

## **IPSA World Congress, Montréal 19-24 April 2014**

Workshop: Social Movements and Policy Change: Theoretical Approaches and Empirical Findings

### **“Explaining Environmental Mobilization in Deprived Urban Neighborhoods and City Policy Change: Toward Success for Regeneration Policies from the Ground-Up?”**

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#### **Introduction**

Taking as a starting point the need to think about “environmental justice” in urban Belgium, this paper traces back the various methodological steps that conducted me to work on urban environmental mobilization in Wallonia and its interplay with public policy making.

Wallonia is the southern region of the federal state of Belgium. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the industrial revolution until after the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war, the main cities in Wallonia gain an international reputation for steel industry. However, since the 1950s and 1960s, with the closure of the collieries and the progressive decline of the industrial sector in northern-Europe, Wallonia has faced economic decline, growing poverty and unemployment, and heavy environmental pollution (air, water, soil and the general need to rehabilitate old industrial sites). In this context of social protest against plant closings and of major environmental challenges, this research came out as an opportunity to understand how social movements emerge to propose urban and environmental alternatives in this tough context, and could contribute to providing new tools to better restore a such needed quality of life and of environment in the city. Industrial cities in Wallonia can be considered as “shrinking cities” (Fol and Cunningham-Sabot 2010), deeply touched by the Belgian “urban crisis”, characterized by an urban exodus to greener suburbs, promoted by tax incentives for homeownership (Valenduc 2008) and the progressive decline of urban functions (as private car ownership grew, construction of big malls and economic activity zones located along the main road infrastructures increased) (Halleux and De Keersmaecker 2002).

Environmental conflicts are frequent in these urban areas in Belgium where industrial activities and housing cohabit, areas characterized by uneven access to urbanity and to quality of life in a context of “anti-urban policies”. Environmental inequalities scholarship invites us to think about democracy in the cities (citizen participation, equal access to urban amenities) and particularly fit the main topic of this workshop “social movements and policy change”: environmental mobilizations are directly impacted and impact in return local, regional and national initiatives and policies of environmental and urban planning. With Pearsall and Pierce, I argue that “urban contexts reveal inequalities and the social dimension of sustainability” (Pearsall and Pierce 2010) and go over what Bickerstaff et al. call “a relative neglect of more

mundane and chronic forms of injustice in the urban context” (Bickerstaff, Bulkeley et al. 2009). Integrating environmental justice literature and urban research allows developing a new perspective on environmental justice scholarship and its links with policy change: urban inequalities and injustices of everyday life, and not a narrower vision of disputes over specific facility locations (NIMBYism) (Schweitzer and Stephenson 2007). Environmental inequality and urban research open up a new way to introduce what Whitehead calls “a more critical look at the notion of ‘everyday environment’ that appears to provide the impetus for many contemporary urban environmentalisms” (Whitehead 2009). The ‘ordinary environmental spaces of everyday life’ are a stimulating way to question ‘environmental and social justice in the city’ paradigm in the Belgian urban context.

Moreover, urban areas in Belgium gather in centrally located neighborhoods poverty (Vandermotten, Marissal et al. 2006), old housing, density, newly arrived immigrants, and urban sprawl towards green residential belts, what Loopmans called “a deeply entrenched anti-urbanism”:

Belgian (or Flemish, for that matter) urbanisation policies have always been characterised by deeply entrenched anti-urbanism, prioritising peripheral, low-density developments as opposed to central dense neighbourhoods (Loopmans, De Decker et al. 2010).

The need to reverse this dominant feature in urban policies in Belgium have conducted some local authorities, in dialogue with regional and national bodies and local organizations, to turn toward new strategies and methods to deal with city centers deprivation. Despite many studies urging to “rebuilding the city over the city” (Halleux 2012), the awaited shift toward more sustainable and greener cities and territories is still lacking policies, strategies, and budgets to be implemented.

More precisely, the idea of this research is to understand the factors explaining environmental mobilizations at the local scale of the neighborhood, at the crossroad of polity, policy and civil society organizations. The underlying goal is to determine and formalize new spaces and configurations of multilevel regulation between many stakeholders, acting at the local scale; keeping in mind to propose connections between policy-making, modalities for the inclusion of local population and social movements grievances, to produce greener and more livable environments.

This paper is mainly methodological and only presents some primary results from my first case study. The first section presents environmental inequalities and the environmental justice movement, as an introduction to the broader topic behind this research. In a second section, I will present my methodology and go through a first set of interviews conducted in 2013 and 2014 that helped me circumscribe my research question. In a third section, I present the main concepts I use in my research and the working hypothesis. Then, I will detail the framework of my case studies and propose first results from fieldwork investigation. I will finally discuss first insights learned from this set of interviews.

Empirical evidence relies on twenty semi-structured interviews conducted between April 2013 and March 2014 and experts' consultation, as well as a review of legal documents and official strategies.

## **Section 1. Environmental Inequalities and Social Movements**

Environmental justice movements (EJMs) arose first in the USA in the 1980s as grassroots movements seeking to publicize the unequal environmental burden supported by minorities and poor populations, mainly in the cities. Directly connected to the civil rights movement and its methods, EJMs gained in importance throughout the 1990s and 2000s, along with researches dedicated to strengthen scientifically the assumptions on which the movement is based (Been 1995, Bowen 2002, Bowen and Wells 2002). One of the major goals of environmental justice (EJ) research has been to explore the appearance of grassroots and local environmental mobilizations (be it protest, legal action), particularly in poor and minority populations.

Without going into much detail (see (Wenz 1988, Bullard and Johnson 2000, Pulido 2000, Pellow, Weinberg et al. 2001, Agyeman 2002, Kurtz 2003, Schlosberg 2007, Taylor 2011, Holifield 2012), environmental justice has become an important way to deal with social and environmental issues together in urban America. For Pellow, environmental inequality (EI) “addresses more structural questions that focus on social inequality (the unequal distribution of power and resources in society) and environmental burdens” and bring broader dimensions to environmental justice (Pellow 2000). EJ and EI research challenges “the dominant ecological paradigm utilized by environmental researchers [that] failed to recognize and/or adequately address the fact that environmental problems are contextual and experienced unevenly across the population” (Krieg and Faber 2004).

The rise of an environmental consciousness, or the shift from materialist to post-materialist values (Inglehart 1995, Inglehart and Abramson 1999), is presumed related to the growing material security in Western countries after Second World War that allowed people to develop post-materialist or environmentalist values. In this perspective, “environment is a luxury good in affluent consumers society” (J. Meyer<sup>1</sup>). However, environmental justice activism and environmental awareness contradict this postulate and invite to go beyond this assumed trade-off between objective problems and subjective values.

In Europe (let's skip the rest of the world), EJ was logically first imported in the UK in the mid 1990s (Bulkeley and Walker 2005, Bickerstaff and Agyeman 2009, Fairburn, Butler et al. 2009, Walker 2012), and then in some countries of continental Europe, never reaching its US counterpart in terms of mobilization, scientific research, or public policy formalization. In the UK, for instance, EJ was mostly a matter of concern for mainstream environmental NGOs – Friends of the Earth England (and Scotland) - and received very quickly a political answer with the Environment Agency endorsing its principles. Environmental justice was integrated as a goal of neighborhood

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<sup>1</sup> John Meyer, *Questions of materiality in environmental politics*, ECPR Environmental Politics and

regeneration policies (Walker 2012). This wider spread of EJ in England explains the choice of an English city as my second case study, along with some similarities in terms of economic and historical development with big Walloon cities.

What exactly are EJMs combatting? They gather people and NGOs, trying to address the inequalities – or injustices – burdened by deprived populations. That is to say: the excessive exposure to air pollution, the proximity to noisy road infrastructures, the siting of waste facilities in deprived communities, what is called LULUs in English, for ‘locally unwanted land uses’. This early focus of environmental justice scholars and activists has been extended to include today what is at the core of this research: urban greening processes, access to green spaces, public gardens, and urban agriculture, particularly in poor communities where quality of life is worse. From a narrow focus on traditional LULUs, EJ has tended to include more and more environmentally related issues, particularly of concern for the quality of life in urban areas. And here, we get back to the main focus of the research: how to recreate environmentally oriented projects in deprived urban areas, supported by the people and NGOs, along with political support? If US scholars have built their research on movements explicitly identifying their action to an EJ framework (Taylor 2000), a similar study in Belgium necessarily implies a focus on less ‘formalized’ action.

### ***Environmental Inequalities in Belgium, Linking Local Mobilization and Policy Initiatives***

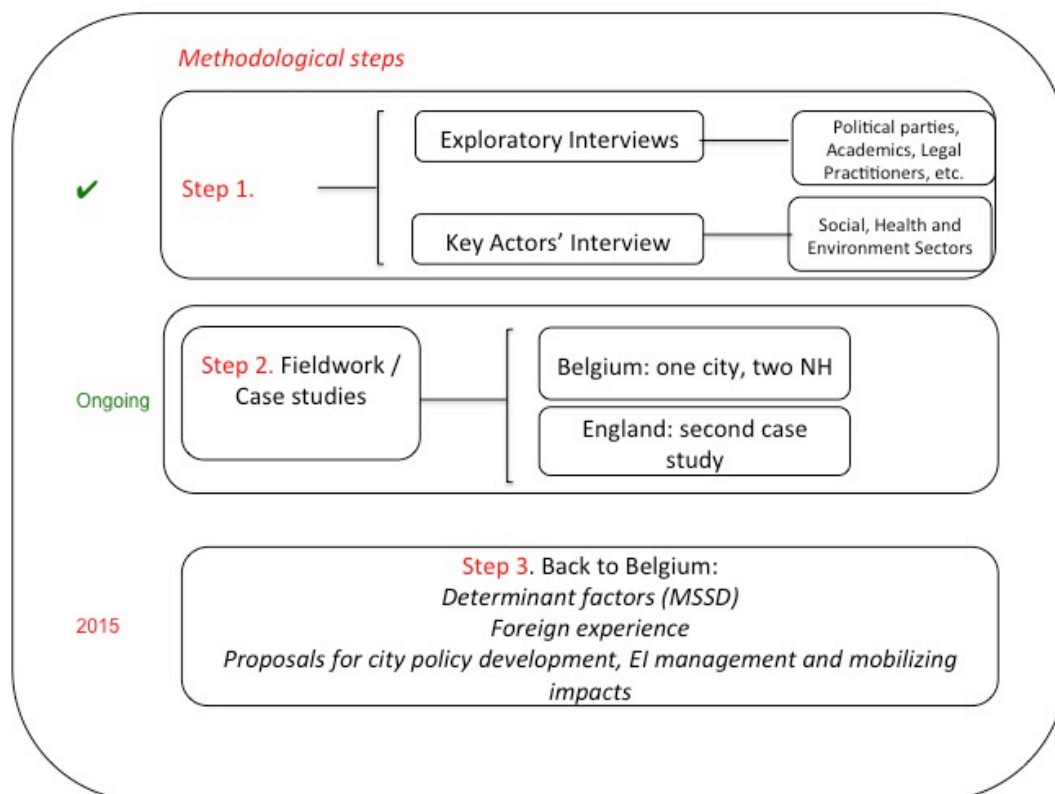
Why work on this topic in a country like Belgium where EJ or EI - as they are commonly called in Europe - have trouble in finding a way to unfold in a wholly different context? Indeed, lacking data to carry out studies as those which found the movement in the US and lacking movements overtly recognizing their affiliation to EJ, we needed to find a way to open up this field of research and to propose paths to address them and put them onto the political agenda. Few studies have documented environmental inequalities in Belgium, be they data based studies (indicators and mapping/GIS) or environmental movements analyses (Cornut, Bauler et al. 2007, Dozzi, Lennert et al. 2008, Boniver, Castiau et al. 2009, Lejeune, Chevau et al. 2012). Environmental inequalities (Emelianoff 2006, Cornut, Bauler et al. 2007, Walker and Eames 2008, Faburel 2012, Walker 2012) are a growing field of research but they are not seen as a specific frame for action and collective mobilization in Belgium.

Combined to a general failure of city policies to infuse new dynamics in deprived neighborhoods in southern Belgium, this convinced us: studying local environmental mobilizations in deprived areas is the best way to explore environmental inequalities in Belgium. Policies’ efficiency substantially suffers from not including people, especially disadvantaged ones in positive environmental dynamics, crucial for the wellbeing and quality of life in urban centers. This choice is partially based on semi-structured interviews, conducted during the springs of 2013 and 2014 with key actors

in the Walloon Region<sup>2</sup> (southern part of Belgium), prior to the fieldwork in two neighborhoods. But let me first introduce the early steps of this research framework and method.

In the following section, I will quickly get back to the method used for the first step of this PhD research, the main items identified from interviewers' point of view, how they contributed in formalizing my research hypotheses and finally, how it influenced the selection of my case studies. This research is based on a twin-track approach for the analysis of environmental inequalities: it focuses on exploring both (i) quantitative data which should support EI investigations and make them public issues and (ii) qualitative interviews with key stakeholders involved in local mobilizations, planning process, and political strategies, for the understanding of community-based responses to environmental challenges and political reconfigurations. The material used for the quantitative part is not further explored in this paper.

**Figure 1. Methodological steps**



## Section 2. Method

The assumptions presented here are derived from fifteen semi-structured interviews with key-actors in Wallonia, namely, political parties – via their research center –, environmental NGOs, specialized lawyers and legal practitioners, and academics in

<sup>2</sup> Belgium is a federal state composed of three regions and three communities. Wallonia, the southern region of the country, is amongst other tasks in charge of housing, land planning and environment (water, air quality, biodiversity, etc.).

Belgium, as a first step<sup>3</sup>, and then, five “key actors” working in health, social and environmental policy making. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and labeled, according to the grounded theory methodology (GTM) (Charmaz 2006). These first two sets of interviews, conducted in 2013 and 2014, were designed to “explore” the understudied general field of environmental inequalities in Belgium: how is it conceived by political and civil society actors. It was, as well, an opportunity to confront one important working hypothesis I had been dealing with since the beginning of my research: are environmental justice and inequalities really not considered at all by stakeholders in Belgium? And if this is really the case, what do ‘environmental inequalities’ evoke for stakeholders? My purpose through these interviews was to give an overall picture of EI from the stakeholders’ point of view, by reviewing three dimensions of EI from scientific literature review: access to justice and legal mobilization, environmental justice movements’ methods and actions, and public policies and more generally political players’ opinion.

### **Key items**

From those interviews, I have been able to bring out three main items, which help me highlight the main environmental inequalities issues at stake.

#### *First item: the very idea of inequality – capacity*

During the interviews, I managed to get an idea of what “environmental inequality” meant for my informants. The main answer I got was that inequality was most important in terms of the capacities of deprived people (socio-economic level) to challenge authorities and to devise environmental projects positive for their neighborhood. Many factors contributing to this major inequality in capacity were formulated: a general lack of knowledge of poor people about their rights and unequal access to information, lack of expertise, of time, of money (expensive procedures), in sum, of resources and tools to call for urban greening processes and against projects constituting a threat to their environment.

A legal practitioner, specialized in environmental law:

*“Citizens don’t have the same propensity and ability to use available tools [public inquiries, legal actions], the responsiveness to those tools differs from one to another, depending on people’s standard of living. [...] Who has the ability to act and to make a difference?”<sup>4</sup>*

A member of the Mouvement Réformateur (MR), right-wing party:

*The very first environmental inequality is educational, formative. Access to information and participation is the first inequality. The main problem is the misreading of their rights, the technical nature of environmental law. Inequalities are ahead from the problem, as well as a sign of the interest for public things.*

Environmental inequality, that is to say, poor communities living in deteriorated environment, centrally asks in this context: “who can mobilize (successfully)? Who

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<sup>3</sup> Those eight interviews were conducted during Spring 2013.

<sup>4</sup> All excerpts from the interviews are translated in English by the author.

has influence on the decision making process?” The capacity to mobilize to defend “the environment”, understood as ‘where people live, work and play’, (Novotny 2000) is key to reduce environmental inequalities.

### *Culture of participation & empowerment*

This second item confirms the first assumption based on unequal capacities to mobilize. Informants have mentioned the problem of the weak culture of participation in southern Belgium, even in comparison with the north of the country.

A member of Ecolo, a green and left-wing party:

*The first issue at stake when considering participation is to have a culture of democratic participation, which we don't have.*

Again, the idea of participation (as ‘organized procedures’) is considered a central feature of environmental conflicts. The supposed lack of a culture of democratic participation confronts unequal capacities to mobilize (poor versus rich?) and a cultural dimension. Informants highlighted the central question: between environmental militancy or activism (agency in a society characterized by strong connections with public authorities) and empowerment strategies (Bacqué and Biewener 2013), how to deal with and include disadvantaged communities into environmentally oriented strategies and policies?

### *Political approach*

Belgium is characterized by a historical tradition of social dialogue (between employers and trade unions, and more generally between stakeholders in a country split into many authorities and identities). The tradition directs environmental (and other) issues towards polity and policy, and not toward the justice arena, seen as the “last resort”, only if previous political compromise fails.

A member of the Mouvement Réformateur (MR), right-wing party:

*First of all, it is up to public authorities to tackle those questions, not the judicial branch.*

This item guided me to focus on the spaces of cooperation and regulation, designed locally between public and private actors, to create more livable and greener communities.

There is as well a kind of “political unwillingness” to seriously consider environmental inequalities, because it is politically complicated to say “we have a problem of EI and the reality is that a great number of citizens are concerned with EI in Belgium”. As an elected official from the green party (Ecolo) told me:

*I've noticed a total lack of knowledge! I'm struck, struck! I've seen this during the debate around the 6% VAT, I've seen it during negotiations related to a system of progressive taxation on electricity, I've seen this during 25 debates. Politicians have on average a zero-knowledge, not to say incorrect, about inequalities mechanisms and redistribution. It is unbelievable... [...] I think nobody cares about this because this issue [EI] raises many more questions, notably car travelling, the first source of local micro-pollution. The third reason is that most men and women politicians, at some level, don't endure this kind of pollution.*

This argument shows how environmental inequalities are political issues that cannot be reduced only to scientific correlations between socioeconomic deprivation and environmental dimensions, but also a highly controversial question, “not to be asked” in the political arena, ‘inaudible’ for many political actors in Belgium.

The three items “inequality and capacity”, “participation” and “political first” directed this research toward environmental mobilization in deprived neighborhoods and on the interactions and empowerment processes and strategies developed by the stakeholders, including political actors in their interaction with local NGOs and people in their attempt to challenge EI and build more sustainable communities.

### ***New questions arising from recent interviews***

Before exposing the working hypothesis guiding this research, some new items emerged from the interviews, which served as basis in the formulation of the hypothesis. Those items are, i.e. the role of intermediate stakeholders (environmental and social NGOs and public bodies) and of networking. The environment is seen as a way to deal more generally with social exclusion and community development, the potential nexus between empowerment and instrumentation when dealing with poor populations was underlined, as well as the importance of local dynamism (political and social movements), and the acceptability of the change.

Second, the key actors’ interviews allowed me circumscribing the central topic of my research to urban greening processes. Working on access to green spaces and urban greening, in general, opens up new perspectives toward city and neighborhoods renewal dynamics, empowerment strategies - as crucial to foster community development in environmental issues -, to propose a relatively new focus on recently flourishing themes of environmental action: urban agriculture, public gardens, public spaces improvement. As environmental justice movements in the USA have spent lots of effort to demonstrate, environmental quality is not and should not be a “rich people problem”. That is why this study will concentrate on socially and economically deprived neighborhoods, facing major challenges to confront the economic and financial crisis and compete in the European and international context.

Mobilization and collective action upon the urban environment encompasses here projects developed in order to reconnect with the environment in deteriorated urban areas as well as to dispute projects with adverse environmental effects for the neighborhood or community. My perspective embraces confrontational as well as non-confrontational approaches, i.e. legal action, direct action, protest, petition. Using Anguelovski’s concept of “green environmental justice”, I am particularly interested in projects seeking to restore greater livability in the neighborhood (Anguelovski 2013).

To concentrate on urban environmental justice and the local scale is the logic consequence of one premise of my research: cities and their neighborhoods/divisions are the site of social and political fragmentation. This fragmentation is not neutral as regards the distribution of environmental bads and goods (Turmel 2008). That is why I will concentrate this research on urban neighborhoods facing environmental

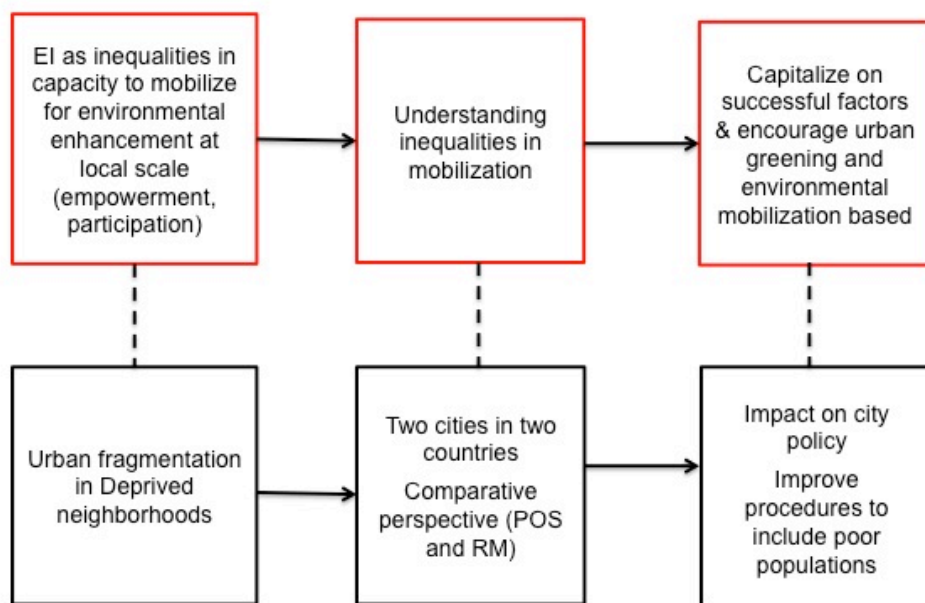


problems such as atmospheric and soil pollution, old and running industrial sites, ancient buildings and “hard-to-reach” people. We annul socioeconomic determinants and work only on disadvantaged neighborhoods, so that we can concentrate on the other variables explaining environmental mobilization.

Recent interviews and meetings with stakeholders provided new avenues for my research and new questions: the role of firms and potential confrontation between firms’ and people’s visions, snowball effect of good practices or innovative projects for community improvement, the multiple faces of poverty in Belgium, the processes of stigmatization, the appropriation logic of organizations’ projects and goals by local population, proactive mobilization versus reactive mobilization which offer contrasted collective action methods, the role of trust from impacted citizens.

This PhD tries to understand what makes neighborhood greening dynamics successful and to implement those factors into policy dedicated to urban areas, in the context of the Belgian federalization, that is to say, the transfer of competences from the national level to the regional one, including city policy, from the last government agreement signed in 2011 (and to be implemented from July 2014), following one of the major crisis of the Belgian federal state and political system.

**Figure 2. Working scheme**



**Case studies:** why some urban dynamics (boosted by grassroots’ action) are more successful in bringing to the forefront of public agenda environmental and greening initiatives at the local level? (POS: political opportunity structure; RM: resource mobilization).

## Section 3. Concepts and Working Hypothesis

### Concepts

Giving priority in our reflections to disadvantaged populations is a way to circumvent the traditional perspective (NIMBY) on urban and environmental issues. EI are conceived here as inequalities in terms of mobilizing capacities of deprived population to act upon the quality of their living environment, as well as historical reasons accounting for the spatial distribution of people and activities. Those mobilizing capacities are, for instance, inequalities in terms of capacities from people or groups to face environmental degradation: resources, expertise, networking, information, and so on.

I am excluding the economic factor by focusing only on “poor” neighborhoods, part of a larger city, Liège, eastern agglomeration near the borders of Germany and Holland. I chose two different profiles in terms of mobilization: a community with a lot of mobilization and another one facing far less environmental and greening processes. These two contrasted contexts allow for identifying key factors explaining greening processes.

This study intends to combine, on the one hand, literature from social movements theory, centrally political opportunity and resource mobilization approaches (McCarthy and Zald 1977, McAdam, McCarthy et al. 1996, Neveu 2005, Fillieule, Agrikolianski et al. 2010), adding the local “cultural” and identity dimension (McAdam, McCarthy et al. 1996). The hypothetico-deductive methodology is used to explicitly formulate working hypotheses before going onto the field, as environmental inequalities and local environmental mobilizations are a relatively new field of study in Belgium. Some key concepts also served to guide fieldwork experimentation: Charles Tilly’s notion of ‘grassroots settings’, siting the neighborhood as one of them, as well as “micro-mobilization contexts”, which intend to give meaning to place based experiences. Kitschelt also differentiates between the substantive impact (inducing change in public policies), the procedural impact (actors get a “status”, may participate as valuable actors), and the structural impact (modifies the POS) (Kitschelt 1986): this three-fold approach is particularly relevant to deal with policy impact of environmental and local SMs and the social change induced by those practices. These concepts provide new avenues to deal with power and civil society (re-)configurations, the appraising of new spaces of legitimacy, and of identity in deprived territories (Snow, Rochford et al. 1986).

### ***Working hypotheses***

Three types of hypotheses are subdivided in several sub-points, guiding the fieldwork. Each hypothesis from the first two categories (“social movements structure and resource mobilization” and “political opportunity”) refers to one of the main social movements theories. The third category is more specifically related to local people attitude and organization: it refers to local and cultural identity items, considered here as motive to mobilize.

The legal opportunity structure was first considered as a feature but is, for the reason pointed out previously in this paper (priority given to a political solution), removed

from the scheme as it is not spatially specific within Wallonia, and was not perceived as a central element for the various stakeholders interviewed.

**Figure 3. Working hypothesis**

1. <b>Social Movements Structure and Resource Mobilization</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Connections with larger structures (social, environmental NGOs) for support, expertise, resources, ...</li> <li>b. Support and dynamism from local NGOs</li> <li>c. Community/Neighborhood dynamic and social networks</li> </ul>
2. <b>Political Opportunity<sup>5</sup></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Openness of local authority to public participation and information (perception)</li> <li>b. Nature of local political bodies and its orientation towards urban environmental quality</li> <li>c. Local leadership, leading figures, “allies”</li> <li>d. <del>Electoral instability</del></li> <li>e. Division between elites</li> </ul>
3. <b>People</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. « <i>Soft gentrification</i> » and well-off populations in determining neighborhood reconversion</li> <li>b. Social composition of mobilizing structures and people (representativeness of territory/NH under study), evolutionary composition of constituency over time (Snow et al., 1986)</li> <li>c. Expertise and education of local people</li> <li>d. Leader, leadership, strong leading figure</li> <li>e. Perception of the problems (grievances) (Snow et al., 1986), cognitive liberation (McAdam)</li> <li>f. People’s turnover in deprived neighborhoods and occupancy status (owners-occupier versus tenants, length of residency)</li> </ul>

#### **Section 4. Case Studies and Most Similar System Design (MSSD)**

As mentioned earlier, the main idea of this research is to work on two neighborhoods, with different mobilizations profiles and to try to understand what are the factors explaining successful greening and better livability processes. This analysis will be completed by a second case study to be conducted in England during Spring 2015.

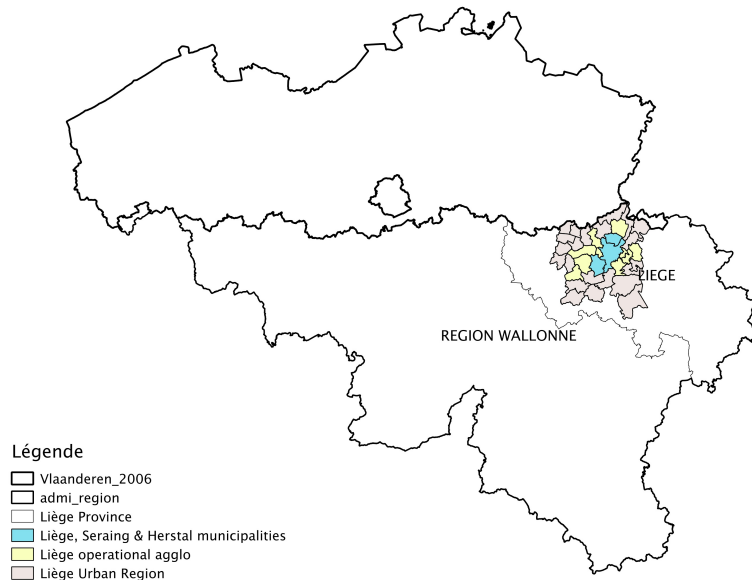
The city of Liège, my first case study, has around 200.000 inhabitants within the municipality and around 650.000 for the whole “urban region” (Van Hecke, Jean-Marie et al. 2009), comprising thirty-five municipalities. Located within the Meuse valley, in the eastern part of the Walloon Region, near the Dutch and German

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<sup>5</sup> Following Koopmans (1995), we choose to go beyond reporting the « objective » characteristics of political systems in explaining collective action to try to understand how those variables are part of and affect SM’ decisions and actions. An opportunity needs be conceived as one by grassroots, local actors Koopmans, R. (1995). *Democracy from below: New social movements and the political system in West Germany*, Westview Pr.

boarders, the main city of the region has faced economic and industrial decline since the 1960s and 1970s, with the closure of many industrial facilities.

**Figure 4. The Walloon Region and Liège within Belgium**



**Figure 5. Our Case Study, Liège**

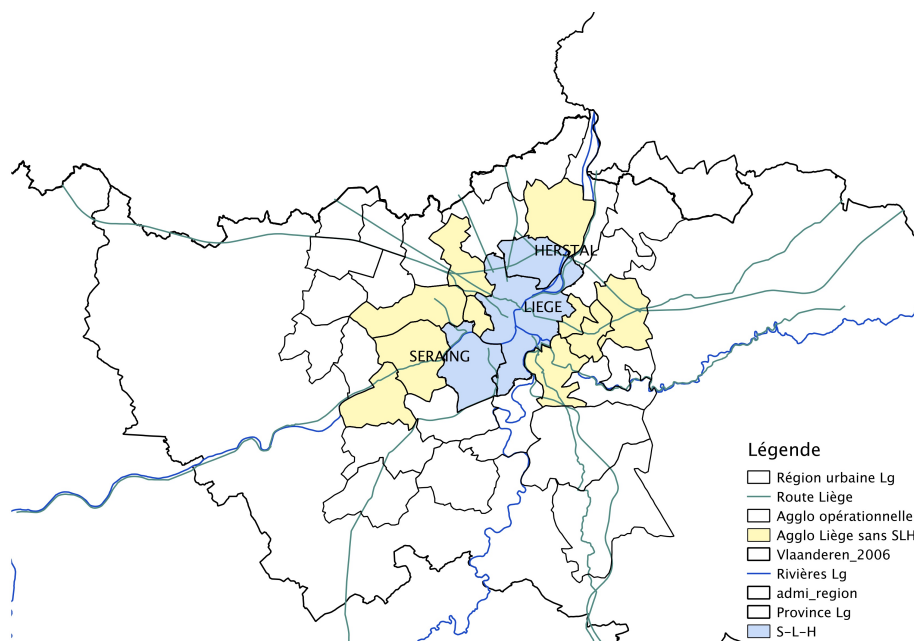


Figure 4 locates Liège (as well as Herstal and Seraing, our two case studies, in blue) in Belgium and Wallonia. Figure 5 more specifically situates the main municipalities forming the Liège operational agglomeration (in yellow) and the wider urban region – a classical way to divide the Belgian territory following a monograph realized in 2001 on the major Belgian cities and their area of influence (Van Hecke, Jean-Marie et al. 2009)).

For the purpose of this research, those two municipalities, directly connected to the central administrative municipality of Liège were chosen as case studies. The starting point of this reflection is to put into perspective two similar contexts, two municipalities characterized by economic decline and a nascent reconversion process, high rates of poverty and unemployment, but who are also very distinctive in terms of political and local mobilizations for urban environmental and renewal policies. The “most similar system design” (MSSD) (Landman 2008), adapted from international comparative politics (Mills), is chosen in order to identify the main explaining factors of urban greening processes at the local, neighborhood level. The idea is to emphasize one specific feature, all the other being most similar in both cases (here: socioeconomic criteria, industrial tradition, and so on). This method will be more effective in helping us identifying the factors determining environmental mobilization.

**Figure 6. Most similar system design versus most different system design**

	<i>MSSD</i> <i>Difference<sup>†</sup></i>			<i>MDSD</i> <i>Agreement<sup>†</sup></i>		
	<i>Country 1</i>	<i>Country 2</i>	<i>Country <math>\Phi</math></i>	<i>Country 1</i>	<i>Country 2</i>	<i>Country <math>\Phi</math></i>
Features	<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>g</i>
	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>h</i>
	<i>c</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>i</i>
Key explanatory factor(s)	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	not <i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>
Outcome to be explained	<i>y</i>	<i>y</i>	not <i>y</i>	<i>y</i>	<i>y</i>	<i>y</i>

**Source:** Landmann, T., *Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics. An introduction*, Routledge, Third Edition, 2008, p. 71. (Adapted from Skocpol and Somers (1980:184))

**Figure 7. Similarities and Differences (MSSD) in two neighborhoods**

	<b>Seraing</b>	<b>Herstal</b>
<b>Similarities</b>	<p>Socioeconomic decline: unemployment, poverty, newly arrived immigrants</p> <p>Environmental inequalities: atmospheric and soil pollution, industrial landscape</p> <p>Localization: along the Meuse river (upstream), mainly in the bottom of the valley</p>	<p>Socioeconomic decline: unemployment, poverty, newly arrived immigrants</p> <p>Environmental inequalities: atmospheric and soil pollution, industrial landscape, mixed economic activities, important motorway</p> <p>Localization: along the Meuse river (downstream), mainly in the bottom of the valley</p>
<b>Differences</b>	<p>Collective mobilization: NGOs, local authorities, residents</p> <p>Strategic and prospective vision of spatial development</p> <p>Global reconversion of the Seraing basin</p>	<p>Lack of collective action, no specific vision for the municipality, no coherent visibility</p> <p>Important undergoing project: Trilogiport</p>

First, Seraing, in the upriver part of the city, which is characterized, on the one hand, by high rates of unemployment - the valley was directly hit by industrial closures (one third of its territory used to be dedicated to industry), with its latest blow in 2011 with the decision by the ArcelorMittal group to close the blast furnaces and coking plant (achieved in June 2014) -, newly arrived immigrants, structural poverty and structural economic decline. On the other hand, since early 2000s, the city has taken a strategic turn for the future of its territory. A major study was conducted to report on the local situation and needs. Indeed, the city's authorities entrusted a consortium of international architects and urban planners to produce a plan designed to define the strategic development of the city, to help cope with the planned closures and their economic consequences on an already impoverished city. Many initiatives have been taken at the neighborhood, community and city levels to encourage urban renewal: new public spaces, parks, housing projects, retail centers, city administrative buildings, and so on. These projects are, for most of them, currently under



construction. Seraing is our ‘positive’ case study: many initiatives are currently reshaping the city center.

Second, Herstal, our “negative” case study, is, as well, characterized by high rates of poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation and industrial plants (i.e., the Chertal steel plant; FN Herstal, a leading firearms manufacturer in Europe; Intradel, the intercommunal structure for waste management; and a major regional project, Trilogiport, aimed at expanding the Liège port into a multimodal platform). This second case study will begin during Fall 2014.

As this is a work in progress, the first results I present here are not definitive and will have to be contrasted with other case studies. As mentioned, my first fieldwork is on the municipality of Seraing, along the Meuse river, and more specifically on a historical neighborhood, called “Le Molinay”, located just above downtown Seraing. This neighborhood used to be home to workers employed in the many factories of the city, characterized by a mix of populations (Italian immigrants were numerous after world war 2), a dynamic community with lots of stores and economic activity. Since the 1960s, however, with the closure of many industrial sites (collieries), the neighborhood has become poorer and gradually deteriorated.

The masterplan, an important initiative from the municipality in early 2000s to face the last closure of industrial plants, kind of “forgot” to include this historical part of the city into its core strategy.

**Figure 8: The Master plan for the Seraing basin**



**Source:** ERIGES (régie communale autonome de Seraing), [online]: <http://www.eriges.be>, 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2014

Actors from le Molinay, lead by the CAL, non religious action center, decided to force the city to “integrate” them to the masterplan, the global strategy of the city. Studies were conducted, foresight analyses of the neighborhood were carried out (the “Molinay 2017” initiative). This is the first ingredient of the neighborhood’s successful strategy: local associative networks are dense and strong. The ability of local actors to formalize residents’ grievances and expectations regarding their neighborhoods, through an important consultation of all stakeholders (a three-type actors’ approach was developed – elected officials, residents’ and ‘technicians’<sup>6</sup>) via a worldcafés method, that is innovative and tends to include a maximum of stakeholders. Le Molinay is an example of active social networks in socially deprived territories: “*There can be a really important local and community life in deprived neighborhoods: social actions, support and also via schools*”. There is a need for intermediate actors’ intervention (local NGOs), able to get in touch with the most deprived segment of the population. This neighborhood, without entering into specific data, is extremely precarious, with, for instance, 50% of single households, 10% of houses with outside toilets, and median income far below the national level<sup>7</sup>.

Furthermore, the identity of the neighborhood is important for local residents. They, however, suggest that they are loosing the neighborhood spirit and identity, as new comers (immigrants, asylum seekers) arrive and create an important turnover of population.

There was obviously not always a formalized and precise vision of “the project to do” for their neighborhood/city, but orientations, experiences and personal feelings of the problems in the Molinay - visual problems, experiences of deprivation and exclusion, the image of the neighborhood (and more specifically the need to open up the neighborhood, physically, isolated from the rest of the city due to industrial facilities siting) – were key to renewal projects.

The strong political support received is as well decisive, in this municipality run by the socialist party for decades (the current mayor is the son of the previous one). The strength of this party in the city recalls for a necessary support and dialogue for NGOs with city authorities in conducting environmental projects. Public authorities, at the same time, seek to develop a stimulating image and strategy, “*to make things possible and doable by local actors*” and stimulate a “*snowball effect*” of city action on many private, local actors. At least, this is the official speech among city officials and other key actors in the renewal process.

As for the occupancy status of the housings in the neighborhood, we supposed that owners would be more concerned with the quality of their environment than tenants, but first analyses from the Molinay show that some owners are also really poor people, facing economic and environmental problems.

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<sup>6</sup> Technicians are experts of their neighborhood: local government officers, NGOs, and so on. This ‘division’ of actors was elaborated by the CAL (laic/non religious action center).

<sup>7</sup> We would like to thank the AREBS for all the important data conveyed.



In the economic and financial current situation in Wallonia and at the municipality level, many actions launched locally are projects following funding requests from regional (urban and land planning policies), national (federal urban policy), and mostly European funds (FEDER). The European Fund is key to Seraing's development strategy, for which the city needs major public investments, that the Walloon Region cannot provide. This leads community actions to be decided according to expedience, with today an overtly economic orientation.

## **Conclusion**

This paper mainly introduces my research methodology, a twin-track method, combining data to set up the framework for environmental inequalities analysis in Belgium, and interviews with stakeholders to go deeper into the factors explaining mobilization and the socio-political configuration of power and action in environmentally oriented urban renewal strategies.

Without going into more details about case studies and first results of fieldwork, I propose here some connections between this specific project and the links between social movements and policy change in the specific case of urban environmental mobilizations.

This topic fits well the general theme of this workshop as I believe any study dedicated to social and environmental movements in deprived neighborhoods cannot be separated from policy impacts and more, from the constant back-and-forth movement between local action (bottom-up), on the one hand, and public strategies and policies, on the other, closely intertwined.

The idea to study how public policies might be impacted by social movements' action is definitely at the core of urban renewal and greening processes in my case studies. The very idea to even separate the study of environmental social movements from public policy setting (agenda setting and policy orientation) at the local scale is irrelevant, as the two are acting together, supporting one another.

The impact of environmental mobilization on policy formulation suggests a bottom-up approach, the recipe for successful regeneration policies and a potential transformation from the ground up: in procedural terms (how can poor populations can better mobilize and make their voice heard? What are the tools, procedures better able to include them into a efficient decision-making procedure, as many scholars have explore the famous 'public participation' solution from all sides for years without being able to really mobilize this type of public). Via EI and environmental mobilization in deprived neighborhoods, we believe that we can highlight the grievances of poor populations, the way they formulate them and how it is translated onto the political agenda and into public policies directed at urban regeneration. The efficiency of the process and of the goals can be reached only if we know exactly, from the ground-up, the demands, realities and own goals of the people mostly touched by environmental inequality and social exclusion. In substantive terms, with the new responsibility over city policies for the Walloon

regional power<sup>8</sup>, the idea of this research relies in better understanding what could be innovative, close to the reality of impacted populations, and efficient in encouraging positive greening processes in urban areas, with limited budgets (that is, what could be “incorporated into the content of the policy” itself). In the context of the “regionalization” of the ‘federal urban policy’ and the need to find new answers and solutions, this research proposes to analyze the modalities of inclusion of poor populations (what generates local mobilization) and to put into perspective the tools used until now to foster urban growth, be it economic, social or environmental. Capitalizing on successful factors will allow for reducing environmental inequalities, involving local people into complex spaces of political regulation and by implementing those factors into public policies directed at urban and neighborhood renewal.

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<sup>8</sup> Some instruments already exist to act upon deprived areas in Walloon cities. As urban and land planning are regional competences since the 1980s, urban renovation and revitalization, as well as priority areas for urban regeneration processes, have been set up. However they suffer greatly from a lack of public funding.

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