Flemish Communications House in Brussels

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INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2011, Muntpunt, the Flemish Communications House, will open its doors at the Monnaie House located Place de la Monnaie, Brussels.

The Monnaie House, currently the seat of the Metropolitan Public Library, will be transformed during the coming years into Muntpunt. It will become a lively meeting place and a consultation library, where everyone can find information on Dutch-language and city initiatives (culture, education, tourism, welfare, etc.). The Communications House will be the engine of a new common information and communication policy of the Flemish Community and the Flemish Community Commission.

The Metropolitan Public Library and Onthaal en Promotie Brussel vzw (a non-profit organisation aimed at welcoming visitors and promoting Brussels) are the main partners in the realisation of the Communications House. Both will be integrated into the operation and organisational structure of the Communications House. In addition, agreements are being made with other partners, such as Tourism Flanders.

Muntpunt will not only put the abundant Flemish offer in our capital city in the spotlight, but will also give Flanders a face in Brussels and Brussels in Flanders. Besides a modern library, it will also be a beacon of and for the Flemish Community, Flemish-Brussels organisations and their users. A centre that will not go unnoticed – literally or figuratively.
1. OPERATION

Muntpunt is a joint initiative of the Flemish Government and the Council of the Flemish Community Commission. Its aim is to implement a joint information and communication policy and become a meeting place where Flemish-Brussels organisations, associations and institutions become more visible.

It is important that the Flemish Communications House Brussels not only gives the Metropolitan Public Library the space and acting capacity proper of the adjective ‘metropolitan’, but also that it becomes a modern, efficient and lively information and documentation centre. In other words, the ideal place for meetings between and with all those who wish to make use of the rich Flemish offer in the capital when it comes to culture, education and welfare. That is why as many resources as possible for the dissemination of information will be concentrated in the operation of the Communications House. For the same reason, it is and will remain embedded in the local network of libraries and community centres. It will also be studied how existing projects, such as Living in Brussels and the Cultural Voucher, can be integrated into its operation.

The task of Muntpunt is not only to make Flemish-Brussels organisations, associations and institutions more visible, but also to give Flanders a face in Brussels and Brussels in Flanders. It should be clear that the offer that is promoted, and its quality, are an inseparable part of what the Flemish Government and community have to offer. That is why relations will be established as well with strong Flemish partners, such as CultuurNet Vlaanderen, Tourism Flanders and Vlaamse Infolijn.

1.1 MISSION AND VISION

Mission

The Flemish Government and the Council of the Flemish Community Commission implement a joint information, communication and promotion policy with a metropolitan character. The policy is directed at all inhabitants and physical and digital users and visitors of Brussels, with the aim to increase the visibility of and familiarity with the Flemish Community in Brussels, and enhance Brussels’ image as the Flemish capital.

In order to achieve this aim, Muntpunt has the following tasks:

- a one-stop service for centralised and integrated information for the individual seeker of information
- coordination of communication and promotion
- a platform for meetings and active creation, by and in collaboration with the Flemish networks, with a view to events, information provision, etc.
- an interactive website, as a digital counterpart for these three functions

Vision

Muntpunt wants to promote Flanders in Brussels and Brussels in Flanders to enhance the capital’s image and appeal and increase the knowledge, use and experience of Brussels and the identification with the capital.
Strategic objectives

1. being a meeting place for people and cultures
2. organising a physical and virtual service offering general and specific information on Flemish institutions, organisations, facilities and events in Brussels and Flanders related to education, culture, welfare and health and tourism, as well as other city information on Brussels as a residential city, a student city, a shopping city and a leisure city
3. being a metropolitan public library which, through its collection and service provision, offers knowledge, information, cultural experiences and lifelong learning
4. communicating on and promoting quality products and achievements of Flemish-Brussels institutions, organisations and facilities in the areas of education, culture, welfare and health and tourism
5. carrying out these informative, communicative and promotional tasks using current instruments which are adapted to the target groups and are highly interactive: information desk, brochures, exhibitions, debates, fairs, courses, websites, digital and audiovisual material.
6. being a platform for networks of Flemish community facilities in Brussels, with links to local actors

Values

- interactive: with customers
- reciprocal: with partners
- enriching: information, communication and promotion lead to more knowledge, use and experience
- non-restrictive: all themes and subjects that are relevant to the users will be included in the service provision

Reference framework where content is concerned

Where content is concerned, the service provision is based on four reference frameworks:

1. Flanders in Brussels: the Flemish offer in Brussels and the offer coming from Flemish organisations, without distinction between the organising institutions and, in principle, without limitation where content is concerned
2. Brussels in Flanders: the Flemish offer from Brussels and a selection of city information on Brussels as a residential city, a student city and a leisure city
3. the world in Brussels: the foreign-language, especially culture-oriented offer
4. Brussels in the world: the Flemish offer from Brussels with international relevance

Target groups

1. the Dutch-speaking inhabitants of Brussels
2. the foreign-language inhabitants of Brussels who feel or would like to feel connected to Flanders or the Dutch language
3. the inhabitants of the Flemish Community
4. the staff (and their families) of the international and diplomatic institutions in Brussels

Language use

Muntpunt is a Dutch-language institution and will, in principle, communicate in Dutch. It will also use French and English as contact languages and communicate in other languages, depending on the subject matter, the action or the target group.
1.2 STAKEHOLDER POLICY

Stakeholders

Muntpunt is not being founded for its own sake, but to act as a point of connection between the different social tasks with respect to the variety of institutions, organisations and target groups.

Fortunately, Muntpunt is not on its own, and can count on a large number of partners to help it perform its tasks.
If the Flemish Communications House wants to operate effectively and with the necessary acting capacity, it must identify the other players and enter into a network with them. They are the key in order to match the offer to the demand, to make sure the products offered correspond to the real needs of the customers and the target groups. This does not mean that Muntpunt wants to or must take over the activities and customers of others – on the contrary. Much more often, support or cooperation will prove the best way of working. Only in case of gaps in the offer will Muntpunt consider establishing an entirely new offer of its own.

The term ‘stakeholder’ is interpreted in the broadest sense, namely as a person or organisation that has an impact on or importance for Muntpunt.

A stakeholder policy implies that stakeholders are recognised for their crucial role in the strategy and continuity of the policy, and that stakeholder management is part of the organisation.

The stakeholders can be divided into two groups: customers (output side) and suppliers (input side). In this stage of the project only the second group has been approached. The stakeholder map of Muntpunt currently comprises some two hundred potential stakeholders, distributed over ten stakeholder groups. The map will be refined and updated continuously.

The stakeholders on the input side have already played an important part in the needs analysis of Muntpunt (see below).

The needs analysis

In the autumn of 2007 and the spring of 2008 a needs analysis was carried out by Landmark Libraries.

To this end, three complementary activities were performed.
A preliminary study distilled conclusions which were relevant for Muntpunt from the available research results on the behaviour and needs of inhabitants and users of Brussels, and subsequently tested them against the defined mission and vision.
In a second stage, the adjusted mission and vision were, in turn, tested against practice and the sphere of action. For this purpose, the potential stakeholders of the Flemish Communications House were identified, included in an inventory and interviewed. Next, several stakeholder meetings were organised in order to complete a detailed, multi-layered questionnaire (stakeholder group, possible role, theme) to test the stated mission and vision against reality, acquire more insight into needs and target groups, test certain conclusions from the preliminary study in the field of action and initiate a systematic and structural stakeholder policy.

The findings from the preliminary study document a number of social developments at three levels which affect the task of Muntpunt and hence force the new organisation to take a stand. From the findings 29 policy questions were deduced. These questions, of different dimensions and impact,
invite Muntpunt to define its position and this way present itself further and more clearly. In addition, five research questions – which are recommendations for further research – were formulated.

The needs analysis led to the following results:
- a clear mission statement
- the confirmation of the relevance of a Flemish Communications House in and for Brussels
- a start of the broadening of the basis among stakeholders
- a list of ideas and suggestions for the concrete service provision of Muntpunt
- the need to make clear policy choices, based on these results, and translate them into a coherent business plan
2. MANAGEMENT

The concept chosen is not the cohabitation of two separate partners, but a marriage contract without separate estates. Therefore, a new form of management is being established, which will in the medium term replace the existing organisations.

Muntpunt will become a private-law external independent agency dependent on the policy area Services for General Government Policy of the Flemish Government.

This form of management offers the best guarantees for a partnership between the two founding authorities and for the necessary operational autonomy. This autonomy has to lead to cooperation agreements with numerous Flemish-Brussels organisations and networks in the areas of culture, media, education, welfare and health.
3. THE BUILDING

The building complex is located within the square formed by Muntplein, Schildknaapstraat, Leopoldstraat and Koninginnestraat and consists of:

- the Monnaie House, Munt no 6;
- the Schildknaap building, Schildknaapstraat 28;
- the commercial premises (night shop), Schildknaapstraat 26;
- fifteen car parking spaces in the underground car park Monnaie level -4

A short history of the building: ‘Koninginnestraat (70 m long) was built in 1818 at the time of the construction of the new theatre (this refers to the Muntschouwburg). The building at no 1, which formed the corner with Schildknaapstraat (presumably the building which was located where the public garden with the statue is now), was the renowned ‘Café des Mille Colonnes’. It had existed since the 1830s and had also been the first café (in Brussels) to have gas lighting. Around 1930, one hundred years later, the interior and the name were changed. It became a tavern and tearoom called ‘Pourquoi Pas?’, a cosy place where businessmen, pensioners, journalists, singers and actors were regular customers.

In the early 1970s it was thought that the works on the underground system were a good excuse to demolish the entire street, as well as part of Schildknaapstraat. Approximately 30 metres back, a concrete office building (the current Monnaie House) was built. Part of the building initially housed a home decoration store (Habitat), later a bank, and is now the continuously expanding Metropolitan Library. (from Hugo Reinhard: ‘Van de Nord no de Midi’, 3rd revised edition of 2005, pp. 106-107)

The Flemish Government is a long leaseholder of the Monnaie House.
4. OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

For the development and guidance of the project a steering group and different working groups were created.

A project coordinator of the Flemish Government was appointed to guide the concrete creation of the Flemish Communications House. In this capacity, he is the connection between the different technical working groups and the first contact for all members of the steering group.

The steering group guides both management and infrastructural activities and the conceptual and operational elaboration of the project, and supervises the interaction between both.

The building team is in charge of the follow-up of the infrastructure programme, both where property rights and technical construction aspects are concerned (property management, investment works, financing).

The working group in charge of content elaborates the content-related, operational part of Muntpunt and also takes care of the further follow-up.

Finally, the technical working group for personnel is responsible for drawing up a plan of personnel (needs) and the transfer of the personnel of the Flemish Community Commission, the Metropolitan Public Library and Onthaal en Promotie Brussel to Muntpunt.
5. PROJECT PACKAGE

Functions and service model

19 generic functions have been defined for Muntpunt. These functions are based on the existing task packages and target groups of Onthaael en Promotie Brussel vzw and the Metropolitan Public Library, and link those tasks to needs detected elsewhere at the level of Brussels with respect to information, promotion, communication and appeal.

An overview:

INFORMATIVE & EDUCATIONAL
1. Being welcomed / introduction
2. Getting a consultation or being referred
3. Browsing
4. Shopping
5. Borrowing / taking in
6. Consulting
7. Working
8. Learning

MEETING & STAY
9. Reading
10. Listening
11. Watching
12. Eating and drinking
13. Meeting
14. Participating
15. Taking part in meetings

COMMUNICATION & PROMOTION
16. Tasting Brussels via initiatives
17. Promotion of third-party Dutch-language initiatives

18. PLATFORM DEVELOPMENT
19. NETWORK REINFORCEMENT

where can the customer go with his question?
what can the customer take with him?
where can the customer start working on his own?
where can the customer start enjoying the offer on his own?
where can the customer meet others?

The position of the service model of Muntpunt is plotted on three axes: personnel, finances and target groups.
The needs analysis

With the needs analysis the defined functions and needs were mapped for the first time, so that the initial mission could be translated into a powerful, relevant vision and strategic objectives. To this end, three complementary activities were set up:

- the formulation of the mission and vision of Muntpunt
- a preliminary study based on a relevant research corpus
- an inventory of possible stakeholders and a survey among some five categories of stakeholders.
6. THE INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT

The agreement with design firm B-architecten, which had already carried out a preliminary study for the Flemish Community Commission, was taken over by the Flemish Government, which thus became the client. The Flemish Community Commission remains involved in the renovation dossier via the technical working group ‘building team’.

The Metropolitan Public Library and Onthaal en Promotie Brussel vzw worked out a concept for the content in 2006. From this exercise the wish became apparent to integrate the tasks of both partners into the building as well as possible.

In a first stage, B-architecten made a rough design. Then, in May 2008 – after the definitive approval of the rough design by the client – B-architecten submitted the preliminary design. In the design the buildings merge into one accessible House with four entrances. The most part of the seven-floor building is occupied by the library. On the first floor the library for young people will be located; the rest of the library – including meeting rooms, conference rooms and a large study room – will be distributed over the second to fifth floors. The ground floor will be a large open space focused on information, with information desks, shelves with information, a corner with newspapers and magazines and a café. In this agora the visitor of Muntpunt will be able to find all information on the Flemish offer in Brussels and other Flemish cities.

At the end of 2008, after the preliminary design had been approved by the building team, the steering group and the client, the final design and the application for the building permit were started. Once the final design has been submitted and approved, around mid 2009, the tender procedure can be started. The approval of the tender dossier for the building permit is planned for the second half of 2009.

If the permits are issued in time, the works will be able to start in 2009, so that the Flemish Communications House can open its doors in 2011. For the duration the works an alternative location for the Metropolitan Public Library will be looked for.