

CITY FOOD POLICIES



Brussels a city-region which bets on urban agriculture to stimulate sustainable food-based local economy

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| City | Brussels |
| Country | Belgium |
| Population: City of Brussels | 166.497 |
| Population: Brussels-Capital Region | 1.13 millions |
| Surface area: City of Brussels | 32,6 sq. km |
| Surface area Brussels-Capital Region | 161,4 sq. km |
| Green areas | 80 sq. km |

Brussels' priority in implementing sustainable food systems is to reinforce economy in order to create local employment.

To do so, many projects either top down or bottom up are launched in the same moment, all framed into an action plan run by the Alliance Employment-Environment, under the control of the regional government, in line with a dynamic that recall the philosophy of Living Labs, relying on co-creation activities that engage various stakeholders to foster innovation.

Moreover, Brussels-Capital Region has commissioned a study to identify the potential resource of jobs, all relevant sectors of activities and the profile of such job recipients. That's how urban agriculture has been identified as a promising area of activity still to be implemented.

Among lessons that can be learnt, Brussels-Capital Region has built in the last 10 years a territorial vision in which sustainable food has taken more and more importance. Brussels has demonstrated a strong capacity to use efficiently European money to support the development of its food policy. As a city-region, it has been pragmatic enough to mobilize the European regional development fund to foster economic and social cohesion policy, to facilitate cross-border cooperation and promote the realisation of local and regional projects and the URBACT programme, which is designed to help cities to exchange and learn around urban policies.

A multi-faceted city-region

The City of Brussels is the largest of the 19 municipalities of Brussels-Capital Region. National Belgian institutions are located not only in the City of Brussels, but also in most of the other 18 municipalities. Therefore, the entire Brussels-Capital Region and not only the City of Brussels serves as a capital. This densely populated area of 1,1 million of people is located in a larger metropolitan area of 2,5 million inhabitants.

At institutional level, Brussels-Capital Region is one of the three regions of Belgium, with Wallonia and Flemish Region. Members of federal French Community and Flemish Community exercise their jurisdiction on the territory of the region. On the other hand, regional parliamentarians can be either members of the Brussels Parliament, members of the Assembly of the Common Community Commission, members of the Assembly of the French Community Commission, members of the Parliament of the French Community of Belgium and "community senators" in the Belgian Senate.

The regional parliament can enact ordinances which have equal status as a national legislative act. The 19 municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region are other political subdivisions with individual responsibilities for the handling of local level duties, such as law enforcement and the upkeep of schools and roads within its borders. Municipal administration is also conducted by a mayor, a council, and an executive. A lot of controversy exists concerning the division of 19 municipalities for a highly urbanized region which is considered as one city by most people.

Brussels also serves as a "de facto" capital of the European Union, which has contributed significantly to the importance of Brussels as an international centre. It hosts the major political institutions such as the European Commission, occupying 865,000 m² within the "European Quarter" in the east of the city, and the Council of the European Union. Serving as the centre of administration for Europe, Brussels' economy is largely service-oriented. It is dominated by regional and world headquarters of multinationals, by European institutions, by various administrations, and by related services. The population of Brussels is younger than the national average. Brussels has a large concentration of immigrants, mainly from Turkey, Morocco, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi etc. Middle and high revenues classes tend to go to live out of Brussels' urban area and 360.000

people commute everyday into the capital. The gap between high and low incomes tends to be wider than in the rest of the country. Brussels-Capital Region has the highest unemployment rate at national level. In 2011, it reached 16,5 % against 10,3 % in Wallonia and 5 % in the Flemish region.

Although the number of farms has been reduced of 63% between 1980 and 2010, food production is still an important sector of exportation for the country. Organic farming represents 4.6% of the whole cultivated areas at national level and 2% in Brussels-Capital Region. In the Brussels-Capital region, according to 2010 statistics data, there were 21 farms, whose 7 breeding farms, generally dairy and poultry farms, on a total of 268 ha of workable agricultural land. Cultures are mainly cereals (97 ha), grassland (94 ha) fodder (36 ha), potato (22 ha), and vegetables (15 ha). There are also four pedagogical farms and an urban agro-ecological farm on the territory. Most of the potential green belt available for Brussels-Capital region is located in Wallonia or Flemish region.

Belgian cuisine is a major tourist attraction in Brussels. It is characterised by the combination of French cuisine with the more hearty Flemish fare. The city is also famous for chocolate and pralines manufacturers. The gastronomic offer includes approximately 1.800 restaurants, and a number of high quality bars. In addition to the traditional restaurants, there are a large number of cafés, bistros, and the usual range of international fast food chains. Brasseries offering a large number of beers and typical national dishes are widespread. Traditional fresh, hot, waffles are sold on the street as well as deep-fried food in the "friteries".

Starting point and milestones

Both the City of Brussels and Brussels-Capital Region are involved in food-related projects and policies.

The City of Brussels.

To foster its involvement in sustainable development, the City of Brussels adopted in 1995 the Aalborg charter. Since 2005, it has actively worked on a local [Agenda 21](#) that has been officially launched in 2008 with 86 actions implemented according to 14 objectives. In 2009, the city and its [Public Center of Social Action](#) signed the "[Aalborg Commitments](#)".

In 2010, the local Agenda 21 has been restructured in five main objectives, 22 area of intervention and 154 actions.

Food-related issues of the Agenda 21 are concentrated in the fourth objective: social cohesion and extended solidarity. They mainly aim to promote education for healthier food at school. Since 2005, a committee gathers representatives of production sector, of education services, experts (dieticians, nutritionists, dentists) meet two or three time per year to produce guidelines for more efficient actions in schools.

Agenda 21 is coordinated with the [Local Development Plan](#) of the city. It is also coherent with the 2012-2018 [legislative program](#), in which the City of Brussels identified four main issues related to:

- Economic and social dynamism
- Services for well-being
- Respect and conviviality in a secure city
- Governance.

Indeed the City of Brussels intends to intensify its efforts to improve the quality of life of the citizens by focusing on social and economic issues in collaboration with the Public Center of Social Action (CPAS: Centre Public d'Action Sociale) and all para-municipal associations.

Food-related issues are mentioned in the second pillar, through the improvement of food quality in kindergartens' meals, educational programs on healthy food at school and in recreational centres for children and teenagers. Within the fourth pillar, under the generic "Brussels, sustainable city", food-related issues are also indirectly concerned by actions to reduce waste production, to increase food waste recycling by composting and also to foster tap water consumption in administration building, schools, sport stadiums, etc.

Brussels-Capital Region.

The Government Agreement (2009-2014)

Sustainable food is a core issue of the Brussels-Capital Region, clearly identified in the Government Agreement (Accord du Gouvernement) 2009 - 2014 that underline "the Government will aim to make Brussels an example in terms of sustainable food. (...) To do so it will implement a strategic Plan to develop sustainable food and urban agriculture in Brussels." Two different lines of actions have

been identified. The minister of environment of Brussels-Capital Region, Evelyne Huytebroeck has started a program of transition towards a sustainable food system. Interestingly, a synergy has been identified between this program and a "New Deal" called Sustainable Urban Growth Pact, (Pacte de Croissance Urbaine Durable), that aims to create quality jobs.

The program of transition towards a sustainable Food System.

This program mainly aims to support sustainable food consumption to meet both public health and environment concerns. By increasing both collective and individual demand for sustainable food it will be possible to implement sustainable food supply chain.

Brussels Environment is the environment and energy administration of the Brussels Capital region in charge of the implementation of such program. It has launched several European projects in order to fund activities to support the program of transition towards a sustainable Food System.

The Food transition process follows several objectives, starting from the structuring of a local food supply chain embracing all activities, from production to consumption, up to waste management, including processing, distribution. Socio-economic aspects including the possibility for small companies to be part of this local market in one hand and the affordability of the so-called sustainable food in the other hand are also taken in consideration, as well as the exemplarity of public food services.

To go further:

Alliance emploi environnement : <http://www.aee-rbc.be>

Portal Brussels region: <http://be.brussels>

Accord de gouvernement 2009-2014 available at: <http://be.brussels/files-fr/a-propos-de-la-region/competences-regionales/accord-de-gouvernement-2009-2014-rbc>

Portal city of Brussels : <http://www.bruxelles.be>

Agenda 21 : <http://www.brussels.be/artdet.cfm/8519>

Brussels Environment (<http://www.bruxellesenvironnement.be/>)

The Green Cook project - Towards a global sustainable food management (2010-2014)

This project carried out by Brussels Environment, in partnership with several other partners from Belgium meets either the objectives of the fourth waste plan and those of the Program of Action for a Sustainable Food in Brussels-Capital Region. "GreenCook is aimed at reducing food wastage and to make the North-West Europe a model of sustainable food management, by in-depth work on the consumer / food relationship thanks to a multisectoral partnership." It has led to several campaigns and guidelines to prevent food waste.

The URBACT project "Sustainable food in urban Communities" (2012-2015)

Brussels Environment (Institut Bruxellois pour le Gestion de l'Environnement), is the lead partner institution of this project, jointly financed by the European Union (European Regional Development Fund) and the Member States. URBACT is, in a general way, a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development that allows different European cities to share good practices and experiences and to develop pragmatic solutions. The thematic network "Sustainable Food in Urban Communities" involves ten European cities (whose Bristol) and focus on developing low-carbon and resource-efficient urban food systems.

Besides the international meetings between all partners, a Local Support Group has been created to gather all inputs from the various initiatives presented by the different partners and to disseminate a new culture of food to the citizens and to develop concrete activities, according to low-carbon and resource-efficient urban food systems. This project in particular has allowed to give a general overview of all the initiatives taking place in Brussels, according to three pillars: growing, delivering and enjoying. The program of transition towards a sustainable Food System has faced the difficult challenge to give a precise and exhaustive description of what is sustainable food. Brussels-Capital region relies on the Federal Council for Sustainable Development (Conseil Fédéral du Développement Durable), FRDO-CFDD, an authoritative council that advises the Belgian federal government on federal policy on sustainable development and also, for a pragmatic understanding and vision, on the RABAD (Réseau des Acteurs Bruxellois pour l'Alimentation Durable), a network of 42 local stakeholders, working around sustainable food issues, including ONG, restaurants, sector

organizations, distributors and shops, consultants etc.

The Sustainable Urban Growth Pact and the Alliance Employment-Environment: to use environmental challenges as a leverage to create jobs

High unemployment level is a critical factor in the Brussels area. In such context the Alliance Employment-Environment (AEE)'s plan is based on the premise that

"environmental challenges are an essential resource of jobs and economic development for companies that will be able to quickly adapt or innovate in sectors related to environmental issues."

Indeed the AEE was been launched in 2010, to explore the use of sustainable development as a lever of competitiveness. It has worked, since the beginning, to create conditions for stakeholders to commit, either collectively or individually, to foster environmental related business and create high quality jobs. As a result, public and private actors, including no profit associations have agreed to collaborate: firstly they have evaluated priority areas and limiting factors. Four axes have been successively highlighted: in 2010 "sustainable construction", in 2012 "water management", in 2013 "waste management" and "sustainable food". By accompanying the food transition process, the AEE gets results in terms of partnerships, training and development of new skills and job creation.

The European operational program FEDER for the implementation of the European Regional Development Fund

This program "Objective 2013, Let's invest together in urban development", covering the period 2007-2013, already aimed to create economic activity and employment according to a model of sustainable urban development. The next one, approved in April 2014 by the Government of the Brussels-Capital region, for the 2014-2020 programming period is a continuation and indicate the sustainable food sector as one of the five priority sectors identified to be funded and developed. This program will consider actions to support sustainable food supply chain in Brussels. According to the very small food production in Brussels-Capital Region, FEDER will be coordinated with other funding systems to implement actions in the neighbouring Wallonia and Flemish region. It will also network the different projects developed according to the AEE sustainable food axis.

Turning the city into a Living Lab dedicated to food sustainability.

The lever of Public Food Service: to provide healthy meals and to educate children

270.000 meals are served every day in canteens in Brussels. In terms of Public Food Service the efforts mainly concentrate on awareness raising campaigns. All schools (about 6000 pupils) were involved in 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 in different education programs. Among the issues treated: seasonal food consumption, food waste reductions etc.

A great effort is also made on meal affordability. In 2012/2013 meal prices ranged from gratuity up to 2,39€ in kindergartens, 2,51€ in primary schools, 2,65€ in secondary schools, whereas adults paid 2,79€ for a whole meal. School meals aim to cover 40% of children nutritional needs.

Half of the meals are prepared by a private company. Another important actor is "Les cuisines Bruxelloises", an association in charge of public Food service managed by the City of Brussels and four other municipalities. The catering activity of the association is divided in two sectors: health (hospitals and elderly homes) and childhood and out-of-home (schools, kindergartens, administration restaurants, and sporadic events on demand). 268 full-time-equivalent employees, including 30 persons in professional rehabilitation are working to serve, on a daily basis, 6000 lunches in schools, administrative restaurants and 1500 and 950 breakfasts, lunches and dinners, respectively in hospitals and for elderly people.

Food safety is a high concern and the municipality has chosen to invest in "Cook and Chill" technique to prepare meals. Today 3300 school meals are prepared in newly equipped kitchens thank to a 1.126.000€ that allows to improve quality level and also to propose three different menus everyday: regular, without pork meat and vegetarian. Organic food is also occasionally served. The City of Brussels also removed all vending machine selling snacks and soda in the school, replacing them by alternative healthier solutions.

Brussels-Capital region transformed in a laboratory to experiment innovations in Sustainable Food Systems

No less than 50 different projects are currently running on the thematic of food sustainable systems, within the Alliance Employment-Environment action plan responding to different strategic objectives presented in table 1 or classified according to their sector of activity as shown in table 2. Indeed Brussels-Capital Region is transformed in a huge open-air laboratory that fosters innovation. All projects are detailed in in the AEE Report of activity 2010-2014. Most of them have been already funded on 2013 or 2014 budget.

Projects have different ambitions, from very large such as "Identify all different existing and potential synergies on the issue of sustainable food systems on the territory of Brussels-Capital region." to very specific "create a hub to collection, transformation and repackaging of unsold food on the site of Mabru" (source AEE)".

Table 1: Amount of local food purchased by different City Agencies in 2013, in the city of New York.

| Strategic objectives | Number of projects |
|---|--------------------|
| To know, to plan to monitor food systems | 6 |
| To stimulate research and innovation | 4 |
| To reinforce and structure food supply chains | 11 |
| To foster business incubators | 17 |
| To foster empowerment | 12 |
| Total | 50 |

Table 2: Axis "Sustainable food" of AEE action plan: number of projects according to sector of activity in Brussels-Capital Region

| Sector of activity | Number of projects |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Urban agriculture | 9 |
| Transformation | 5 |
| Distribution - logistics | 9 |
| Consumption | 11 |
| Transversal | 16 |
| total | 50 |

To run such an action plan, AEE proposes a system of governance that allows all stakeholders to participate and collaborate all along collective preparation phase up to action implementation. All public and private bodies involved in learning and training at any level are also involved in the process, at least to be informed and aware about the state of progress, in order to adapt their own educational programs. Research bodies are also potentially involved where innovation needs to be supported by experimentations. A total of 107 structures are actively involved in this process. A third of them, for instance "Bruxelles Environment", are directly managing one or more projects.

To create a sustainable Food Supply Chain that generates good quality employment.

Brussels Environment has ordered a study about the job potential for the territory of Brussels brought by the implementation of sustainable food systems. A thorough analysis has been necessary to determine what could be a transition from actual food systems towards sustainable food systems. Indeed, if it is clear that globalised agro-industrial systems are not sustainable, it is difficult to model the evolution of a diverse set of alternative food systems, because they are now a minority developing in a market niche. Even if alternative food systems can be more resilient in a moment of crisis, it is difficult to imagine what influence will have a greater degree of professionalism or a change of scale when they will grow and enter in a competition mechanism. It might become difficult to evaluate the real state of sustainability of all

these different businesses. Therefore the pragmatic approach of RABAD: to promote life cycle approach to measure environmental impacts, use of fresh, local, seasonal food, fair trade, support of local small producers and suppliers, foster sustainable food awareness raising, can be very useful although not completely exhaustive.

The table 3 indicates the number of jobs that actually arise from sustainable food systems, compared to the potential number if such sustainable food systems are further developed. Today Sustainable Food Systems ensure 2.500 jobs, of which about 1.000 in food distribution. A specialized branch is also developing in the HoReCa (HOTel, REstaurants, CAtering) sector, as well as take away and food processing. Interestingly this niche seems no to be affected by the recent economic crisis. Moreover it gives jobs to low qualified young people, a category particularly vulnerable. Future prospects highlight urban agriculture as the most promising source of employment that could derive from the development of sustainable food systems. Indeed this sector is still in infancy on the territory. Despite gardening activity is quite popular in Brussels, (19% of people have a vegetable spot), and only 0,79% of public green spaces are used as vegetable gardens. Brussels environment has already launched a program to allocate vegetable plots in parks, available for households. 190 have been attributed and 170 people are on a waiting list.

Table 3: Sustainable food systems as a source of employment in Brussels-Capital Region.

| Food system value chain | Actual jobs generated by sustainable food systems | Potential of jobs generated by the development of sustainable food systems. |
|---|--|--|
| Food production | 28 | 1407 to 4072 |
| Food processing | 500-650 | 90 to 150 |
| Food distribution | 1150-1950 | 785-851 |
| Food take away | 390-480 | 215 |
| Restaurants and hotels (HORECA sector) | 360 | 180 |
| waste management | 5 | 190 |
| Training | 70 | 37-68 |
| Research / Consulting | 2 | 20 |
| Total | 2505 - 3 545 | 2924-5746 |

Source : Système d'alimentation durable. Potentiel d'emplois en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale Rapport final de la recherche réalisée pour le compte de l'Institut Bruxellois pour le Gestion de l'Environnement (31).

But this is not sufficient to launch a proper production that could flow into sustainable food systems. Studies to verify business model viability for urban agriculture in northern countries show good possibilities to develop viable systems based on the complementarity between urban and peri-urban agriculture. Therefore such urban agriculture programs need to be developed in synergy with neighbouring rural areas. Moreover, pros and cons co-exist. If in one side, it is expected that the development of alternative food production systems based on the reinforcement of urban and peri-urban agriculture will induce the development of a coherent distribution system based on local supply, that minimize transport environmental impact, on the other side, there is a sound concern about air and soil pollution affecting the quality of urban food production. Therefore prevention measures have to be taken before launching urban

agriculture activities for large scale human consumption.

Bibliography:

(31) Magali Verdonck, Michèle Taysmans, Gauthier Chapelle, Gaëtan Dartevelle, Caroline zaoui, (2012, revised in 2014), Système d'alimentation durable. Potentiel d'emplois en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale, Rapport final de la recherche réalisée pour le compte de l'Institut Bruxellois pour le Gestion de l'Environnement Professeur Magali Verdonck et Index Michèle Taymans du Centre d'études régionales bruxelloises - Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, Gauthier Chapelle, Gaëtan Dartevelle et Caroline zaoui de Greenloop.