets

- Temporarily closed to motorized vehicle traffic (at the time of entry and exit of classes).
- No cars or motorcycles are allowed (only on foot or by bicycle).
- 1 million € for their implementation!
Result n°2 : less cars

- Air quality = key issue during the 2019 elections
- No political party dared to question the necessity to decrease the number of cars in Brussels (a huge improvement!)
- Large covering by the media
Result n°3 : Low emission zone & ban on diesel vehicles by 2030
Result n°4 : acknowledgment
Conclusion & lessons learned
Conclusions

Air quality = a good entry point to promote active mobility

Supporting the development of citizens movements is good:
- high legitimacy
- limited investments / massive impacts
- reinforce our demands
- the knowledge developed is useful

Direct actions attract large crowds / Videos & photos 😊
Thank you!