



## Table Ronde 2

### Pesticide Free Towns

#### Towns engaging with civil society in reaching its citizens towards pesticide free towns

##### Participants

Bénédicte Charlier - Natagora  
 Greet Tijsskens - Velt  
 Marc Fischers – Nature et Progrès  
 Bastien Domken – Adalia  
 Koen Hertoge – Pan Italy  
 Marc Wollast – Apis Bruoc Sella

Presentation of speakers including their opinion on the discussions held during the morning sessions. The videos of individual presentations are available on: <http://www.pan-europe.info/campaigns/towns/communes-sans-pesticide>

##### Debate: Questions and answers

#### **What is the biggest obstacle to motivate individual people to change and would it be possible to reach those who are not sensitive to change, for a better impact?**

The biggest obstacle is to show people that a garden without pesticide is also a nice garden. People fear neighbors' opinion with regards to their new management. It is necessary to value existing actions and good practice in pesticide free gardens. Natagora is conducting a project to show on the street side what is being done on the garden side. People can sign a charter and get a label. Natagora organises visits in Brussels in gardens which got the label, with ambassadors who share their experience during planned visits.

Greet (Velt) agrees and explains that an ecological garden can be a wild garden but this is not an obligation. There are various ways to manage gardens ecologically. Ecology in a garden is a way of managing, it is *not* a garden style (like renaissance garden, English garden...)

An important point of their campaign has been the open gardens day, during which 170 very different gardens were open to visits in Flanders and the Netherlands.

#### **When flowery meadows are sown, citizens complain that, when flowering is finished, it looks dirty. Does it improve with communication?**

Marc Wollast explains that when native species are used, they flower quite quickly and then they wilt and people start complaining. The solution is to use mixtures of indigenous and horticultural species which are interesting for biodiversity (which give at least pollen and nectar), and flower from August and longer, until October.

Municipalities need to be supported, informed, through posters, awareness raising of staff, because at internal level if workers are not convinced, it is a disaster. It is essential to appoint a competent official who is able to manage complaints and give appropriate answers. Otherwise there is a risk that complaints go up to the Mayor and that the changes are stopped at an early stage.

Almost everything can be greened. They are trying to help the municipalities in their greening process. They serve as model, their role is essential to change current practices.

PAN Italy explains their action in the village. Farmers have different needs from those of citizens. They have prepared a brochure to explain why it is better not to use pesticides. People need general information because they are not necessarily aware of pesticides. They first need to be informed about the reasons why pesticides are used. In the village they communicated through various media : newspapers, press releases, twitter, information sessions... to reach all the villagers. Communication means and content must be varied.

Velt explains that a big part of their communication is with their supporters, with people who are members of Velt and are thus an easy target as they want to be informed. To that aim, they organise trainings and produce publications. On the other hand they also try to communicate with other people, mainly through social media such as Facebook. Through this channel they receive a lot of questions to which they answer. This allows them to reach many more people than just their ecologist supporters. In addition at the moment they communicate on the Flemish legislation on pesticides, in cooperation with the Flemish Environmental Agency, to reach every citizen. But this is much more difficult.

### **What does Nature & Progrès think about the Italian experience of a village becoming completely organic ?**

Currently there are 10% of organic farmers in Wallonia, of which many come from conventional farming. This change comes generally through feminine influence and the influence of consumers who buy directly from the farm.

It is now necessary to go towards those who continue to apply chemical products, for two main reasons :

- The knowledge : those who use pesticides do not know anything else to manage their environment. They do not know that there are solutions other than chemical products. This knowledge can be spread through demonstration farms by farmers in the process of converting to organic, who show the good techniques they have found, and in which they became experts. Concerning individual citizens, it is important to inform them about the danger of these products, as they are often convinced that these products are not dangerous because they have been tested and are authorised.
- Pride : people who apply chemical products want to control nature. We need to catch them up where they are and show them that it is possible to control nature globally through ecological management of the garden. We will replace the expert in chemical products with an expert in ecological management.

The expert aware of ecological management becomes a terrific voter. He calls out to the public authorities, to his neighbours and becomes a real supporter of the organic sector. He can help to push municipalities to become 0 pesticides.

Farmers who changed to organic 4-5 years ago are the most aggressive to call out to the minister. They know how to speak and push the municipal officials to stop using pesticides.

Nature & Progrès does not believe that imposing organic through democratic power would work in Wallonia. It is possible to influence the political world through voting, writing letters etc. But the citizen can become co-actor: if he asks to a farmer to convert to organic farming, he must support this farmer and become a consumer of local products.

### **Are NGOs active in private companies and can they raise awareness among workers?**

Natagora reaches private companies concerning the planning of the surroundings of the offices : botanists come and make inventories, then propose management plans and communicate with private companies. They help in the design of nature trails in some companies. It is on a case by case basis.

Apis Bruoc Sella is involved in the framework of environmental certification (such as ISO14001). They give advice on what can be planted for example. Some companies want to open their employees' mind and organise information sessions on climate change and bees for example, and on what employees can do individually.

First they did not know that the Mayor supported them as he had to be neutral until the referendum. They felt the necessity to convert to organic because the landscape was changing, with apple tree plantings. During the preparatory phase, they took grass samples in the playgrounds and the analysis showed that 9 substances, including glyphosate, were present. These substances were found in places where children play, when it is forbidden to farmers to enter to their fields after they have spread glyphosate.

After the referendum, the mayor informed the population about his support for a pesticide free village. He is indeed responsible of the villagers health.

### **How much are people informed about the long term effect of pesticides which are still used and how can we inform them while limiting bystander exposure?**

Many non-governmental organisations receive questions concerning accidental exposure of people to pesticides, because they live besides a field which is spread or because their neighbour applies pesticides. NGOs try to assist citizens as much as possible, making sure that the individual people feel less isolated.

Adalia receives many questions on the impact of pesticides on health. These are very complicated questions and they do not have the right tools to reply as they are not physicians. They can give information from published studies but it is not enough and the information is not accessible to everyone.

If the person who applies pesticides does it legally, there is not much to be done. The best is to establish a friendly dialogue and try to change things progressively.

Greet (Velt) explains that they receive regularly questions from people whose neighbour applies pesticides, with consequences for their garden. They ask where they can order a soil analysis. It is essential to talk to the neighbours, even if it does not always work. When ordering a soil analysis, you need to know which pesticide has been used. Analyses are expensive and it is not always the solution to the problem. Talking about the pesticides reality and spreading the results of studies can help.

Pesticides are available over the counter in supermarkets and thus it is difficult to inform people that they are dangerous. In addition there is publicity on television and in magazines on these products.

For more information:

Natagora: [www.natagora.be](http://www.natagora.be)

Velt: [www.velt.be](http://www.velt.be)

Nature & Progrès: [www.natpro.be](http://www.natpro.be)

Adalia: [www.adalia.be](http://www.adalia.be)

PAN Italy: [www.pan-italia.it](http://www.pan-italia.it)

Apis Bruoc Sella: <http://www.apisbruocsella.be>