

The power of the public opinion Citizens engagement The Leuven approach

SUMP-training 13 May 2026

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Advisor mobility city of Leuven



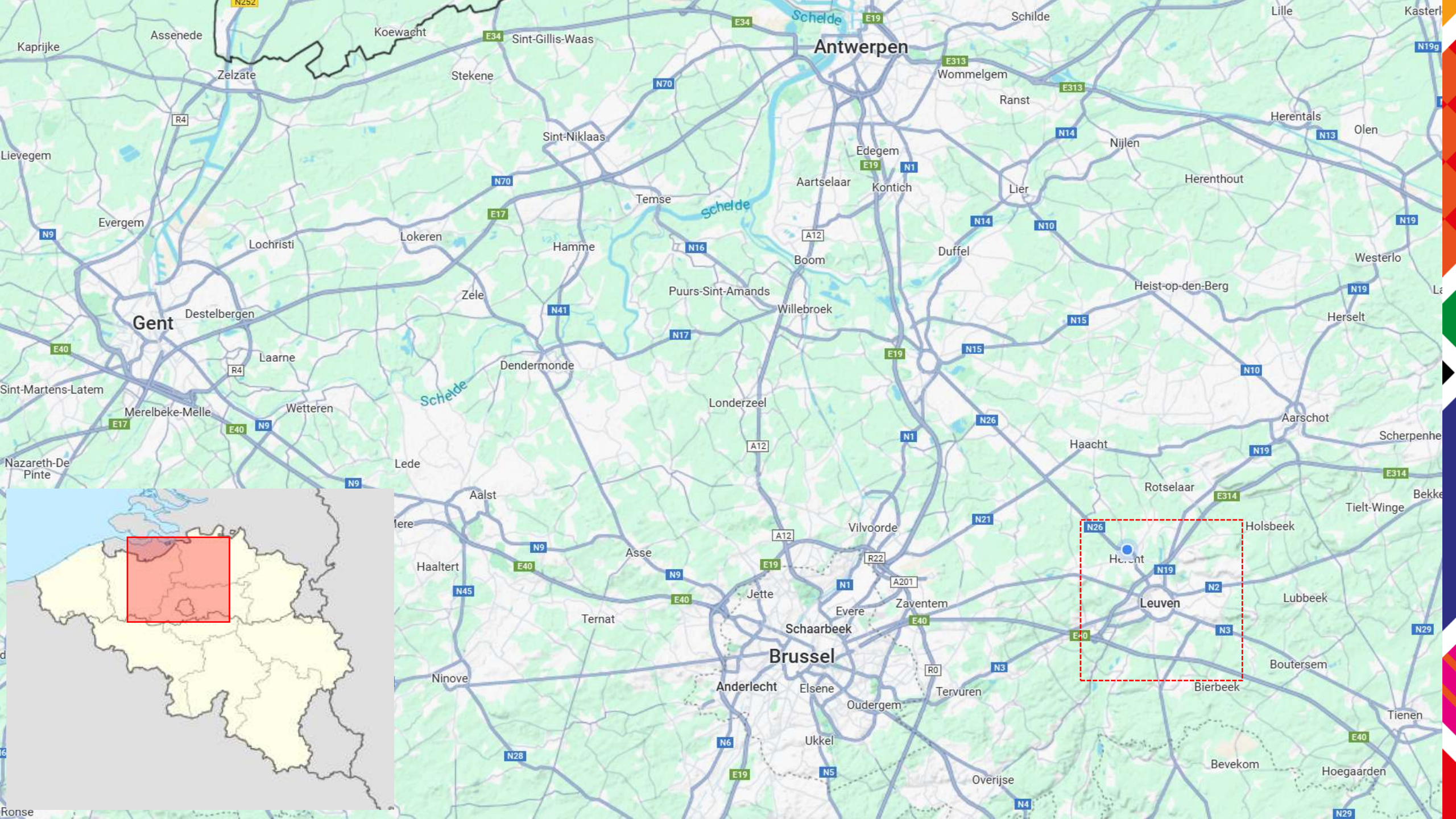
leuven



Leuven - Facts and figures

- Surface area: 56,63 km²
- Residents: 104.189 – 160 nationalities + 50.000 resident students;
- Density: 1.812 inh/km²
- Climate ambitions: 100 Climate-Neutral & Smart cities
- Modal split: 20% walking, 37% cycling, 13% PT, 30% car
- 9 in 10 commuters come to Leuven by car





Agenda



The power of the public

How to change the city (public domain) and getting re-elected?

- Quadruple helix Leuven2030 – Leuven Climate Neutrale
- Civic participation -public consultation
 - Mobility plan city district Kessel-Lo 2025
 - Traffic circulation plan city centre 2016
 - Reallocation public space – design of public space
 - Stand up for your neighbourhood
- Reading the public opinion by politicians and its biases
 - Leading the public opinion or following public opinion



LEUVEN
2030

MINDER UITSTOOT, MEER TOEKOMST



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2030



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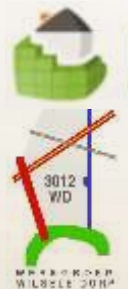
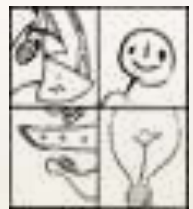
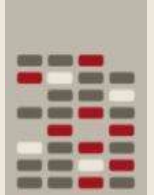
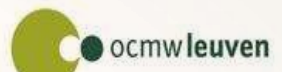
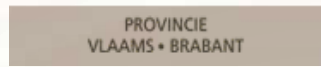
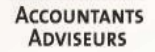
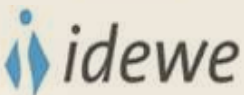
BUSINESS

**LOCAL
GOVERNMENT**

**KNOWLEDGE
INSTITUTIONS**

**CIVIL
SOCIETY**





LEUVEN 2030

MINDER UITTOOT, MEE TOEKOMT

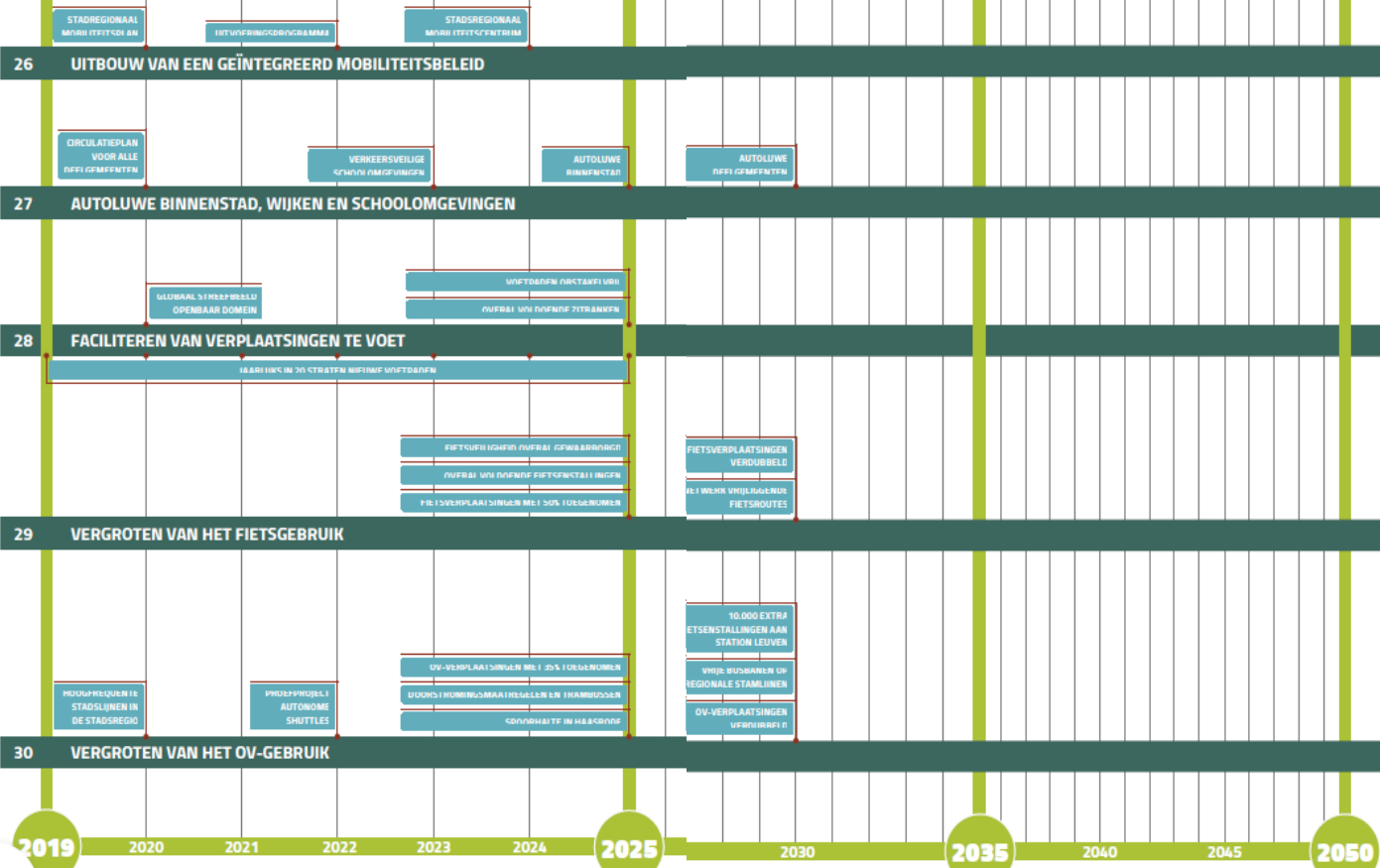
- samenvatting -
ROADMAP
2025-2035-2050

naar een klimaatneutraal Leuven

[ROADMAP KLIMAATNEUTRAAL LEUVEN]

[PROGRAMMA 5: DUURZAME MODAL SHIFT]

PROGRAMMA 5 DUURZAME MODAL SHIFT





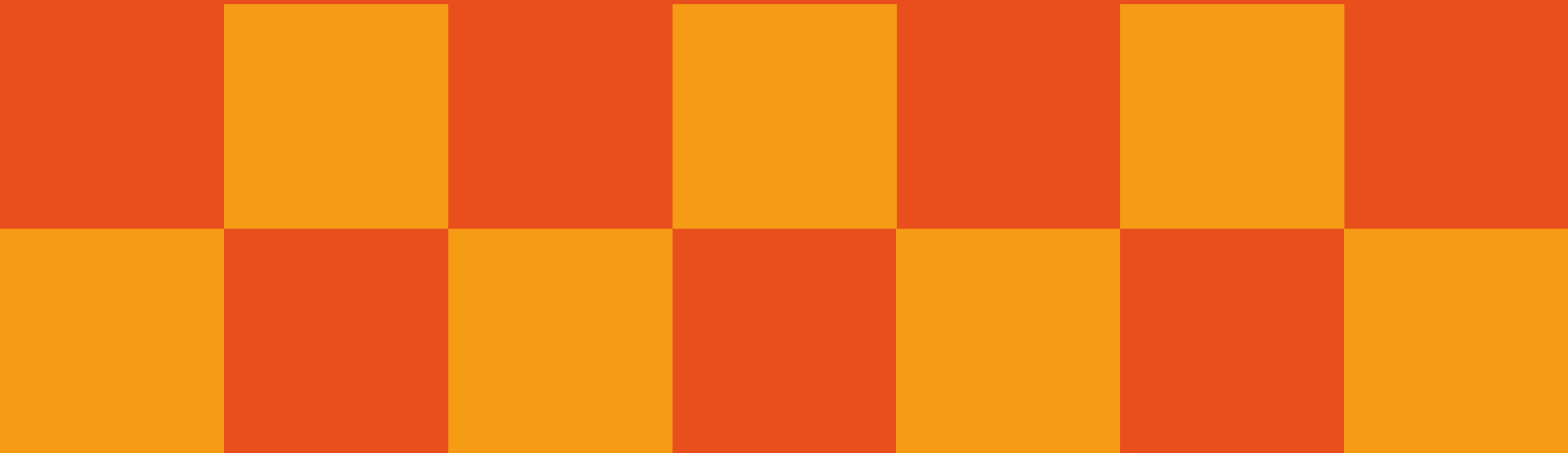
LEUVEN



leuven

**CLIMATE
CITY CONTRACT**

Civic participaton in Leuven



Civic participation Leuven

Creating our city together

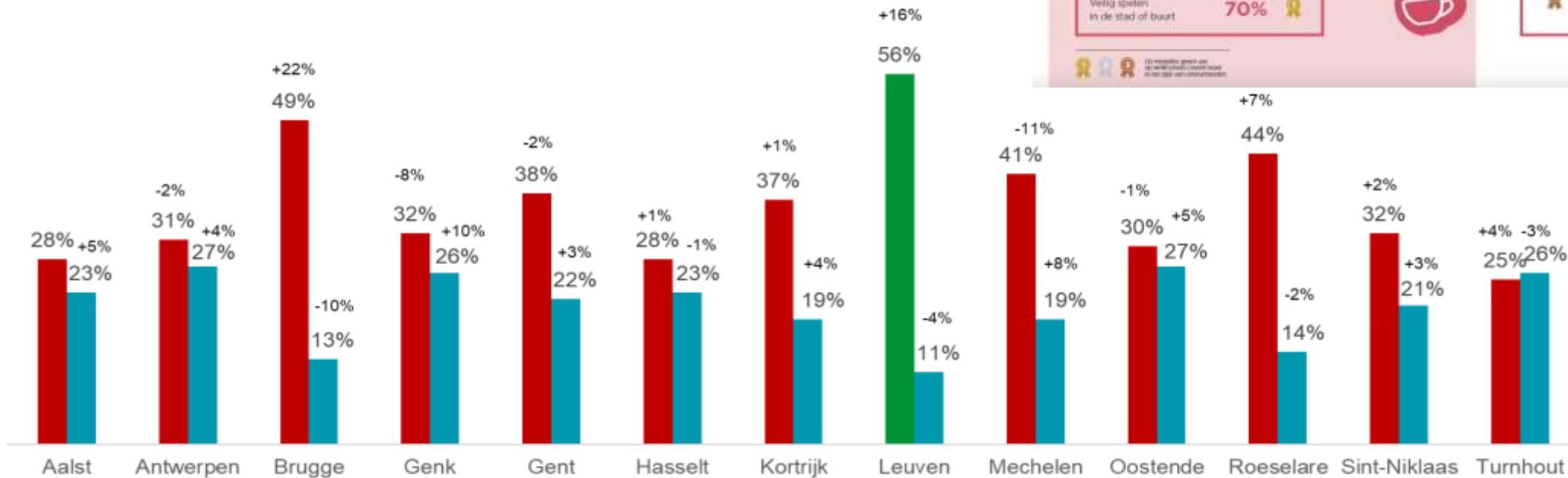
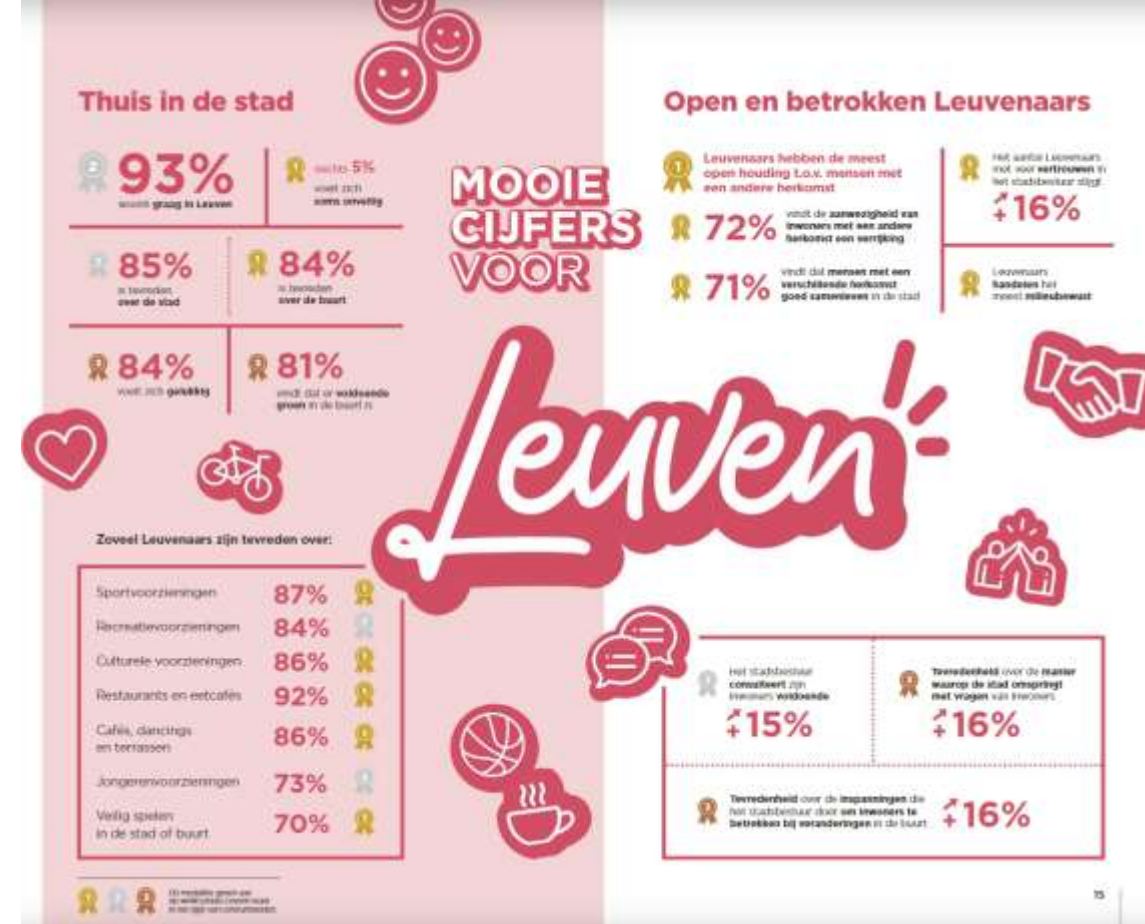


- At citizens request
- By the government
- Interaction between both

To illustrate this: at this moment 75 processes (initiated by a top down approach) are being carried out in Leuven during which citizens and other partners are engaged.

City survey

- Gaining citizens' trust (+16%)
- More citizens feel engaged
- Good communication to citizens



Civic participation

Not a single shot

- Diverse approach in Leuven
- Three cases to illustrate
 - ◆ Kom op voor je wijk - Stand up for your neighbourhood
 - ▶ Longterm and permanent call & channel for citizens
 - ▶ Stepping stone & anchor point
 - ◆ Leuven, maak het mee - Leuven, create and participate
 - ▶ Involvement in multi-annual plan and internal operations of the city
 - ▶ Online participation and how to handle all the input?
 - ◆ Random selection & deliberation as methodology
 - ▶ To deepen out complex processes
 - ▶ To reach a broader diversity

Stand up for your neighbourhood

Create!

- ✓ financial support up to 18,600 euros
- ✓ for a larger period of time

Stand up for your Neighborhood and Invent! A neighborhood sitting area, additional playground, a work of art, a small fountain ... Which well-thought-out initiative will turn your neighborhood into an even nicer and cozier place to live in?

Underdeveloped construction site converted into a temporary neighborhood park.



Neighborhood sitting area 'De Triangel', a permanent and cozy meeting place.



A petanque field revitalizes the neighborhood.



The Street Talent hotel presents the special skills of each neighbor.



Brightening up the neighborhood.

Experiment!

- ✓ temporary
- ✓ out of the box

Stand up for your Neighborhood and experiment! Your neighborhood has come up with some crazy and wild ideas that you first want to try out for a couple of months? Do you have a refreshing idea to restyle the street layout and furniture? Do you want to suggest a creative approach for making the transition to a more environmentally friendly mobility in your neighborhood? Have you been thinking about another way of taking care and watching over about immediate neighbors? Submit your project your immediate neighbors? Submit your project and the city will assess its feasibility together with you. If your project gets a positive feedback, you can try it out for a minimum period of one month and a maximum period of 6 months. After this trial period, the city will evaluate it, together with the neighborhood. Positive experiences may lead to structural improvements.



Join in!

- ✓ easy application
- ✓ city's 'ready-to-use' offer

Stand up for your Neighborhood and subscribe! The city has gathered a range of valuable, ready-to-use initiatives that are easy to set up and in which your neighborhood can participate by simply subscribing. It is a smart way to revitalize the community life. Make your choice between the following projects:

Community garden

Work all together to turn an unused area of your neighborhood into a community garden. It's a healthy, tasty and sociable initiative.

Little free library

A little free library is a small box in front of your house where people can share books or magazines. You take one, you leave one ... A great idea that will certainly please your neighbors.

Neighbors' Day

The moment of the year to celebrate community life. That specific day, the city supports all kinds of neighborhood activities to promote the community life.

Bulletin panels

Your neighborhood can ask for a bulletin panel to announce neighborhood news and activities.

Street or neighborhood block party

You want to organize a party in your street or neighborhood? You can rent all the equipment you need from the city, free of charge! If possible, the city closes the street or neighborhood to traffic for the duration of your event.



Community garden



Little free library



Neighbors' Day



Bulletin panels



Neighborhood block party

Kom op voor je wijk



Stand up for your neighbourhood

- Long-term and permanent call
 - Longterm and permanent call & channel for citizens
 - 20 years and counting
 - 84 'create projects' are running at this moment, (this causes a permanent movement)
- Stepping stone & anchor point
 - Easy accessible entry
 - Execution of other creative ideas is possible
 - In their own neighbourhood
- Collaboration with city council and service
 - Inviting conduction & shared initiative
 - Impact on relationship between partners and breeding ground for other projects, for other public support



Leuven, create and participatie

A participation project for the multi-annual plan of the new city council

- Interaction between online & offline
 - ◆ Online platform to collect ideas
 - ◆ Offline recruitment / mobilisation of target audience

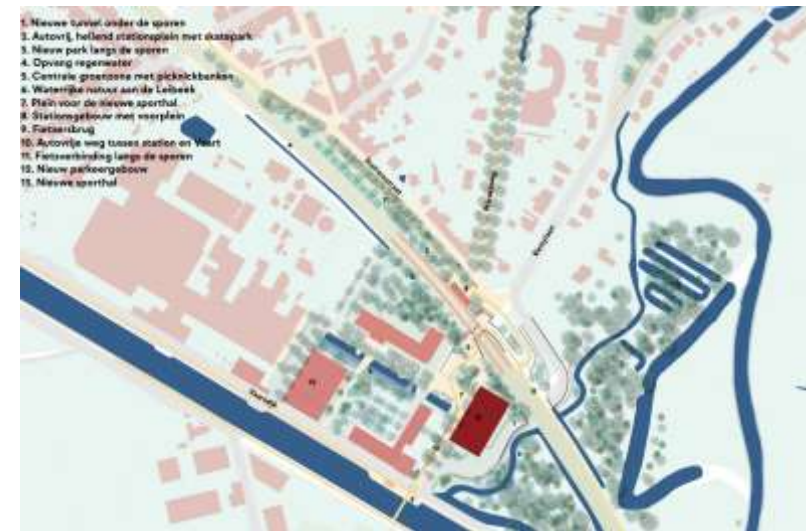
- City and organisation wide
 - ◆ All domains and all city services
 - ◆ Intense back office for processing the ideas
= integral working method

- Until the end of the legislature
 - ◆ Transparency regarding ideas and course of multi-annual plan
 - ◆ Internal process still runs within our organisation

- Out of 2 208 ideas, 1 348 were included in the multi-annual plan (by processing all online input)
(ca. 1000 ideas mobility related)

Participation projects with random selected citizen panels

- ‘Oevers van de Vaart’ – ‘The banks of the canal’
 - ◆ Jury of citizens deciding about agency and design plans
- ‘Wijgmaal in de Steigers’ – ‘Wijgmaal under construction’
 - ◆ Forming an area-oriented plan
 - ◆ Future of Wijgmaal on a lot of domains
- ‘Vorm 3010’
 - ◆ Mobility plan and part of the European project Climate-KIC
 - ◆ Focussing on meeting each other, mobility and sustainability



Why random selection?

- More qualitative input
- A better representation of the whole population
- Discussing all possible themes, also more complex ones

Criteria

- gender
- age
- education level
- geographic dispersion
- most important mode of transport
- type of residence



Kessel-Lo vormen we samen

VORM 3010



LEUVEN
EEUWENOUW
SPRINGLEVEND

LEUVEN
2030



Together with all citizens of Kessel-Lo



**VORM
3010**

A smart and sustainable mobility plan



- ⚙️ Together with all citizens of Kessel-Lo
- ⚙️ Smooth, safe, sustainable
- ⚙️ Less through traffic, traffic calming
- ⚙️ More space for walking and cycling
- ⚙️ 1 year planning (??) (in reality 2021 – 2023 !!)



De stad Leuven betrekt de inwoners van Kessel-Lo actief bij hun gemeente van de toekomst. © Stad Leuven

Al 1.300 inwoners van Kessel-Lo namen deel aan Vorm 3010

KESSEL-LO De stad Leuven en Leuven 2030 lanceerden eerder deze week [participatietraject Vorm 3010](#). Op die manier wil het stadsbestuur samen met de inwoners vorm geven aan een aantrekkelijke invulling van buurten, straten en pleinen in Kessel-Lo. "Op enkele dagen tijd vulden al 1.300 inwoners de online bevraging in", zegt burgemeester Ridouani (sp.a).

Co-create in 3 phases



Phase 1

How do you see the public domain?

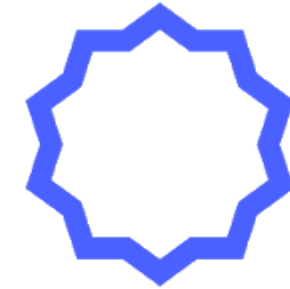
- Survey based on statements
- Online on vorm3010.be
- Interactive visualisations
- Walks
- Start-up drawn citizens panel



Phase 2

How do we built the Kessel-Lo of the future?

- Survey on ideas and inspiration for the preferred public domain
- Selection of bottlenecks
- Citizens panel together with experts



Phase 3

Working together

- Solutions for public domain
- Developing a sustainable mobility plan
- Tempory redesign pending structurel interventions

Interaction between broadly surveying residents and deepening via citizen panel

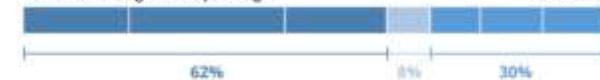
Result phase 1 and 2

- Report on general survey
- A long list of bottlenecks that were processed by the consultancy into a bottleneck map
- 28 goals for the Kessel-Lo of the future

Stelling 2:

Straten...

... mogen regelmatig afgesloten worden voor ontmoeting en ontspanning. ... moeten altijd open zijn voor het verkeer.



- Straten mogen regelmatig afgesloten worden voor ontmoeting en ontspanning
- Neutraal
- Straten moeten altijd open zijn voor het verkeer

De meerderheid van de deelnemers vindt dat straten regelmatig afgesloten mogen worden voor ontmoeting en ontspanning.

Citaten van deelnemers uit de open vragen om stellingen te kaderen:

“Straten tijdelijk afsluiten zorgt ervoor dat mensen hun burens kunnen tegenkomen. En tegelijk dat ouders niet bang zijn om hun kinderen te laten spelen op straat.”

“Openbare ruimte dient niet voor ontmoeting maar voor verplaatsing van allen.”



Inzetten op het nuttig, lokaal gebruik van regenwater en opgepompt grondwater



Het openbare domein maximaal ontharden.



Regenwater opvangen en gebruiken via collectieve waterputten en -tonnen.



Regenwater afleiden naar ondergrondse infiltratieputten.

Adjustments Phase 3

- Mobility polarizes: clear plan needed with political support
- Same approach like traffic circulation plan inner city:
 - ✓ Large information market
 - ✓ Discussion tables for public consultation
- Pitfall: adjustments based on streets that make themselves heard
 - outspoken minority <-> silent majority
- Timing: legislature leaves no room for temporary interventions and intense participation process



2021 – start up



Phase 1
bottlenecks + wishes

Phase 2
Challenges + goals

Phase 3
Draft plan

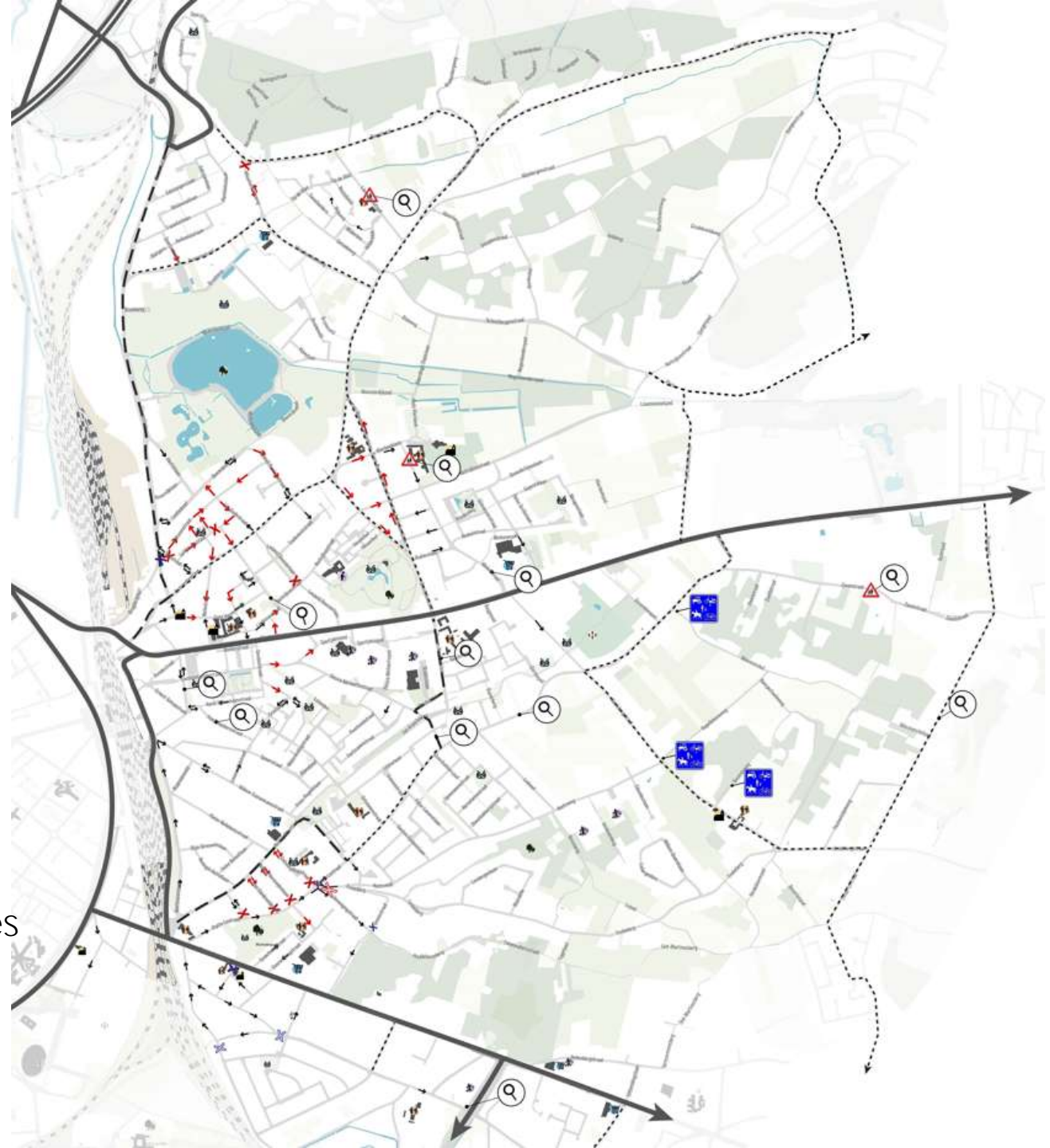
Broadly
residents
consultation
+
Deepening via
citizens panel

2022

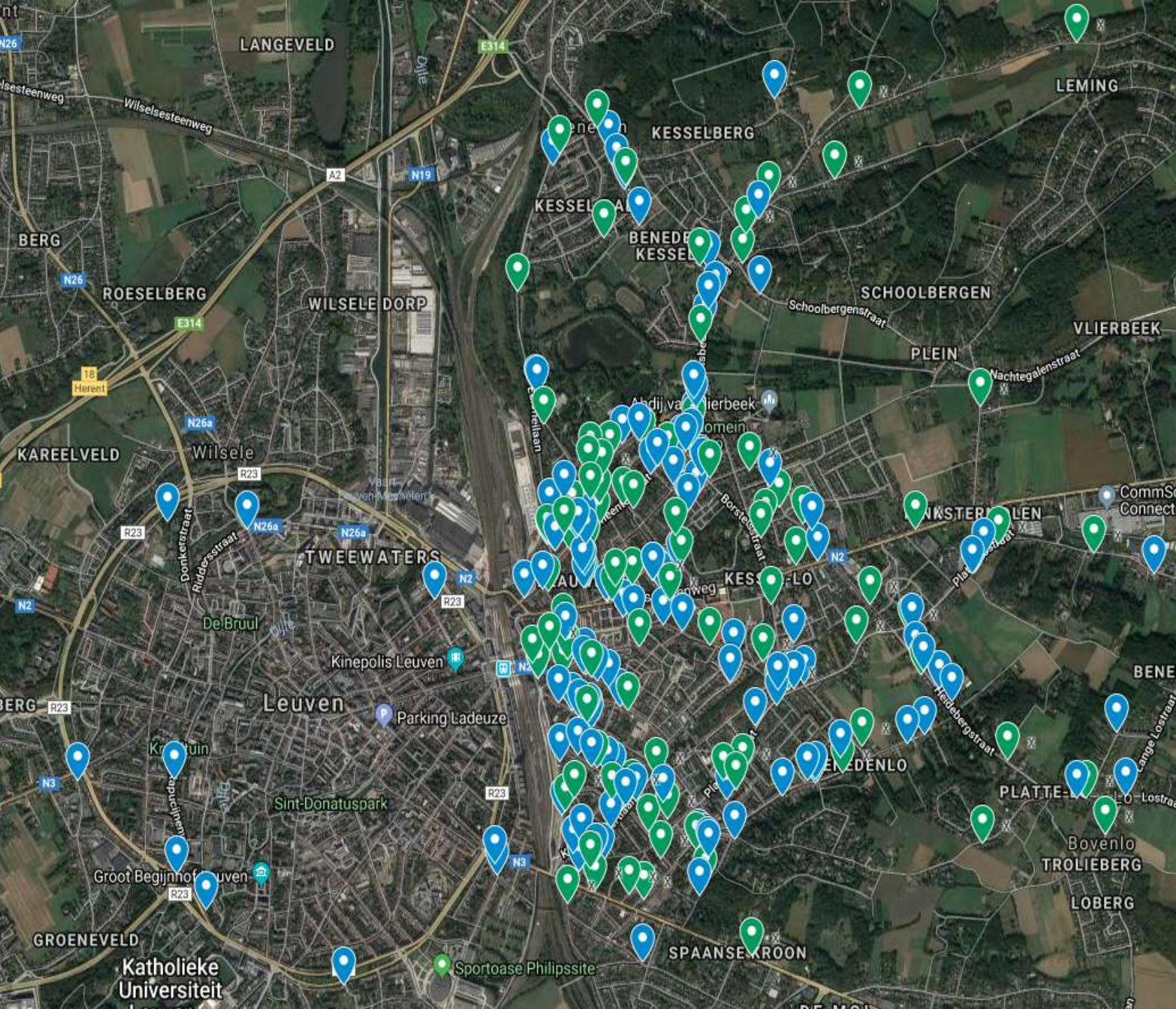
Adjustments Phase 3

Infomarkets
+
Discussion tables

2023 – implementation of the plan







- Real time traffic counting with sensor on windows
- Kessel-Lo mobility plan
- 150 sensors



790
13.74 %



3203
55.70 %

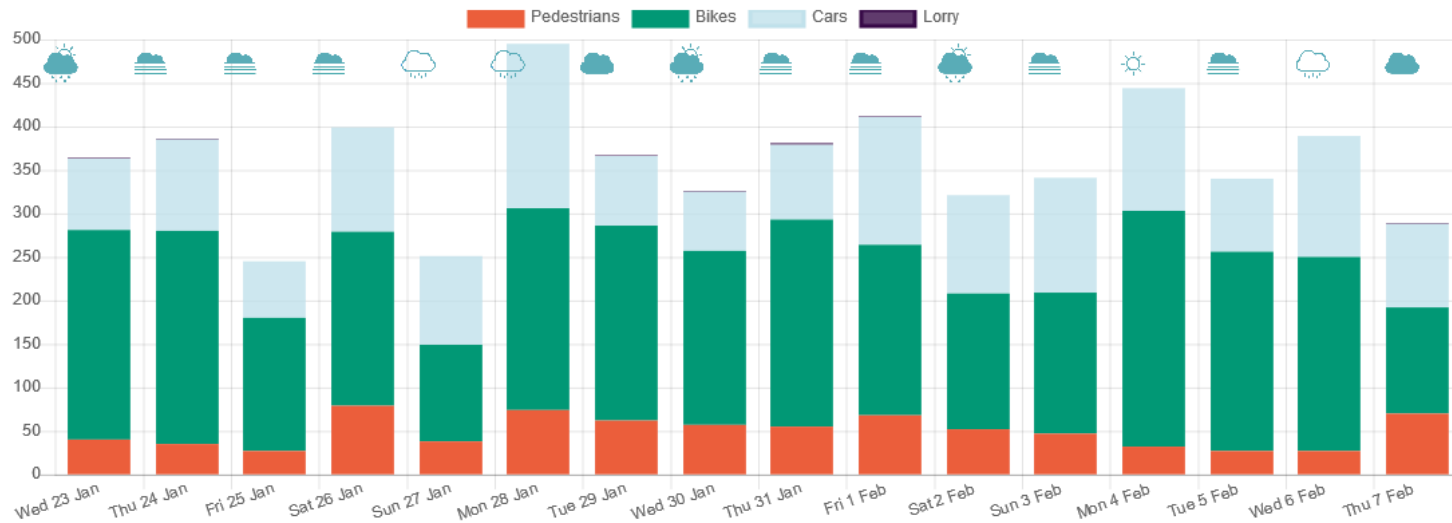


1749
30.42 %



8
0.14 %

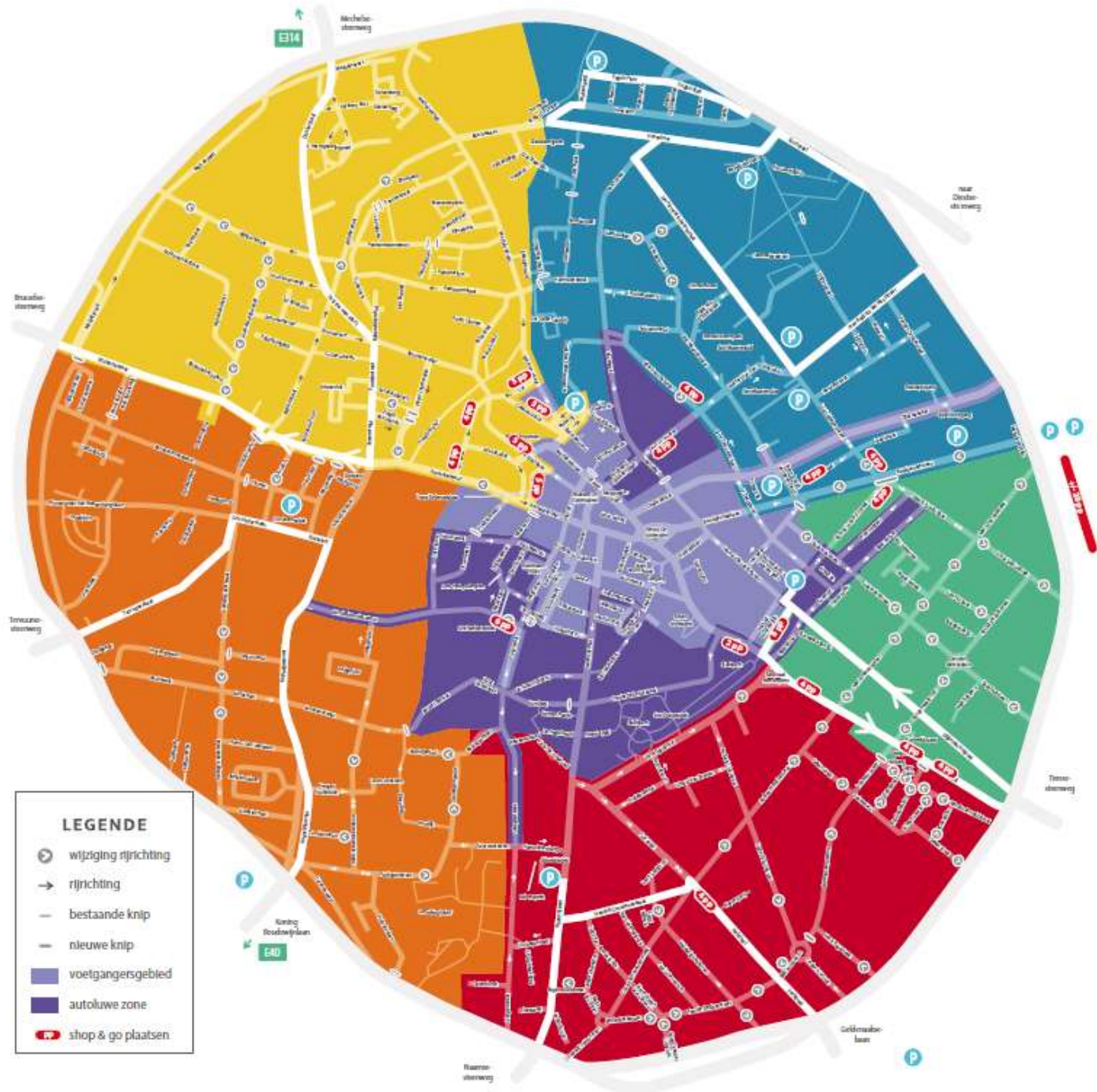
Overzicht per dag



Traffic circulation plan city centre (2016)

'Top down' + public consultation

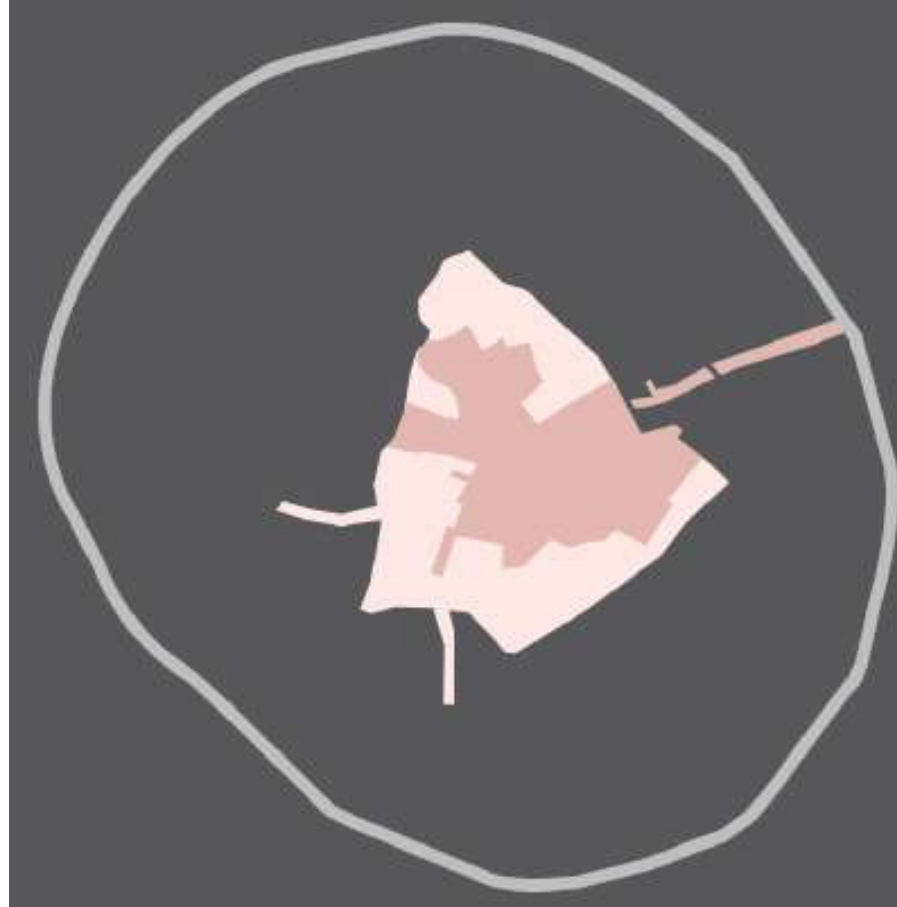
A decorative pattern of interlocking diamonds in two shades of orange and red, located at the bottom of the slide.



LEGENDE

-  wijziging rijrichting
-  rijrichting
-  bestaande knip
-  nieuwe knip
-  voetgangersgebied
-  autoluwe zone
-  shop & go plaatsen

PEDESTRIAN ZONE + CAR 'LESS' ZONE



- No on-street parking anymore
- Acces controle by ANPR
- Delivery time frames (11h – 18h30)
- UVAR's (inhabitants, medics, disabled, taxi, ...)



Making room for cyclists

- 75% of the city center = bicycle zone
- Max 30km/h on the whole territory
- Bicycle highway network
- Cycling infrastructure





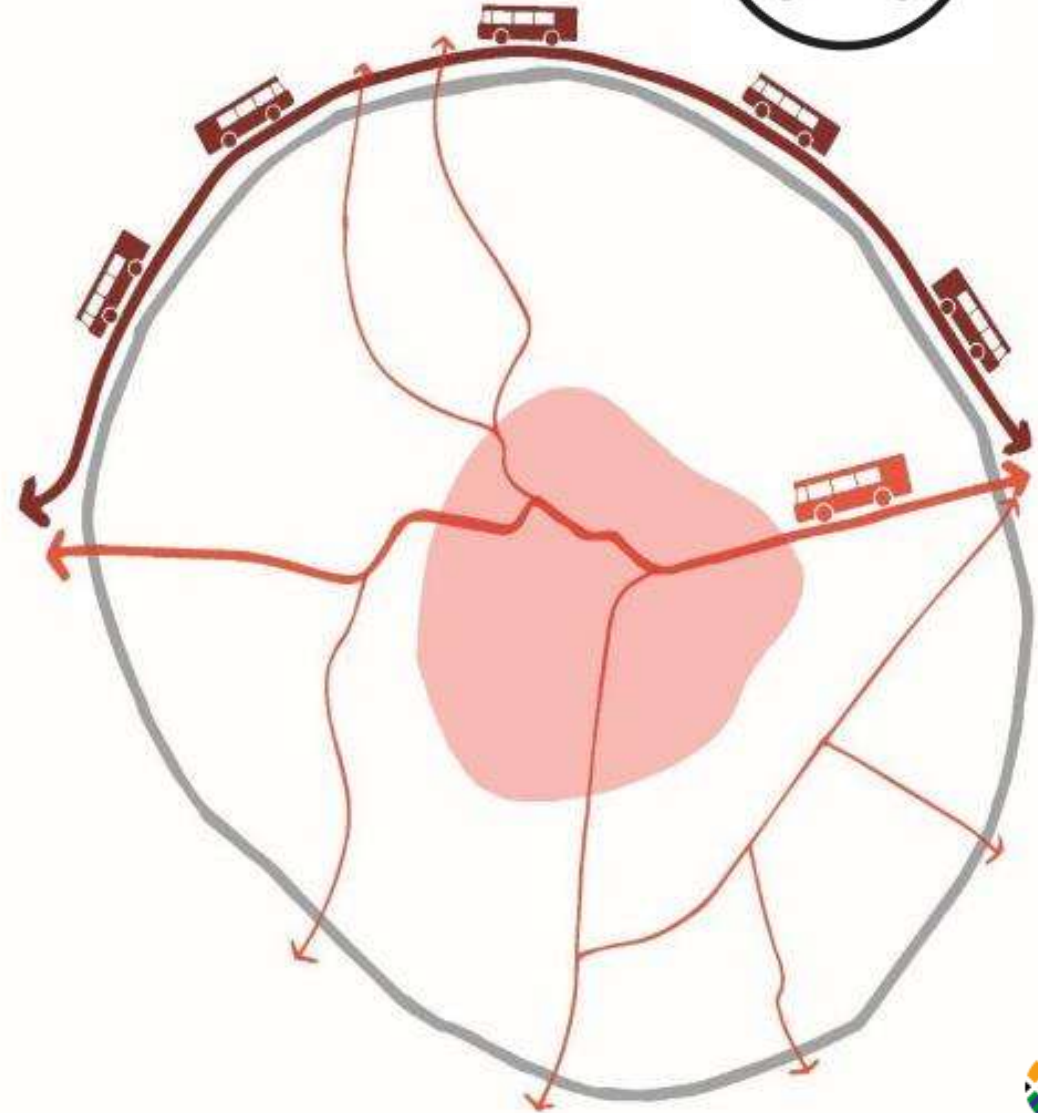


Supporting policy

SLOWER BUSES ARE QUICKER



- 20 km/u op Bondgenotenlaan
- Less regional busses through city centre
- Bussen Grote Markt → Maria Theresiastraat
- P + BUS vanaf randparkings
- Greening busfleet



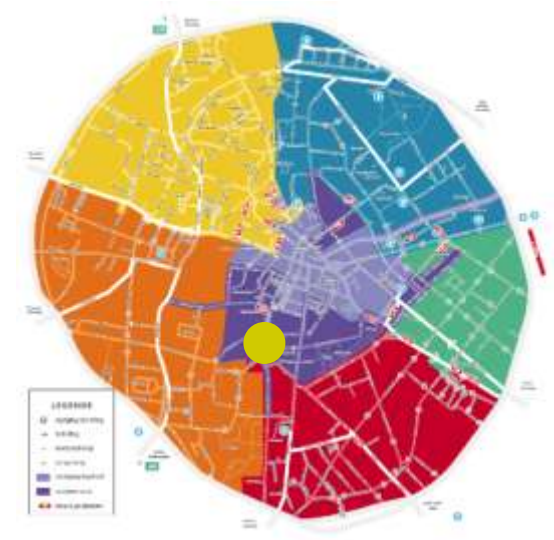
3 tracks for upgrading public domain

1. Bottom up: Straten Vol Leuven (temporary transformation squares and streets)
2. Co-creation: 'Kom op voor je wijk' cooperation civil servants, neighbourhood workers and citizens (participatory design and realisation)
3. City investments: programme public domain (experts design + information)

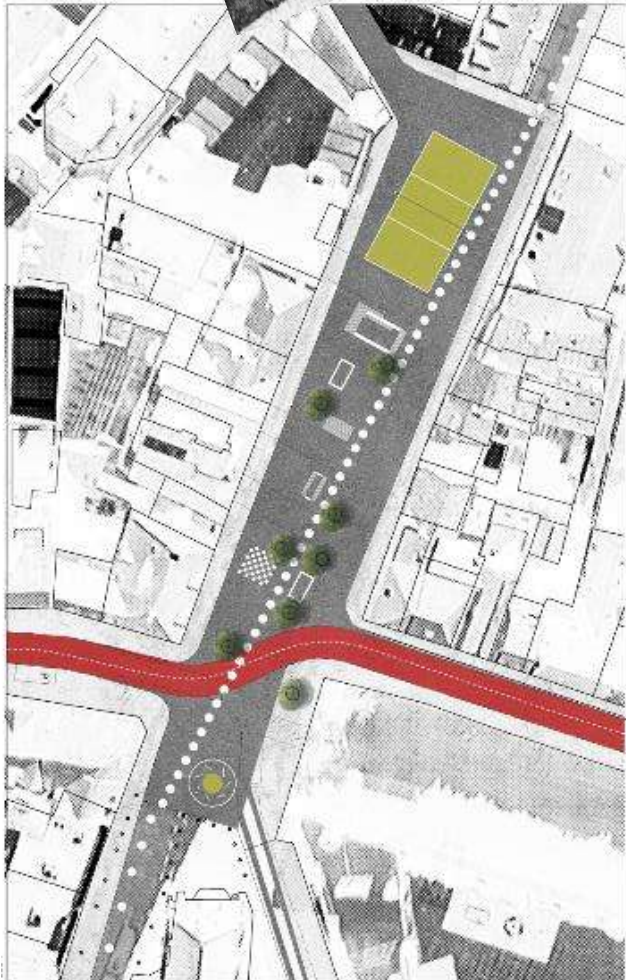


Bottom-up = Straten Vol Leuven

Transformation of a parking space to a square
In collaboration with neighborhood and schools
Temporary transformation = trial



STRATEN
VUL
LEUVEN





Co-creatie = Kom op voor je wijk, neighbourhood working

- Many residential streets entered the low-traffic zone
- Used by different neighbourhoods to claim back the street – search together for new spatial use
- Design is not starting point – neighbourhood strengthening



Co-creation





Co-creation

Circulation plan +50 tree elements
(traffic reasons)

Mosaic project: to connect citizens of
Leuven and refresh the public domain

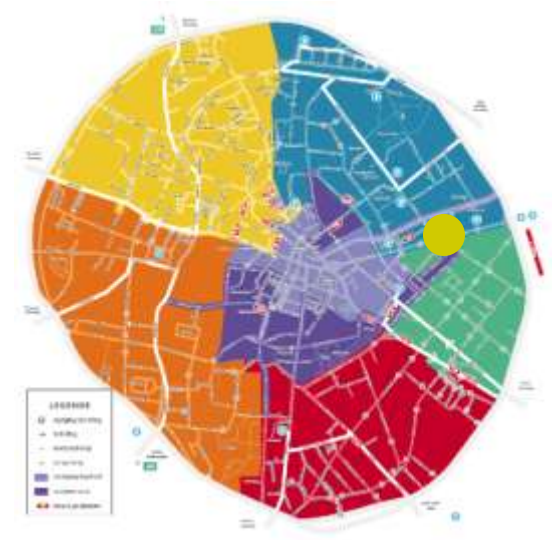
Claim an element with the
neighborhood/street/school/company







City investments



Stadsdiensten





Program public domain

Hooverplein (pedestrian area)

High parking pressure (next to largest underground car park Leuven)

Realisation of residence/event square



Nature Based Solutions Redesign Constantin Meuniers street (2023 - 2025)

Co-creation

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Leuven pilot

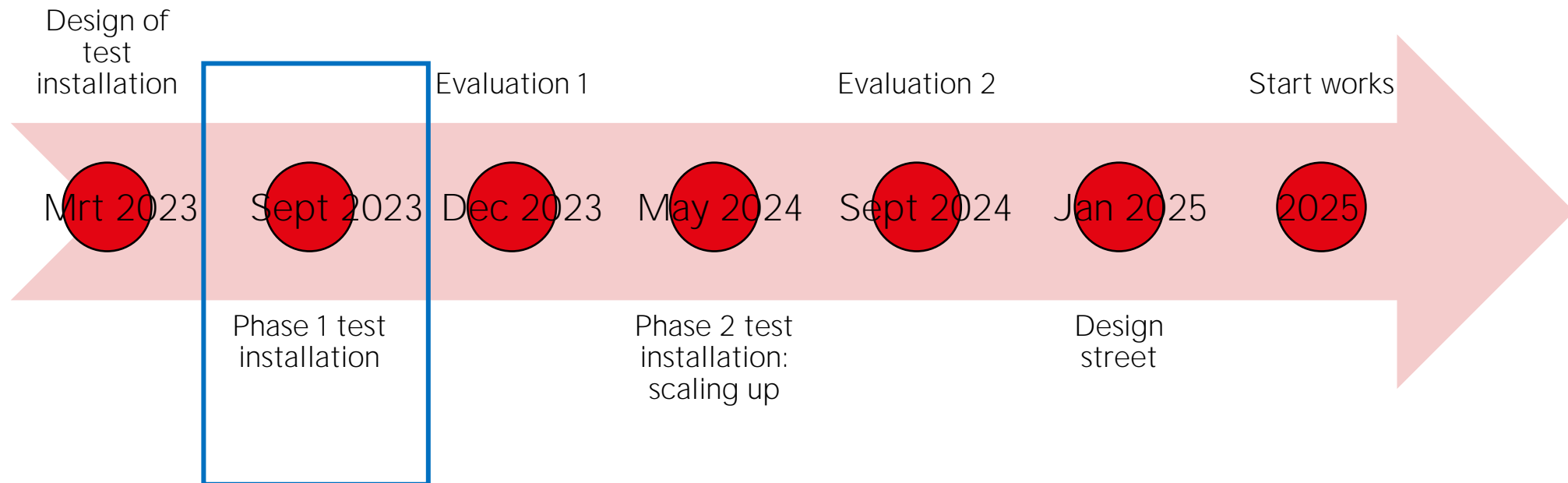


Constantin Meunierstraat

- Renovation of street & sewage system
- Big opportunities to create a Climate street
- Temporary installation as part of the design process
- Show and test NBS scenarios and integrate the results in the design for the street.
- Together with citizens
- Measure & evaluate



Time line











May 2024: upscaling











Atelier Meunier



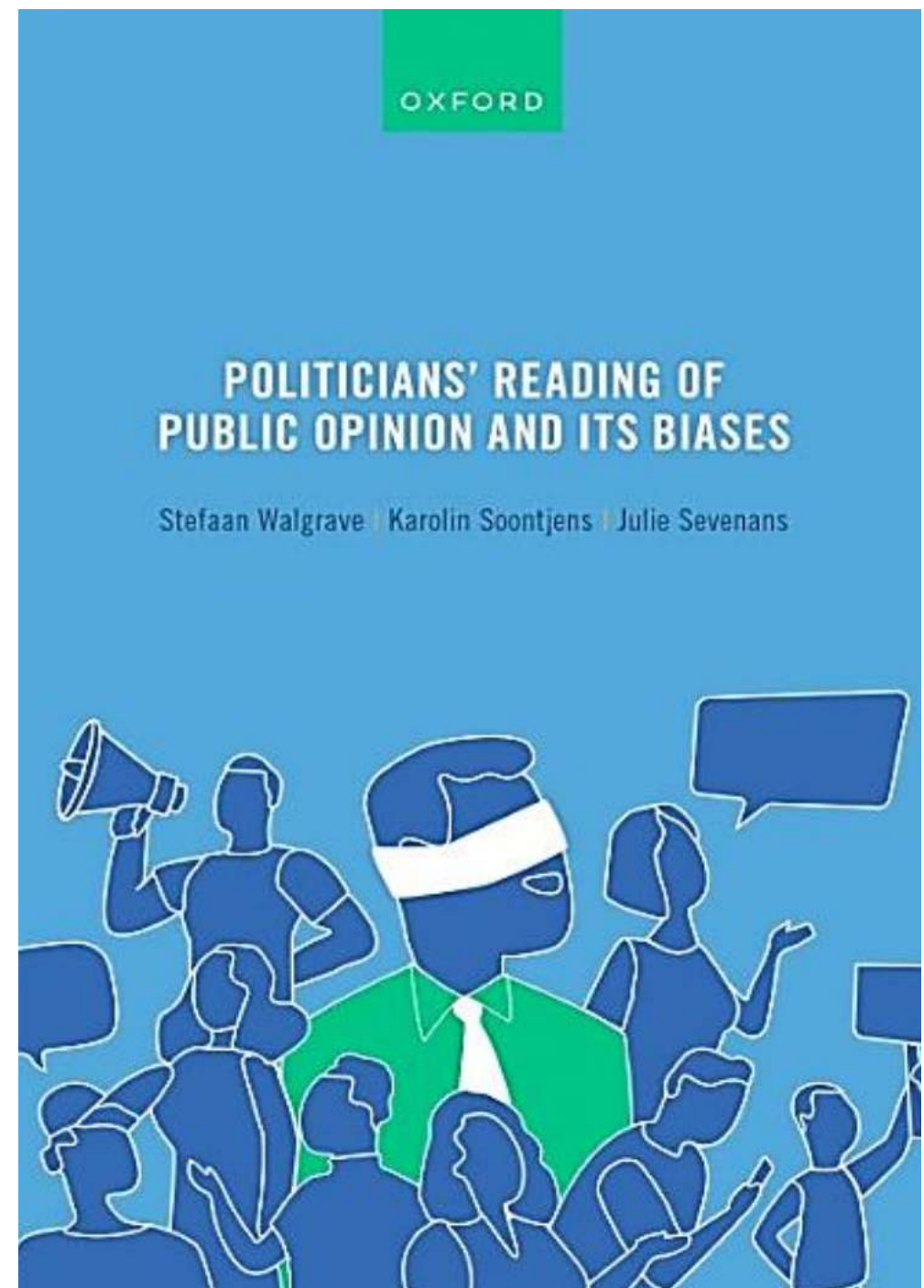


Reading the public opinion by politicians and its biases



Public opinion and its biases

- Politicians care about public opinion
- But their public opinion perceptions are inaccurate
- This has consequences for policy-making
- Democratic importance of accurate perceptions



GOOD MOVE
CHAOS = ORGANISE

GOOD MOVE ON NEN VEUT PAS!



BRUZZ

Tegenstanders mobiliteitsplan Good Move manifesteren in Anderlecht: "Onze strijd is nog niet gestreden"



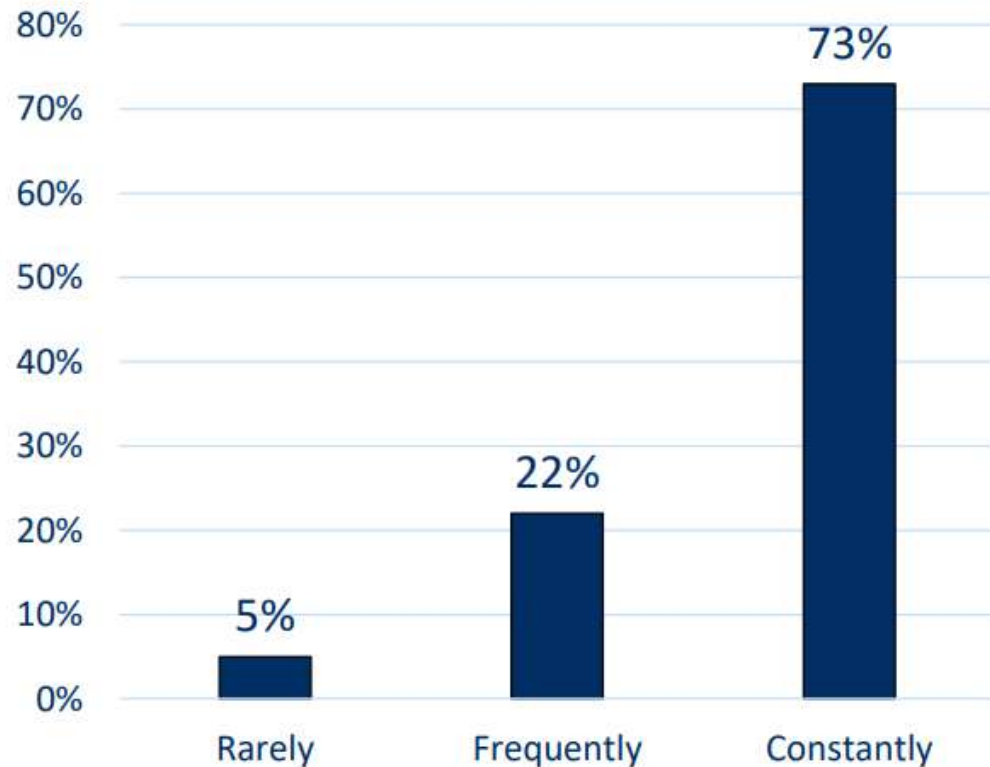
HET GEMEENTEBESTUUR HEEFT BESLIST OM AL NA TWEE DAGEN HET CIRCULATIEPLAN TE BEVRIEZEN TOT MAART
BUURTBEWONERS VERNIELEN VERKEERSBORDEN TIJDENS PROTEST

Chaos tijdens protest tegen verkeersplan in Schaarbeek: buurtbewoners klimmen op verkeersborden, agenten en brandweerman gewond

BRUSSEL De Brusselse brandweer is tijdens een interventie in Schaarbeek bekogeld met eieren door actievoerders, die protesteren tegen een verkeersplan. Daarbij raakten een brandweerman, twee politieagenten en enkele buurtbewoners gewond. De brandweer liet weten klacht te zullen indienen, want hun collega moest afgevoerd worden naar het ziekenhuis. Op videobeelden is te zien hoe buurtbewoners op verkeersborden klimmen en ze vernielen.

A. Politicians care about public opinion

“Is estimating public opinion something that you often do?”



“It is an automatic reflex, a constant voice in your head”

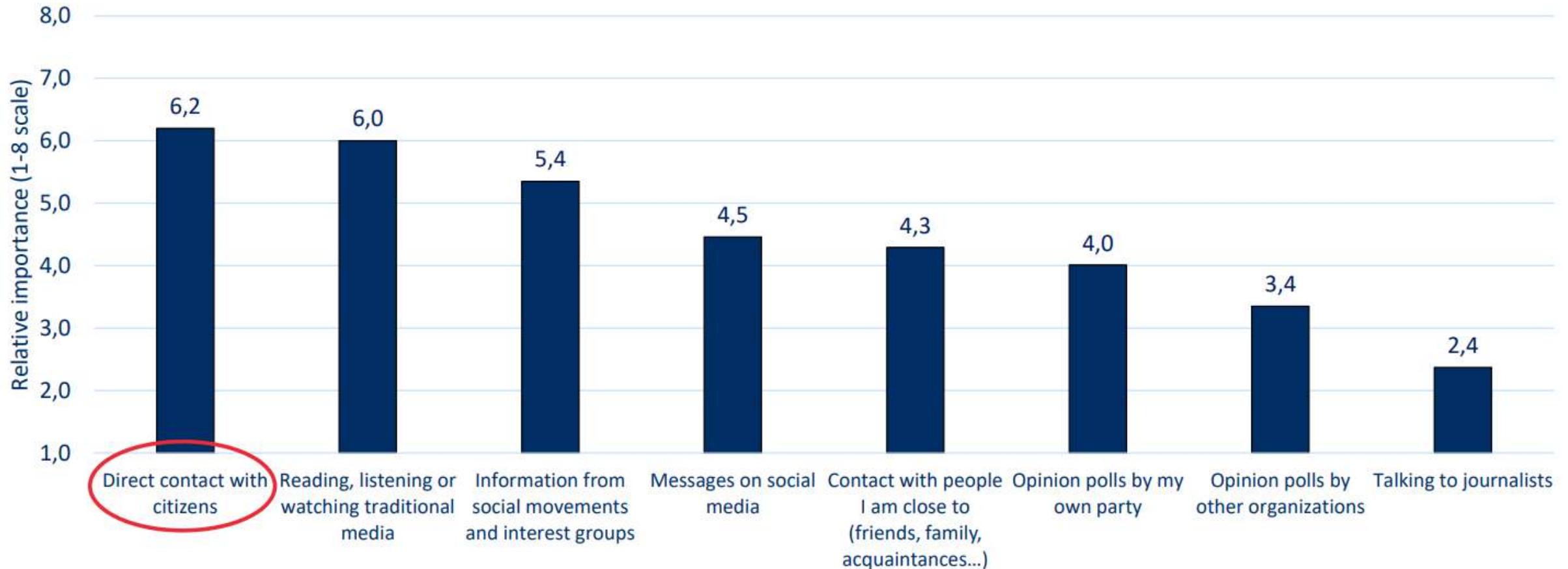
“It plays a role in every proposal I make, not only in the back but also in the front of my head”

“Your radar must turn constantly. A politician whose radar is broken, is a sitting duck”

“We take public opinion into account much more than the public thinks”

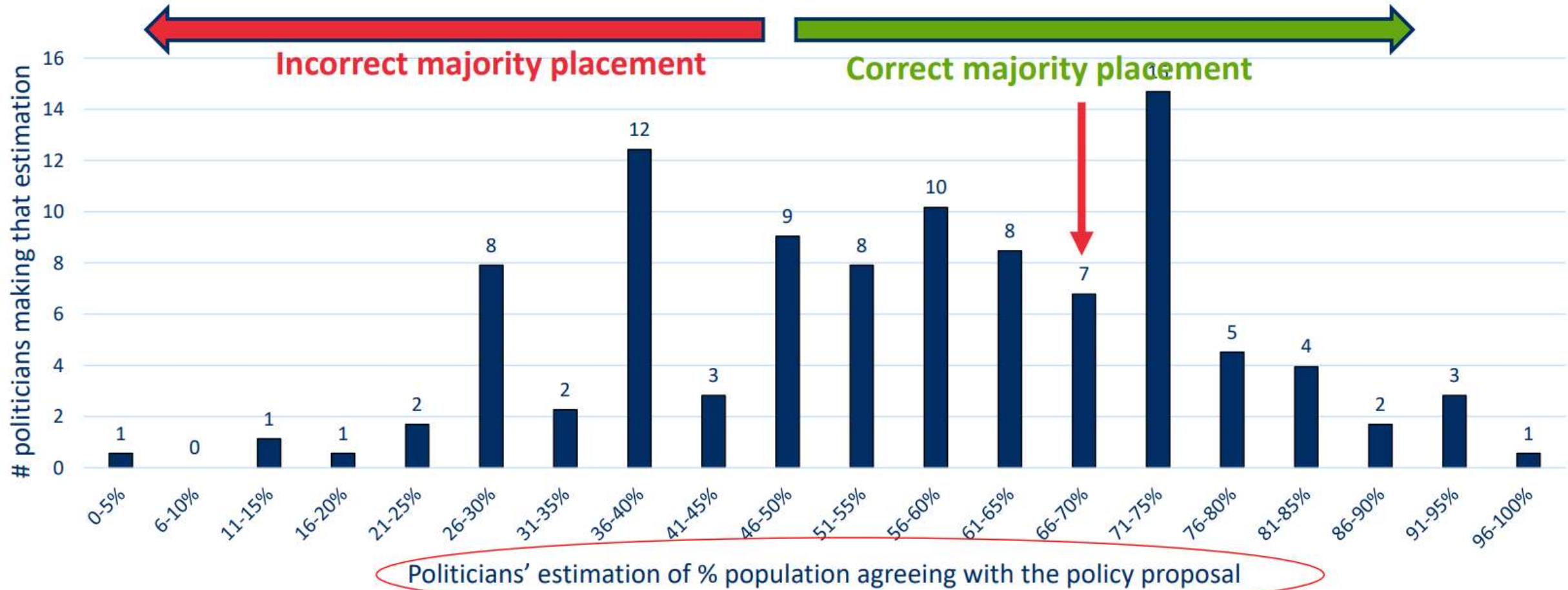
Politicians care about public opinion (2)

“Can you rank these sources based on their usefulness in informing you about what the general public wants?”



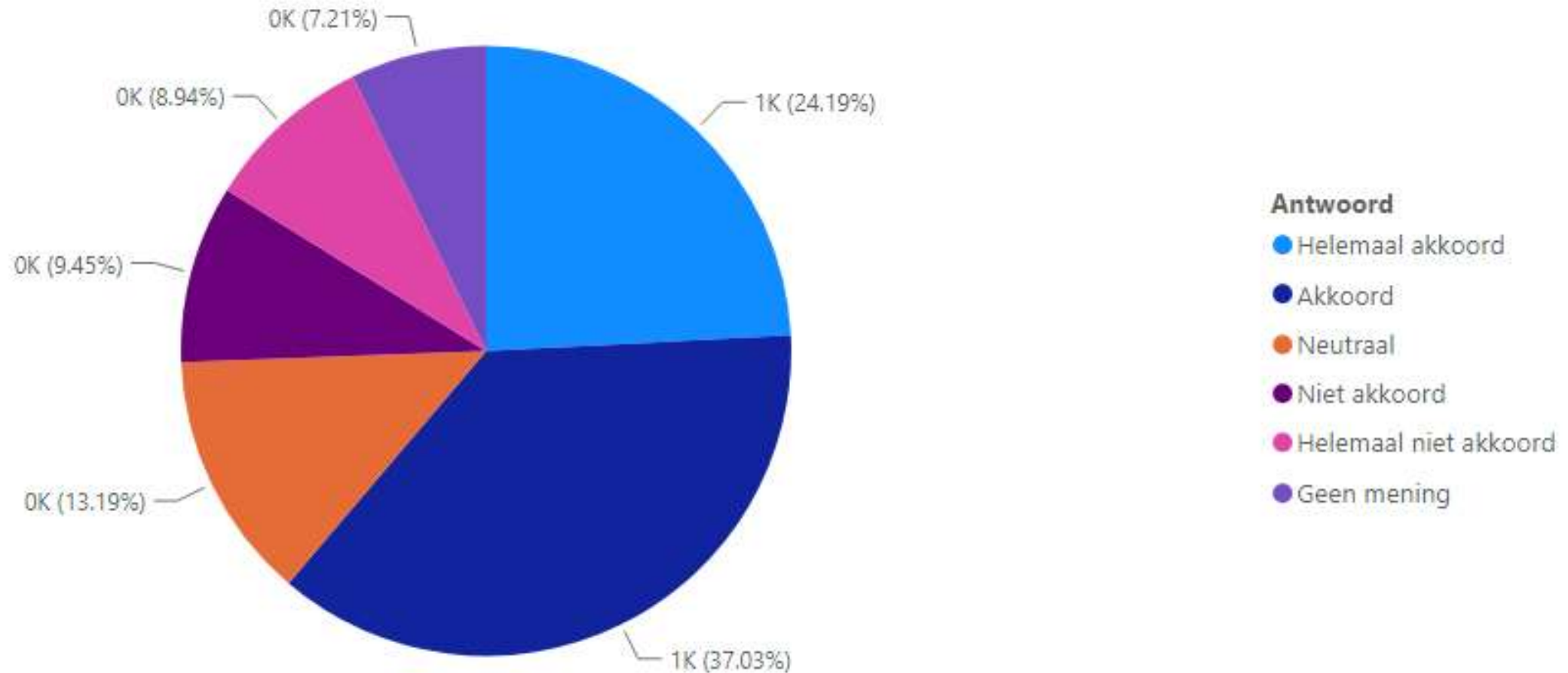
B. Politicians' perceptions of public opinion are inaccurate

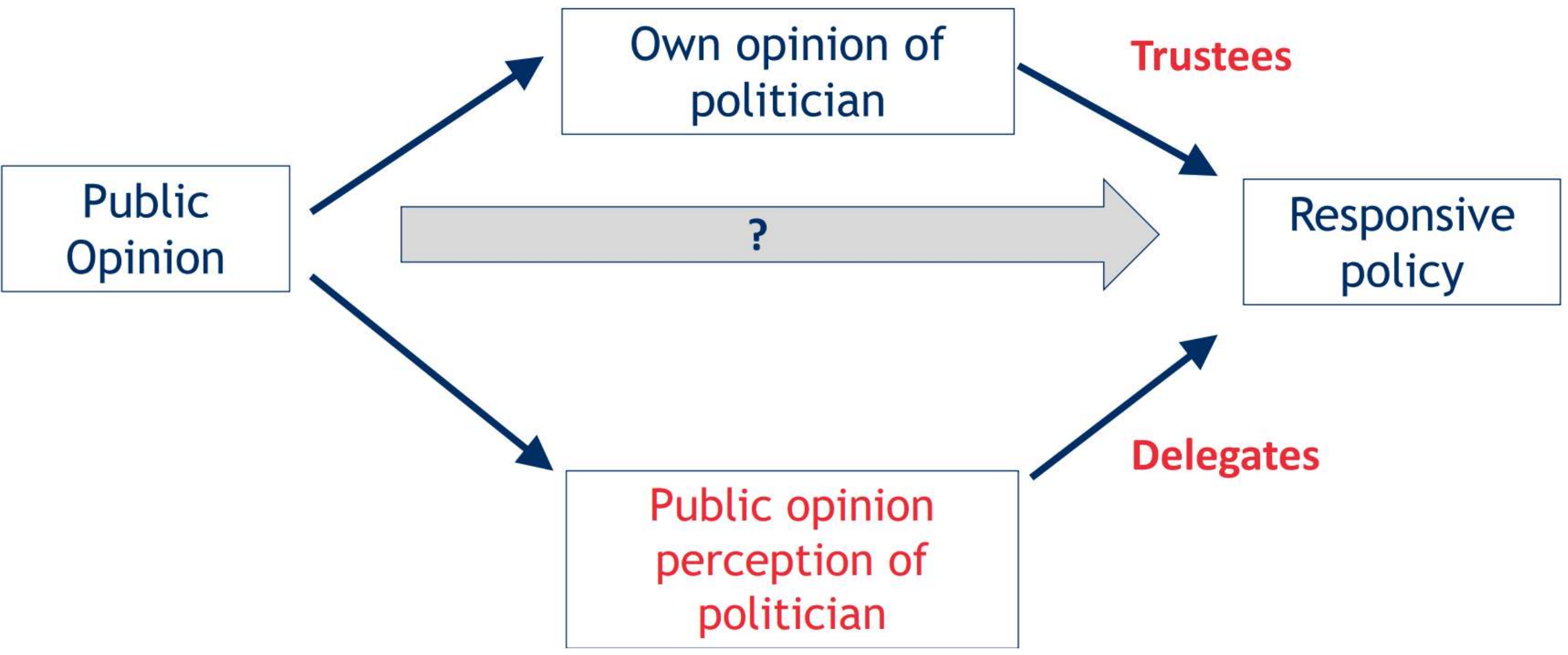
“The most polluting cars should be banned from inner cities” (69% of citizens agrees)



Opinion zone 30

In welke mate ga je akkoord met het invoeren van een Zone 30 binnen heel de bebouwde kom





Lessons for urban mobility

- Urban mobility is controversial (especially banning cars)
 - Vocal groups target policy makers (hot minorities?)
 - Protest is visible and affects image of public opinion
 - Do the powerful protest?
- Hence: inaccurate perceptions are likely
- Biased (conservative) perceptions are likely as well

→ Maybe perceptions explain why necessary measures (that everyone knows are needed) are often not taken?

Conclusions



- Start with clear vision, boundary conditions
- Don't focus (only) on mobility but go for NBS scenario's
- Information, consultation, participation, co-creation
 - ◆ Scale
 - ◆ Policy plan
 - ◆ Redesign of public space
- Don't take too much time for the participation process
- Temporary installation as part of the design process
- **Lead the public opinion instead of following it**















In 1975 werd de Diestsestraat een winkelwandelstraat.

Leuven viert 50 jaar winkelwandelstraten: "Eerst protest, nu meest geliefde plekken in de stad"



In Leuven is de 50e verjaardag van de winkelwandelstraten in het centrum gevierd. Dat gebeurde onder meer met een re-enactment van de inhuldiging van de autovrije straten in 1975, en met gegidste rondleidingen, live muziek en kinderanimatie. "Uiteraard ontbreken ook de traktaties van de handelaars niet, want wie jarig is, trakteert."





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