

Intermediate organizations in citizen participation in Integrated Urban Regeneration:

The case of Sustainable Neighborhood Contracts in Brussels

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Introduction

This research is the first of the three parts of an interdisciplinary PhD project in the fields of Urbanism and Social Work. It aims to explore the role of social organisations acting as intermediaries between civil society and the state in the participation of citizens in processes of Integrated Urban Regeneration (IUR) within the precepts of sustainable urban development. The context of the research is the Brussels Capital Region, with a focus on the most deprived neighborhoods among the nineteen municipalities of the city.

Background

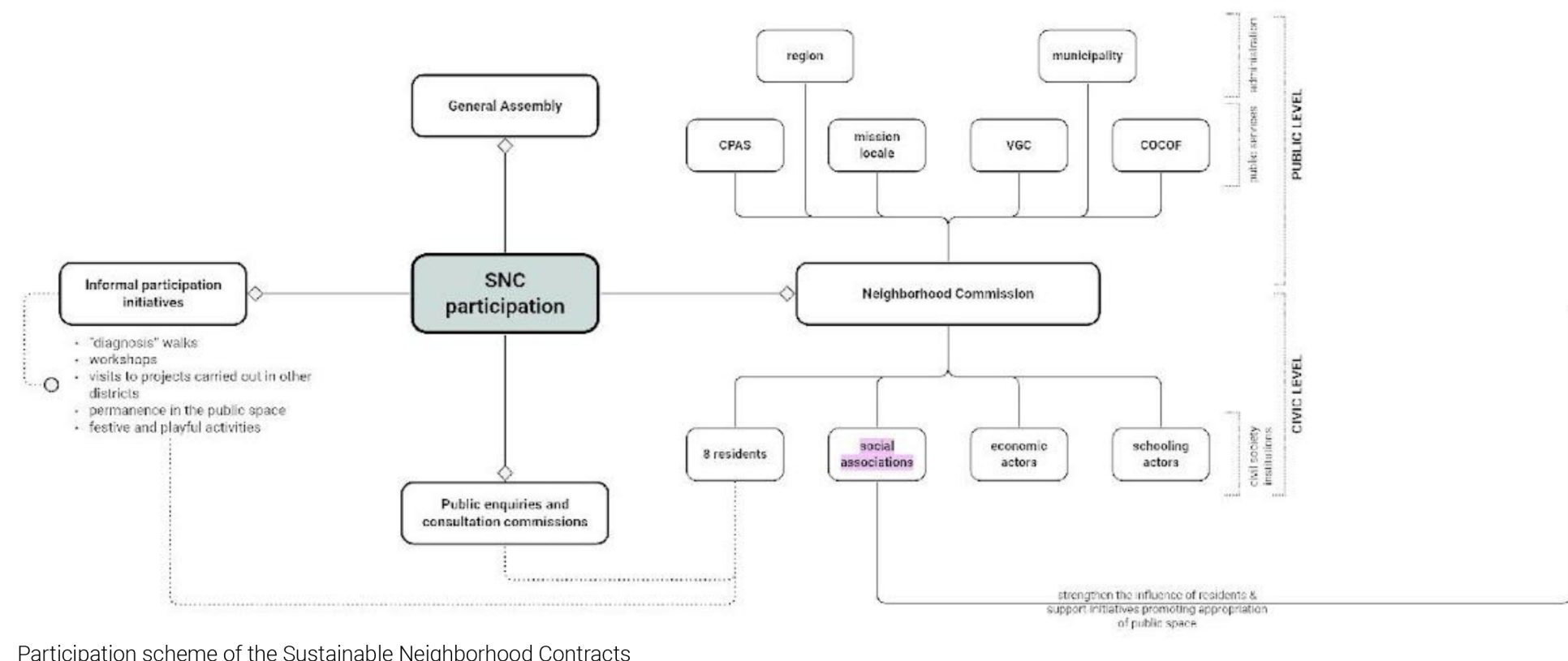
The interconnectedness of the urban problems concentrated in deprived areas has led many cities to develop holistic, area-based and decentralised policies of IUR. Going beyond sectoral approaches they aspire to develop integrated solutions to combat economic, social and environmental challenges, focusing on multi-stakeholder partnerships and citizen participation in the design and implementation of local projects.

Scholars have discussed the benefits and drawbacks of public participation in urban regeneration. They've highlighted the issue of neglecting deprived groups due to their limited involvement (Gaventa, 2003; Klöti et al., 2017) and questioned who benefits from IUR. Community-based social organizations can address these challenges through innovative service models and enhancing democracy (Healey, 2015). Authors suggest more focus on these organizations in planning research (Bailey, 2012; Monardo, 2013).

Research design

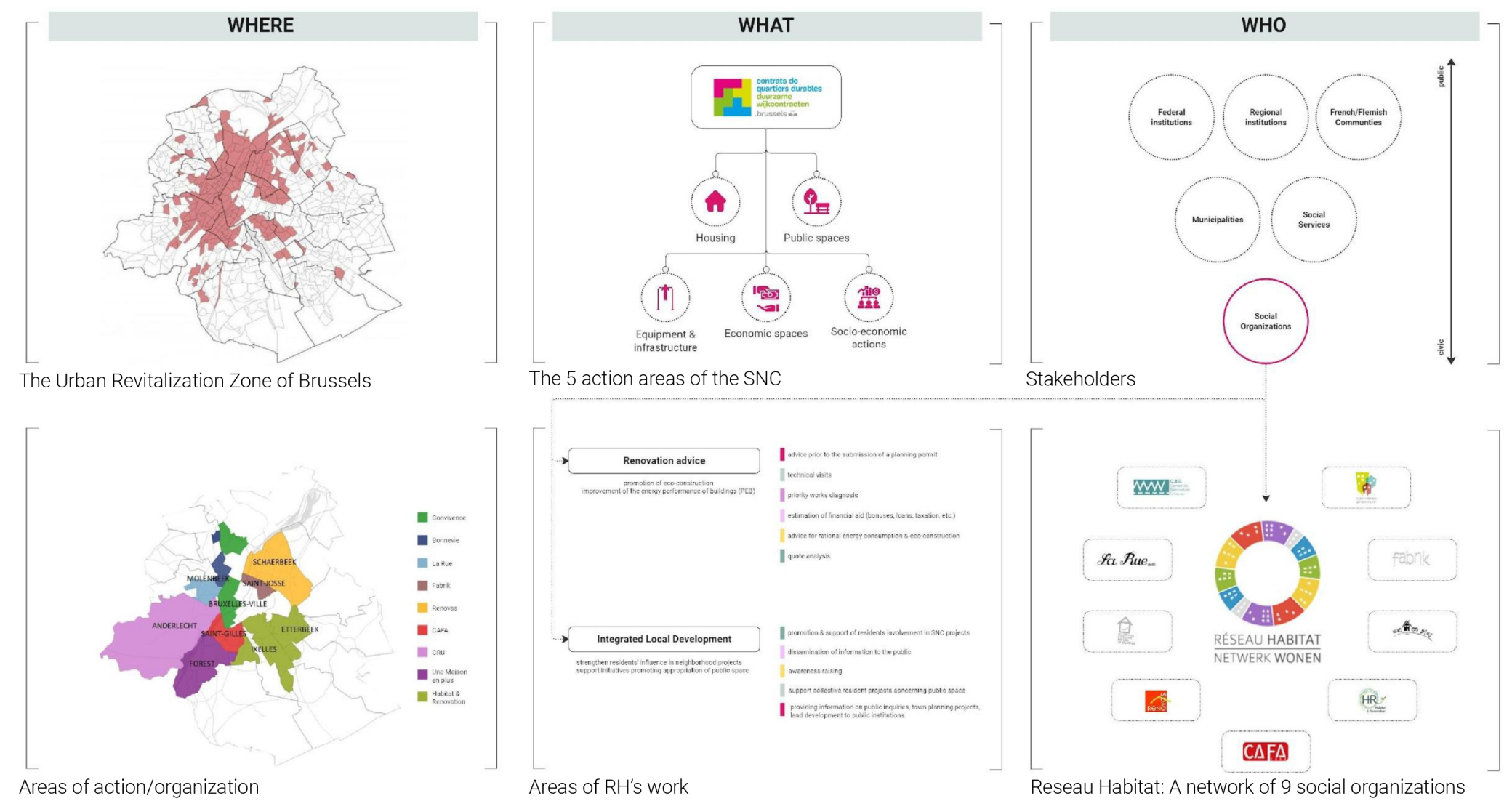
The project adopts a qualitative, exploratory design and utilizes Grounded Theory. The data collection methods employed include the analysis of a case study through:

- i) literature review on Brussels' IUR policy 'Sustainable Neighborhoods Contracts';
- ii) the analysis of nine social organisations involved in the policy using primary data collected through semi-structured interviews.

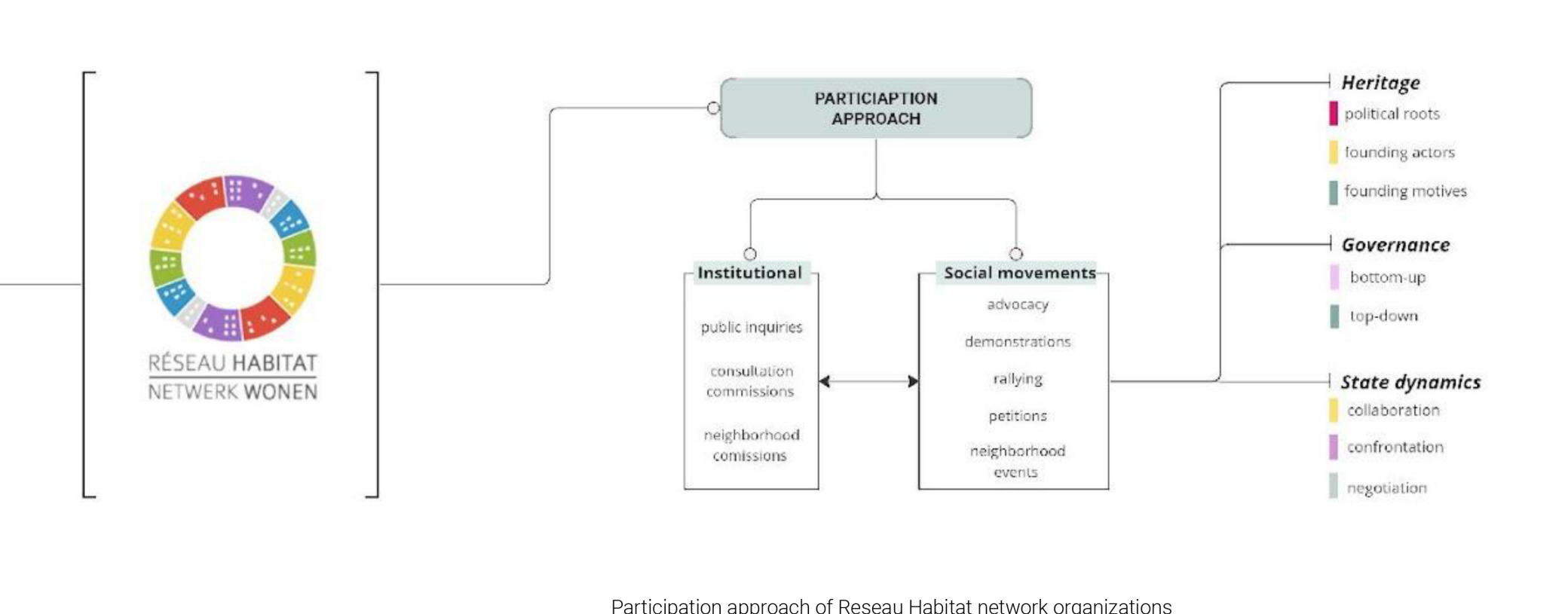


Participation scheme of the Sustainable Neighborhood Contracts

Case study: SNC, Brussels, BE



The research draws on the case study the Sustainable Neighborhood Contracts (SNC) in Brussels, introduced in the 1990s with the objective of addressing urban challenges and social issues within deprived areas through a participatory approach. Within this policy framework, various social organisations historically active in working with vulnerable populations established the network of Reseau Habitat (RH) in order to engage the inhabitants of the affected areas in the projects. Since then, their principal responsibility has been the facilitation of citizen participation on integrated local development and to expose and defend their rights and needs. Their profile, activities and approach to participation is in the centre of this investigation



Participation approach of Reseau Habitat network organizations

Findings & Future work

The empirical segment of this study indicates differences among the nine organizations of Reseau Habitat concerning resident involvement in the Local Integrated Development policy of the SNC. Findings unveil a spectrum of approaches to participation, spanning from institutional to grassroots social movements. The former adheres to the formal participation and consultation criteria stipulated by the Urban Planning Department of the region, while the latter encompasses all informal activities conducted by these organizations beyond these established frameworks. Qualitative data underscores the intrinsic connection of these patterns to aspects of heritage, governance, and the organizations' dynamics with the state. Future research will delve deeper into the primary challenge facing these organizations: environmental gentrification.

References

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- Healey, P. (2015). Civil society enterprise and local development. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 16(1), 11–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2014.995212>
- Monardo, B. (2013). The Role of Non-Profit Organizations For Innovating Urban Regeneration Strategies. Four case studies in the USA. 49th ISOCARP Congress 2013.