

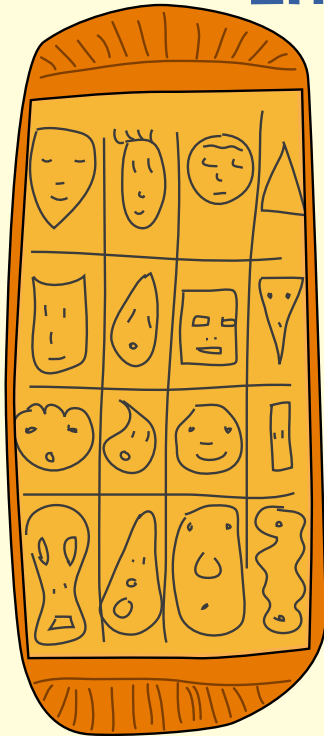


# Bulletin n°2

September, 2003

## The Brussels Forum

## The 3rd HaCER Encounters



14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup>  
March  
2003



## A public First!

*At the initiative of the Belgian Large Towns unit, HaCER organised a forum in Brussels on citizen participation in European Union member states.*

This was our main event in the early part of 2003. Our first meeting, with a broad public audience, took place on 14th March in Brussels. Over 200 people - townspeople as well as elected representatives, institutions, and professionals - took up our invitation and got together in the conference rooms of «La Fonderie», an old factory that has been renovated and recycled.

Despite Swedish-style snowstorms (which haven't always favoured our rendezvous in the past), and the participants' heavily-loaded schedules, all the HaCER groups were able to attend and get fully involved in the debates.



## The Brussels Forum

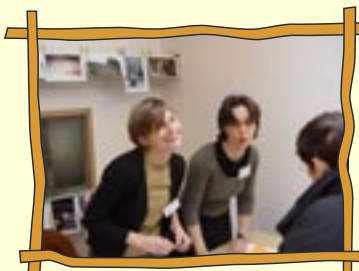
*A debating and deliberation platform revolving around townspeople participation experiences from four groups in the HaCER network.*

Charles Picqué, the Belgian Minister of Economy and Scientific Research in charge of the country's Large Town Policy, was the mainstay of this encounter. He gave full weight to the interest of having townspeople participate in the running or neighbourhoods.

Céline Braillon of France's CNV, (the National Council for Towns on whose initiative HaCER was founded), called all the European countries to throw their backing behind projects like ours.

Several guests told us about their actions and about links that might foreseeably be forged with HaCER. These included a representative from the Inter-regional Directorate of the European Commission, namely, Marcello Roma, Urban Projects Manager, and also several representatives from URBACT, including Jean-Loup Drubigny, the project's general secretary.

Many people who take an active part in European local life were present (technicians, elected representatives, representatives from associations, residents), as well as HaCER townspeople's groups. Also present were representatives from CINs (Citizen Initiative Networks), the «Participatie» group, EAPN (European Anti-Poverty Network), and HIC (Habitat International Coalition)



Lastly, this encounter provided the first opportunity for cooperation with a team of researchers. «Habitat et Développement» from Louvain-la-Neuve Catholic University participated in the preparation and leadership of the Forum. The European participation study they launched in conjunction with member groups of HaCER is currently being finalised.

## The four workshops

Four in-depth presentations from the field by the main people involved, aided by representatives from the institutions and partners from the neighbourhoods, were the prelude to each workshop's debates:

- participation: the political dimension, based on the experience of decision and representation processes as presented by the Tenever residents from Bremen (Germany).
- participation as a social economy lever, based on the experi-

*HaCER groups know only too well that local practices as regards townspeople participating in neighbourhood development vary enormously from one country to another.*

*Solutions developed in one place never cease to surprise those from a different place. They surprise, but most of all they give ideas, enrich, strengthen. Also, words don't always carry the same meaning or have the same collective history. Those we use for telling a story might have quite a different resonance in the language*

*of the person opposite us, leading us to the idea of a «participation vocabulary» that we've already spoken about several times.*

*The Forum has enabled us to raise the issue of these differences and start thinking about them: differences in institutional and legal contexts, in cultures, in social, economic, and political situations, and in the personalities of those who are involved at a local level. The parallel study being conducted by «Habitat et Développement» will add weight to and complement this analysis.*

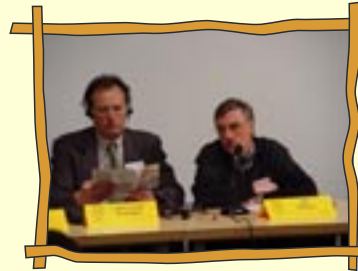
ence of social management and the control of public services as presented by the Bloomsbury townspeople in Birmingham (U.K.).

- participation and the cultural dimension based on the experience of the Trinitat Nova residents in Barcelona, who are creating a «citizens' movement» through a learning process.
- participation and local law making, based on the experience of the Borgate inhabitants from Rome, who raise questions about social, economic, political, and environmental conditions for achieving the common good.

## Real understanding

Each group was able to present its experience over a two hour period using maps, photos, and video aids.

It enabled people to understand the conditions required for get-



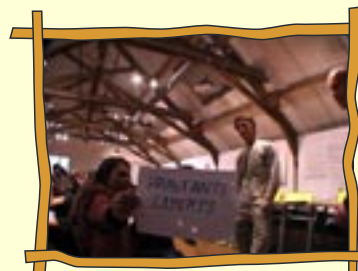
ting townspeople involved, the results obtained, the relations with local institutions, authorities, and groups, the decision processes, the enhancement of resident's skills, financing, projects undertaken, issues and stakes, etc.

After a lunch break, the debate was opened in each of the rooms. It was then a question of delving into how these experiences became possible:

- how did a residents' association in Birmingham find itself directly managing more than 700 council-owned dwellings and creating a district services management board?
- how is it that in Bremen the inhabitants have a veto, as do all of the participants in the neighbourhood council?
- how did a whole district in Barcelona get to define a participative sustainable development project?
- how, in Rome, did whole suburbs that were built illegally by their inhabitants during the post-war housing crisis negotiate with the city council to gain their legitimacy and create public spaces?

The quality of the exchanges was widely appreciated. Away from the thick of the action, far from local relations of power, freed from the requirement to take a professional stance, each person attending felt free to comment, to raise questions, and to reply.

And at the day end, an organised and orchestrated debriefing session for each workshop gave everyone attending access to the essentials of each experience.





## 15th March, the 3rd HaCER encounters

*People's prime motivation here is exchange, enriching themselves with other people's experiences. Meetings by country must be organised.*

*MCRS et Schebba  
Marseille*

Until then, groups have restated their confidence in the Steering Committee along with their willingness to continue participating in the network and to think about their future commitment.



tion of a «neighbourhood newspaper» show, along with a workshop on the same theme.

*HaCER can promote the recognition of townspeople's expertise.*

*Regards d'habitants  
Grande-Synthe*

*We need to be able to put forward concepts concerning citizens' rights that are capable of interesting all European townspeople.*

*Unione Borgate  
Roma*

All the participants, leaders, and initiators of the HaCER project came together on 15th March, once again at «la Fonderie», to talk about the network's future, its programme, its goals, its development, its finances, and its organisation.

The Belgian Large Towns Policy unit, «Habitat et Développement», the «Participatie» group, and the RIC and HIC networks also followed the day's proceedings.

## Network leadership

*The more we develop our own district, the more attractive we can appear on a European scale.*

*EMB  
Birmingham*

The first point concerned the current running of the network and the preparation of groups' commitments in this regard. At the end of the network's formative period, which these first few years have represented, the articles of the AC-HaCER association anticipate opening up the Executive Committee to representatives from townspeople's groups. We have to prepare for this opening together.

A search for information regarding the articles of Europe-wide associations or international NGOs is requested. Next step: a workshop to be held on the way HaCER works, with its representation and decision-making methods, and the setting of an appointment for the future AGM at the early 2004 encounters.

*We want to continue to exchange experiences, ideas, projects.*

*Baron Backarna  
Örebro*



*We need to take care to balance the pursuit of experience with the need to stay close to the people. How can we continue delving further into each other's experiences, as we did yesterday? We need to become independent experts.*

*Ensemble Notre Quartier  
Montreuil*

## The coming programme

Topics, ideas, proposals, comments, remarks... rewarding exchanges and different priorities for each and every one present. As for the means, these need to be found, while possible envisaging local or national partnerships in each country as well.

## Strengthening exchanges of experience through local meetings

- Pash from Antwerp have offered to hold a meeting on social housing.

*Inhabitants need to be able to express themselves on a European scale.*

*Comité de quartier  
Roubaix*

- Trinitat Nova from Barcelona will be hosting the International Cultures Forum in Barcelona in 2004 and has suggested HaCER take part in it.

- The Tenever Projektgruppe in Bremen also hopes to hold a HaCER meeting in its district.
- Unione Borgate from Rome are keeping their eyes open for an opportunity to hold a HaCER meeting in Rome within the scope of the URBACT network. The city of Rome has been selected as leader for the topic of citizen participation.
- Baron Backarna of Örebro in Sweden have also proposed reinforcing ties with HaCER and participating in topics concerning solidarity economy.
- The Hommelet neighbourhood committee from Roubaix, France, has proposed the crea-

*What are the foundation stones of Euro-style citizenship?*

*CNV*

The HaCER definition - Networked «Expert» Townspeople of Europe - is one that has been heavily accentuated in our debates. The

14th March forum was a real occasion to promote this expertise through presentation by townspeople of their participation experiences. The willingness to organise such forums regularly was clearly stressed, so that townspeople can invite technicians and elected European representatives to discover the practices implemented in their districts and to put them to debate.

Participating in European initiatives could strengthen this goal. HaCER must take care to remain independent and self-sufficient with respect to local power relationships and the institutions; therefore it must diversify its range of financial partners. We intend to pursue discussions with URBACT and envisage responding to European requests for tender.

*HaCER is a network of townspeople. That's exactly what gives it its charm. That's how it should remain.*

*Projektgruppe  
Brème*

*It is important to prepare us for European scale topics, like social housing for example.*

*Pash  
Antwerp*



*Four or five year goals need setting.*

*Trinitat Nova  
Barcelona*





## Work topics to complement the workshop themes chosen for the Montreuil encounters in January, 2002

- social housing, put forward by Pash
- European inhabitants' rights, put forward by Unione Borgate
- neighbourhood newspapers, put forward by Roubaix
- photographic projects carried out in conjunction with townspeople from the various regions, put forward by photographer Anne-Marie Louvet
- a work project on HaCER decision making, representation, and operating methods, put forward by arpenteurs
- an education-training workshop, put forward by Trinitat Nova

*January, 2002 workshop topics at the Montreuil encounters:*

- urban renewal
- fight against discrimination
- participative democracy
- multicultural society

## How can the network be expanded?

Several groups have offered to talk about HaCER in their own countries, including the Barcelona, Pash, and Montreuil groups. The Belgian group «Participatie» raises the question of how to interleave their project with HaCER's. Everybody is asking themselves questions about

*Thank you once again to the interpreters, without whom we couldn't hold these exchanges. (The 14th March was the first time we discovered the joys of simultaneous translations in kiosks). On the 15th March, we reverted to our old habit of consecutive, whispered translations. In both cases, we applaud the professionalism and patience of the interpreters.*

what form network development will take - will each country have several independent groups or one network «relay» group? Shouldn't each group be canvassing in its own country? Contacts also need to be made with groups in countries that are so far unrepresented. URBACT could be an opportunity to meet these groups.

*The question of HaCER development must be raised at each step we take. To preserve its vitality and its ability to give an account of concrete experiences, the network must strengthen its exchanges, and not just through the people who represent groups. All groups have relations with many active people, and these could participate in certain thought processes and take an interest in what happens in other European places in their field of interest.*

*arpenteurs*

## News, coming rendezvous

### URBACT

The city of Rome is setting up a topical network on participation with other European towns and cities. HaCER is a passive partner for this project, observing notably the constitution from the townspeople's point of view.

### The European Social Forum

will take place from 12th to 16th November in Saint-Denis near Paris, with expected participation from several HaCER groups.

### The next HaCER encounters

5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> February, 2004.

### International Cultures Forum

September, 2004, Barcelona.

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