Interview UVCW

For more information about this interview, please contact Mr. Maxim Chantillon (KU Leuven Public Governance Institute – maxim.chantillon@kuleuven.be)

As the UVCW was unable to attend the kick-off meeting of the FUC, the project was first presented. Afterwards a discussion and interactive session took place in which the focus lied on:
- Possible case studies
- The role of the UVCW
- The interaction with the Flemish sister organization
- The current difficulties of the cities and communities
- The role of the UVCW in the digitalization of cities and communities in the Walloon Region

Possible case studies
- BeSt Adress: Also the communities are involved in it – especially the practical approach and the workload linked to it is of interest for the UVCW. It would be very interesting to use this as a use case because it is on the verge of being validated. However, he believes that, once it will have to be implemented concretely by the communities, some issues might occur that were not foreseen. Therefore, it could be interesting for us to see what these issues are and to take them into account in our blueprint.
- Information of the cadaster: regionalization leads to new situation that brings new challenges as well (might be interesting to focus on this – also the VVSG pointed to the relation between the FOD Finance and the Flemish Region). Communities and villages have a financial interest as they base their taxes on this system as well. Furthermore, there is also the real estate aspect – e.g. redevelopment of areas, real estate companies looking for properties etc. Also linked to BeSt (it was underlined by the respondent that there is a link between BeSt and the Cadaster as a consequence of the regionalization. This leads to an increase in the complexity level and, as a consequence, to failure in a number of projects or disagreement between actors involved). One of the problems is also the access to the systems (system is called URBAIN). This access issue seems to be linked to the fact that the system that had to be put in place in this regard has failed and the communities now wonder where they will get access to the said information.
- Traffic / mobility project: regional database with all the traffic signs in it – under creation. In Flanders they already did it, however project largely failed due to administrative / technical problems (see also one of the case studies done by Lies Van Cauter).
- Security aspect: emergency forces (e.g. police, fire brigades) need a system to indicate were the black points are, to indicate general problems etc (not yet a clear project, might be too early to focus on this for us).

Role of the UVCW
- Help and assist the communes in the Walloon Region. Focus on the relation between the regional/federal level and the local level – both with a specific and more general focus. Their main goal is to help the communes in the implementation of the new regulations adopted by the federal and the Regional level.
- Lobby – defend the interest of the local communes at the regional and federal level (also EU but only one person). There seems to be a strong focus on the regional level – same as the VVSG – can be explained by the financial structure and the federalization of the country. Also on the federal level – focus on security / mobility / patrimonial documentation (= linked to the cases presented by the respondent).
- Act as a centralization body for some initiatives/requests/claims of the communes. For example, when a legal claim has to be filed on behalf of all or several communes of the

Walloon Region, this is taken care of by the UVCW. The UVCW also files requests to the Privacy Commission for general access authorizations to private Data held by the Federal gov/Regions.

Interaction with Flemish sister organization
Good, contacts exist. Both in an institutionalized and bilateral way – however, he didn't know the direct contact person for digitalization at the VVSG (can be interpreted as a sign of good but insufficient contacts – VVSG underlined that the relations are not very strong).
There is also a Brussels organization that is representing the local communities.
It is also interesting to point out that when they feel that a general need of all the communes (Wal/Fl/Bxl) has to be lobbied towards the Federal government, the three organizations act together as this has more political legitimacy. In fact, this is the remaining of the original single "Union of the cities and communes of Belgium", that has now been split into three organisations.

The current difficulties of the cities and communities
Interoperability
Focus lies on the local level, therefore the interoperability is not the first point of interest, especially when the action is focused on a single commune or a small territory of communes. However, if a larger number of communes are involved in the project/concern, local level often looks at the solutions that were developed in Flanders and is able to learn from them – also when mistakes are made there. This allows to create/build systems on a similar basis.
Also, iMio was founded by the local level and the UVCW to ensure that similar systems could be used by various communes / cities (instead of having each commune/ city creating its own system, which would create obvious interoperability issues) → link: www.imio.be (in Flanders CEVI.be has a similar role). However, iMio is not the only provider of such services as it is a competitive environment (Civadis is for example its main competitor).
Digitalization at the local level
All of them are online, however there is strong difference between local communes – based on:
- Strong staff & means differences (some communes only have 4 people in total while big cities have different departments, including their own IT department)
- All the topics have their own online / digital systems – however, not all communes have the time & resources to educate their staff on how to use the various programs (people need to be highly adaptable)
- Financial problems – challenges
- Rationality in the work method is becoming more and more necessary
Usability of e-services
Local communes have strong difficulties in finding the right and correct information. E.g. the Privacy Commission → therefore the UVCW is asking permission for various topics in the name of a group of local communes (also an issue that was put forward by the VVSG. Can be interesting to create a general platform grouping useful e-services)

The role of the UVCW in the digitalization of cities and communities in the Walloon Region
Horizontality of the digitalization
Digitalization is a mainstream horizontal topic within the local communes and the UVCW, however, it is not an objective in itself. It is brought into every central topic of the organization as a sub-objective.
Memorandum (2009)
- Call was launched to the Region for "ambitious measures destined at increasing the IT level of communes" → no real action has been taken so far, although the official response was that the process is ongoing. However, there is still 3 years to go.
- Smart City Award: These awards must be considered critically as they are awarded by a private sector body (Belfius) that often rewards the cities that have receive investment funds from

them. These awards only concerns the "big cities" that have even an IT department, the other cities are totally out of scope due to the "means differences".