

TERRITORIAL RECONVERSION AND TERRITORIAL KNOWLEDGE: ADDED-VALUE OF A  
TERRITORIAL INTELLIGENCE PROCESS IN FLÉMALLE (BELGIUM)

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**Breuer Christophe**

*PhD. Student, Research Assistant in Geography & Urban planning – University of Liege*

*Associate researcher of the SEGEFA*

*Master complémentaire en Urbanisme et aménagement du territoire*

*Master en Sciences Géographiques*

*christophe.breuer@ulg.ac.be, +32 (0) 4 366 57 47*

**Deville Guénaël**

*Director SEGEFA – University of Liege*

*Docteur en Sciences*

*G. Devillet@ulg.ac.be, +32 (0) 4 366 53 19*

**Mérenne-Schoumaker Bernadette**

*Invited Professor – University of Liege (Department of Geography)*

*B.Merenne@ulg.ac.be, +32 (0) 4 366 53 24*

**Address**

*SEGEFA - lepur*

*Département de Géographie*

*Université de Liège*

*Allée du 6 août, 2 (Bât. B11)*

*B – 4000 Liège*

*www.segefa.be*

**Submitted form:** *communication / presentation*

**Theme treated:** *B – From knowledge of territories to territorial action*

*C – Territorial Governance, vulnerable populations and territories voltage*

## **Preamble**

The areas of industrial tradition have to face many challenges, among which the reduction of unemployment, soil depollution, economic redeployment and urban revival are important issues. These basins are singularly affected by world and regional dynamics, in front of which the local actors, first concerned, feel penniless. More generally, one can consider that local territories are subjected to increasingly complex constraints and dynamics (delocalization, metropolisation, exurbanisation...). This makes essential the search for innovating solutions in order to ensure a harmonious development of territories respecting sustainable development principles.

Conscious of the fact that the economic redeployment cannot be considered under only one sectoral angle, but that it is necessary to adopt a systemic approach; the SEGEFA brought its methodological support and its expertise in order to create a project of territory which integrates economic, social and environmental dimensions. This final report must make it possible for the Commune to take specific measures for the concretization of a strategic development plan. Consequently, it constitutes a tool of decision-making aid. At the beginning of the project, the participation of citizens was privileged in order to enrich the diagnosis by a more perceptive approach, and to share the conclusions of the territorial project for the broadest adhesion possible. Consequently, territorial actors were recognized as experts of the real-life experience of their territories, essential component of the participative step.

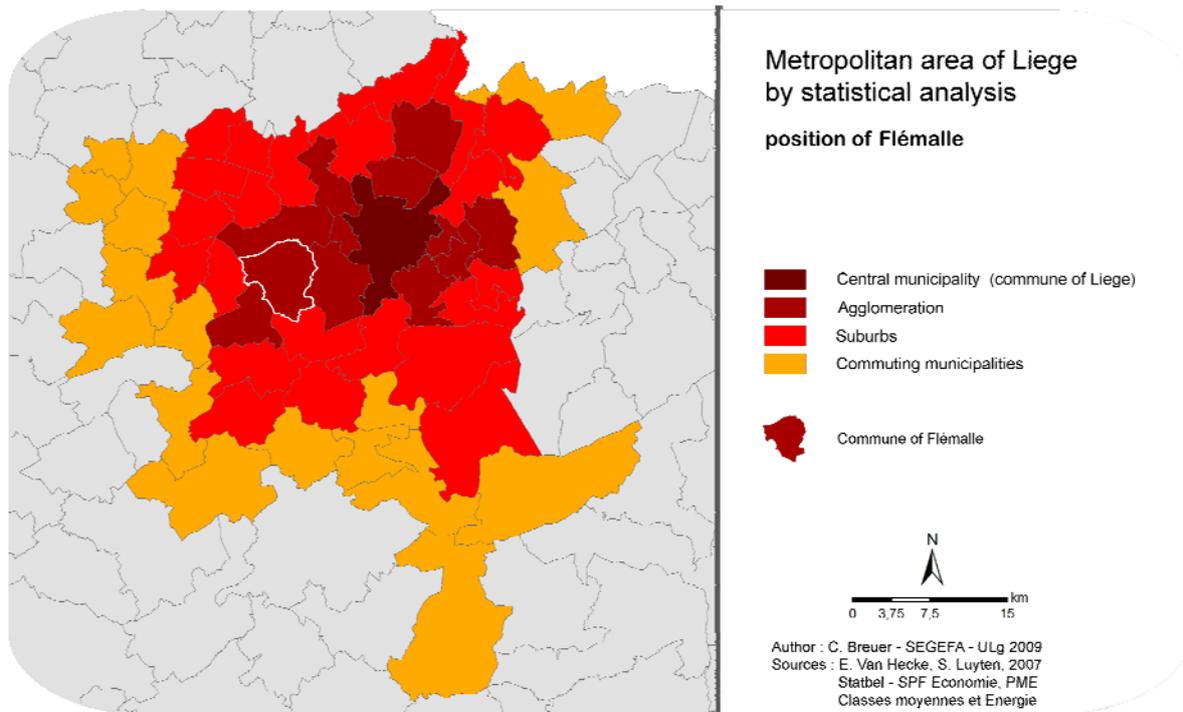
The experiment carried on in Flémalle tends to engage a permanent process of territorial intelligence, through the actors and with the support of an expert assessment either internally or externally. The first part of this article will deal with the particular context of the research, which tends to justify the emergence of the concept of territorial intelligence in a metropolitan context. The second chapter will be related to the methods employed in order to implement the stages, before approaching the results of the latter in the third chapter. The last chapter will approach, finally, the keys of the success of the process and the added-value generated by a process of territorial intelligence, in view of the research undertaken in the coordination action of the European network of territorial intelligence (caENTI).

## **I. Context of the research**

Confronted with main issues areas of industrial tradition are facing today, the Commune of Flémalle (Wallonia, Belgium) requested the support of the Department of Fundamental and Applied Economic Geography of the University of Liege (SEGEFA - ULg) after having invited bids, to work out a methodology and define a strategic plan. The objective was the redeployment of its territory in the respect of sustainable development. The project was carried out between the end of 2008 and the middle of the year 2009.

The Commune of 24.963 inhabitants (2008) sprawls over 36,68 km<sup>2</sup>. The entity is at the same time part of the morphological agglomeration of Liege in the bottom of the Meuse valley, and part of its suburban area on the plateau (the agglomeration of Liège is the 3rd agglomeration of Belgium after Brussels and Antwerp and contains nearly 600.000 inhabitants). Such localisation and physical constraints generated an important heterogeneity in the commune (opposition between the industrial valley and the dynamic plates, but also between certain historical localities), which involves the need for a spatialized strategic vision which takes into account local specificities. Like the rest of the Walloon industrial basin, the area was particularly affected by the changes in the iron and steel industry – 19.30% of the employee jobs of the commune (ONSS, 2009) – which employed many workers and consumed most of the space in the valley, and where populations and economic activities

cohabit. Despite the presence of many companies in the economic parks of activities located in the commune, unemployment remains particularly high with 17.59% (2009). The economic and financial crisis of 2007 - 2009 contributed in addition to make increase local unemployment rate. Particularly, the shut-down of some iron and steel production equipments owned by international companies had significant effects on local subcontractors.



*Fig. 1: Localisation of Flémalle in Liège's metropolitan zone*

The particular position of the commune in the margin of the populated urban area of Liège also inscribes Flémalle within metropolitan dynamic of functional reorganization, generated either by the public authorities or by proper tendencies of various growth sectors for the future of Liège. Thus, although confronted with a reorganization of apparatuses of production and metals treatment, the commune continues in parallel to the implementation of economic activity zones primarily linked with logistics (proximity of the airport of Liège - 8th European airport for freight transport). Paradoxically, and despite the fact that the activity is slowed down by the world economic crisis, positive signs are thus perceptible and are potentially federator elements for local and regional actors.

The economic reorientation generated by these processes is supported by the assistance of the Walloon region (legal, financial and technical aids). In addition it is a regional subvention that financed the study undertaken by the SEGEFA called "pilot project for local management of the industries reconversion on the basis of the case of analysis of Flémalle". We will see that the study and the carried out steps exceed largely the specific case of communes in economic reconversion, and are transferable to a large number of local entities.

In spite of the extent of the task, the pilot project was carried out in less than 6 months, drafting of the reports included. Such time constraint required the implementation of a particular strategy of collection and data processing. This allowed the project to quickly achieve significant results. The temporal limit set up for political (regional elections on which depend subvention) and financial

reasons (budget of the study). In addition, it appears in addition that a too long study tends to disunite partners and erode participation (BREUER and al., 2009a).

## II. Methodology

The reflexive process included three successive and interdependent phases, which required a prospective sight and an important preparatory work.

Phases of the process were validated during experiments of local development undertaken previously by the SEGEFA amongst different spaces and institutional levels (for example, BREUER and al., 2008a). Nevertheless, it is silent partners - here the steering committee which was composed of communal, regional and sectoral representatives - who endorse the final organization, and in particular the degree of opening and participation of the public.

The process was conceived to be cyclic and continuous, in a dynamic of permanent and directed strategic scanning along strategic axes. Schematically, the process can be represented by a “strategic wheel”.



*Fig. 2: Process wheel*

**The first phase** (2 months) consisted in the territorial data acquisition which allowed to characterize the commune and to identify its major challenges. This research was essentially based on the actualization of many territorial diagnoses carried out by other sources (economic missions, regional diagnoses, previous studies...), and was following double objective: on the one hand, to capitalize on researches already carried out, and, on the other hand, to have a complete diagnosis within a tight time-budget (administrative calendar, fundings...). Analysis on various topics (as regards town and country planning, of the retail business, employment, the formation...) was thus examined in order to determine subjects of stakes on which to work and different links between them.

This part of the diagnosis was carried out with the collaboration of the local actors during specific talks. It is thus relatively confidential and is concluded by the installation of a “cold” prediagnosis, without the participation of many people. The diagnosis was shared only during the second phase.

**The second phase** (2 months) was participative. It pursued three goals: the validation of the cross diagnosis (mainly charted), as well as the identification of stakes to put forward solutions and projects to be implemented in order to achieve goals. This reflexive approach joined together more than 120 different speakers during seven themed roundtables or focus groups (one per week) about the following topics: “territorial attractiveness”, “territorial and urban planning projects”, “physical planning documents”, “exporting economy”, “residential economy” (including retail business), “culture and tourism”, and finally “strategic development scheme”. The aspects related to the employment and the formation were integrated, initiated by a reflexive stage carried out in parallel by the FOREM (Walloon Public service for the employment and the formation) and local actors. Indeed, process flexibility allowed to integrate various reflections from which conclusions led to working axes.

Each focus group started with a short presentation of the set of themes (20 minutes) carried out by the SEGEFA. This allowed to highlight the essential points of the initial diagnosis and to objectify the feeling of some actors. The presentation was centered more on the state of the territory (indicators, etc), than on a prospective vision. It contained the observation of tendencies and effects of certain dynamics or political orientations. Data were processed in order to be both pragmatic and communicative: charts and cartographic representations were privileged, in particular through a set of basic charts. On particular sets of themes, external guests came in order to present their projects and good practices, in order to stimulate the discussion.

The second part of each focus group was dedicated to the discussion of the diagnosis, the identification of challenges and the proposal of certain path for action. Particularly in this phase, actors were encouraged to discuss, to find necessary synergies between them, and maybe conclude certain missions. A moderator specialised in the field discussed was named for each meeting in order to frame the debate and to avoid sterile and inappropriate debates. In addition, the moderator concluded the meeting by a recall of the different points approached and a description of the proposals made by the actors.

The last focus group on the “strategic development scheme” was particular as it was aimed at validating a first version of the communal strategy. This first version was formatted by the SEGEFA and was formalized through working axes. In order to work on these points, the meeting started with a presentation from the pre-strategy and followed by a discussion about working axes by workshops. It is only after this last discussion and its validation by local actors that the last phase could be launched.

**A last phase** (one month and half) was necessary in order to formalize the communal development scheme (created by the SEGEFA) and make a proposition to the communal authorities (City council). The development scheme which is articulated around a “territory vision”, an actual local paradigm, is ventilated in three principal strategic components: territorial intelligence, sustainable development and communication. Strategic planning gives place to a series of work axes and concrete actions considered as “leverage actions” for local redeployment. The development scheme recommends the development of a contractual formalization between local actors leading to a successful conclusion made full of strategic actions

### **III. Results**

The strategic development scheme was formalized in a report of 173 pages showing the various modules of the strategy. The prioritised stakes and actions were reported spatially on a map of the “stakes zone”.

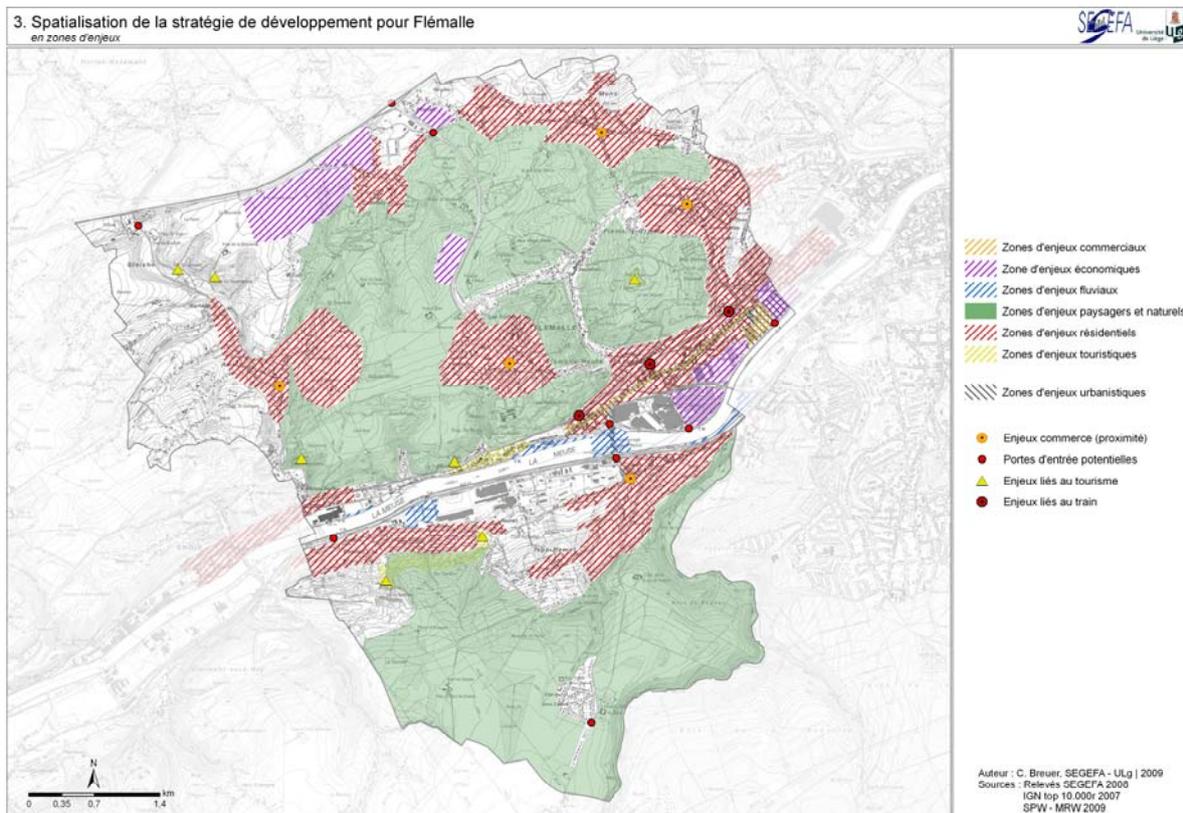


Fig. 3: Map of the “stakes zones”

Owing to an online form, participants focus groups could classify on a hierarchical basis actions suggested in an indicative way ( the arithmetic mean of the weighted importance of actions).The indication given want to constitute a kind of decision-making aid for local authorities in order to define their priorities.

Local authorities adopted the strategic scheme of development and registered certain actions within the communal budget. In addition, a network of actors was formed around some working axes and a specific cell was set up to collect funds allowing the implementation of the operations considered. The SEGEFA continues the monitoring of the process and will certainly be elected to evaluate its impacts.

Finally, the online form was also the opportunity to probe the opinion of focus groups participants. Eighty-eight pourcents of participant found the participative experiment positive or very positive, which shows the great degree of adhesion to the approach and the wish for its prolongation. Least positive evaluations underline the time of discussion between participants (2 hours), which was considered to be too short for forty pourcents of the surroundings participants.

#### IV. Added-value of a territorial intelligence process

It is complex to evaluate the added-value of a process of territorial intelligence, whether this one is limited in time or, on the contrary, permanent. The quantification of this approach is a challenge, and the hindsight on the experiment of Flémalle does not allow to consider this one. Nevertheless, the

experience shows that this manner of proceeding in a complex space tends to improve dynamics and to lead in a more efficient way to tangible results. Nevertheless, this process cannot be separated from an essential operational nature: thus, some previous experiments (BREUER and al., 2008a) showed that in the absence of an institutional level with proper skills and financial power, strategic planning has little chance to succeed.

As previously underlined (BREUER and al., 2009a), the territorial process of territorial intelligence has several comparative advantages, particularly in terms of data acquisition (the information network allows one to target relevant information within a more restricted period of times) and treatment of those. In fact, nontangible explanatory factors perceived by actors can be taken into account, and interpretation is facilitated. In addition, adhesion of stakeholders is an important stage for the strategic development scheme application, in particular with institutions which can give funding.

The first opinion survey for participants by the use of an online form proves to be conclusive, *inter alia* stimulating the participation and maintaining adhesion with project in general. In addition, the hierarchisation of objectives and strategic actions via a form of the same type has given encouraging results, but adaptations are necessary in order to use results in an efficient way make a concrete use of the results.

One of the first added-value of the approach of territorial intelligence is the establishment of sustainable and dynamic relations between local actors. These allow, *inter alia*, the implementation synergies and strategic partnerships not considered before. At the same time, this report is established for intracommunal actors, but also for many particular supracommunal actors dependant from different structures of supervision. Their meetings with local operators are particularly seldom. The process of territorial intelligence may allow the rearticulation of a dialog between different operators working at different levels, but acting on the same territory, this by breaking the compartmentalization and by restoring transfer between them.

In a poorly institutionalized metropolitan context such as the one of Flémalle (BREUER, 2009), prospects offered by territorial intelligence for multiscale integration are thus multiple. Although, they must also take into account the “physical and human” limitations of such approach. The process of territorial intelligence, whose participation is a key for success, requires a very important temporal and financial investment, which may influence the perenniality of the operation as well as scope.

The process can also be enlightened through the research undertaken in the caENTI project, which brought new perspectives on the approach. Thus, question related to indicators (sustainable development and competitiveness) charts, on the one hand, (DEVILLET and al. 2009; GIRARDOT and al. 2006), and the relevant territory, in the other hand, (DEVILLET and al., 2007), have been addressed and find all their relevance in their local application. Nevertheless, although a conceptual research axis, very useful, the research undertaken within the framework of the caENTI is developed upon a relatively large territorial scale of analysis, inappropriate compared to specific needs of local actors. Nevertheless the operational tools developed (in particular the cartography of indicators at the European scale) allow to carry out a first stage of benchmarking, although a more important number of indicators available is absolutely necessary to be actually efficient and useful.

## **Conclusion**

Our communication aims at spreading the participative approach implemented in Flémalle (“new governorship”), but also at discussing the contribution of the theoretical and applied research undertaken within the framework of the caENTI for local projects (NTIC, participation, animation, analyzes....), the objective is to measure its added-value and transposability within territories of industrial tradition in a context of financial and temporal limitations.

While clarifying and dealing with the concepts of vulnerability, competitiveness, durability and participation, the caENTI project favourably influenced the concept of territorial intelligence by directing in a pragmatic way the operational research-action at various spatial scales. The experiment in Flémalle confirms that the establishment of an integrated and continuous strategy, or their analysis shared in between the actors, contributes to the implementation of an actual project of territory on the long run. Although initially limited to territories of industrial reconversion, the process showed its transposability within many territories. Nevertheless, the prevalence of institutional and economic actors, specific to problems of economic redeployment, tends to reinforce the efficiency of the process owing to actual powers of action existing on the territory and the times involved. Although cultural and social questions also found a positive feedback, results are expected to be in the short or the long term.

Prospectively, techniques implemented to frame the territorial approach of intelligence will be embedded in local realities, and will use generic tools with specific territorial databases. The previous experiences show that the local context must be integrated to adapt tools and methods to be efficient. This embeddedness is made imperative by specificities and heterogeneity of governance’s modes, data availability, actors and challenges.

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