

PROVISIONAL VERSION - DO NOT QUOTE OR DISSEMINATE (thank you)

Plotting his/her own way: Online and offline mobilization around the Brussels-Capital air routes. The weight of the social

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Abstract

In February 2014, a collective was created under the name "Pas Question" in order to challenge the "Wathelet plan" which modifies certain air routes around Brussels-National airport. This group immediately mobilizes a diverse set of citizens around various modes of action (signing online petitions, filing complaints, sending letters to the authorities ...). A few months later, twelve defense associations for the victims of noise pollution linked to air traffic at the National airport created a common platform of four demands addressed to political decision-makers. This mobilization is not without success since in July 2014 a court orders the cessation of certain air routes provided for in the plan and that in April 2015 the Michel government opts for the return to the old procedures. However, going back to old air routes also means moving nuisances to other populations. The challenge of this communication would be to question the success of this mobilization which combines online actions and offline action in return for the failure of potential counter-movements. It will be based on a study initiated by a Franco-Belgian team (co-directed by Jean-Gabriel Contamin, Jean-Marc Leblanc, Olivier Paye and Jean-Benoit Pilet) (ANR APPEL) devoted to e-petitioning, combining, on the one hand, an analysis of the data offered by the access to the petitions initiated on this question on the site lapetition.be (more than 20000 signatures on the main petition mostly accompanied by comments) and, on the other hand, an analysis of the other forms of mobilization initiated on this theme and the answers given by the public authorities. In particular, it will show the weight of social variables and areas of mobilization in the relative success of mobilizations against this infrastructure project.

"We bought an apartment in a quiet area of brussels and for that we paid more than 25,000 eur more than in other municipalities flown over at the time by planes. It is not correct that now we were penalized. "(Claude, Auderghem, March 19, 2014, 21:26)¹

"1. Distributing the nuisance means that more people are affected
2. We have paid dearly for our homes for tranquility and now loss of their value "(Marie-Claire, Watermael-Boisfort, March 24, 2014, 9:50 am)

In February 2014, the Wathelet Plan was set up in the Brussels region, on behalf of the Di Rupo Government Secretary of State for the Environment, Energy, Mobility and Institutional Reforms. This plan is a response to the noise pollution linked to Zaventem airport, by modifying some air routes around Brussels-National airport and creating a new route.

More precisely, the Wathelet Plan creates a new air route, passing through the east of the Brussels Capital Region and reinforces the route passing through the "poor crescent" of Brussels. It is therefore a plan which, as shown in maps 1 and 2, which represent the overflight density of the region respectively before and immediately after the implementation of the "Wathelet Plan" (Dobruszkes, 2014) bring the nuisance on the RBC mainly to the benefit of Oostrand. In response, a number of petitioning initiatives have been launched via the lapetition.be website, which particularly criticize what is referred to as the "wide left turn" route, which overlooks the relatively well-to-do municipalities of Woluwe, Etterbeek, Auderghem and Watermael-Boitsfort. Thus, on February 20, the association "No question!" launched a petition (petition No. 14178) entitled "For a lasting solution to the overflight of Brussels, against the dispersion plan", which calls for the immediate suspension of the Wathelet plan. This petition collects more than 10,000 signatures in two months and more than 20,000 signatures in total. Similarly, on February 21, the College of Burgomasters and Aldermen of Watermael-Boitsfort initiated another petition (No. 14184) entitled "STOP-at-fly-over-Watermael-Boitsfort" which also denounced the "New route over Evere, Etterbeek, Auderghem and Watermael-Boitsfort" and finally collects more than 2700 signatures. Claude and Marie-Claire are two of the inhabitants of the concerned municipalities who support this second initiative by matching their commitments with comments that directly testify to the meaning of their signatures: reporting their protests to the ecological and economic impact of this plan and returning those nuisances to other spaces and other populations.

It would be possible to see in these mobilizations a typical example of what some have called 'NIMBY mobilizations' (Freudenburg and Pastor, 1992, Jobert, 1998): inhabitants would oppose a project of general interest not so much by a refusal of the principle of this project, but only to the extent that it would affect their particular interests. This is partly the

¹ It was decided to retain the first names of the signatories when they were not identifying. In the contrary cases, the first names have been changed by substituting them for "socially close" first names. Comments have been taken as they are both from an orthographic and a typographical point of view (but have been translated).

reading of some articles and press reports that directly link nuisances linked to the airport, loss of value of housing and mobilizations².

However, the use of this 'category' of analysis and disqualification, and vice versa, only very imperfectly accounts for the whole of what this episode introduces. Some signatories put forward arguments that seem to be directly linked to the NIMBY effect, but others point to other types of arguments that might not be seen as mere ways to avoid or reverse stigma (Trom, 1999): protest against the procedure³, generalization⁴, arguing about health⁵ or safety matters⁶...

Above all, the question of the overflight of Brussels and its surroundings by aircraft and of the various nuisances linked to this overflight is not new. And, if it has already given rise to mobilizations, it seems that they take such a large scale for the first time. For example, of the nine petitions launched about this issue on the lapetition.be site between 2008 and 2014, only three are initiated before 2014 (two in 2008 and one in 2012) and they receive only 629, 145 and 32 signatures respectively⁷. Moreover, it can even be noted that these last mobilizations succeed in winning the case: a moratorium is decided in April 2015, which essentially comes back to the old routes in spite of the nuisances which had led to the implementation of the Wathelet plan.

This contribution is then structured on the basis of this enigma: how can we account for the particular strength of the mobilizations aroused by the Wathelet plan and of the particular form of these mobilizations? We could, from a 'technological' point of view, see the effect of new technologies that would encourage the mobilization and the questioning of representative democracy: social media would enable citizens to intervene more easily to the point of creating a new model of democracy involving a transition from institutions to individuals (Margetts, 2015). This perspective would, however, presuppose that populations more directly affected by nuisances linked to other air routes mobilize at the same time or even afterwards with the same force and the same tools. The question was then rather to account for the social uses of these new forms of mobilization by certain populations rather than by others, by the ability of these populations to mobilize and be heard better than others, using an

² For an example, a report from the RTBF : "Plan Wathelet : 1,1% de dépréciation pour les maisons survolées", 4 October 2014, https://www.rtb.be/info/belgique/detail_nuisance-des-avions-le-plan-wathelet-a-reduit-la-valeur-des-maisons-nouvellement-survolees-de-1-1?id=8370120 (access on 6/03/2017)

³ "Why have citizens not been consulted?" (Monique, Auderghem, 25/03/2014).

⁴ "It is unworthy to pretend to solve a problem by moving it" (Tony, Watermael-Boitsfort, 26/03/2014); "The real problem is that Brussels is the only capital of a developed country with an airport that is so close to the city. Safety should be the only criterion in the choice of routes" (Benoît, Watermael-Boitsfort, 26/03/2014).

⁵ "Densely populated, noise pollution for our children" (Robin, Watermael-Boitsfort, 24/03/2014).

⁶ "This flight plan is a total lack of respect for the inhabitants. Citizen safety, noise pollution, and worse, low-level pollution in the most populated areas." (Marc, Auderghem, 22/03/2014)

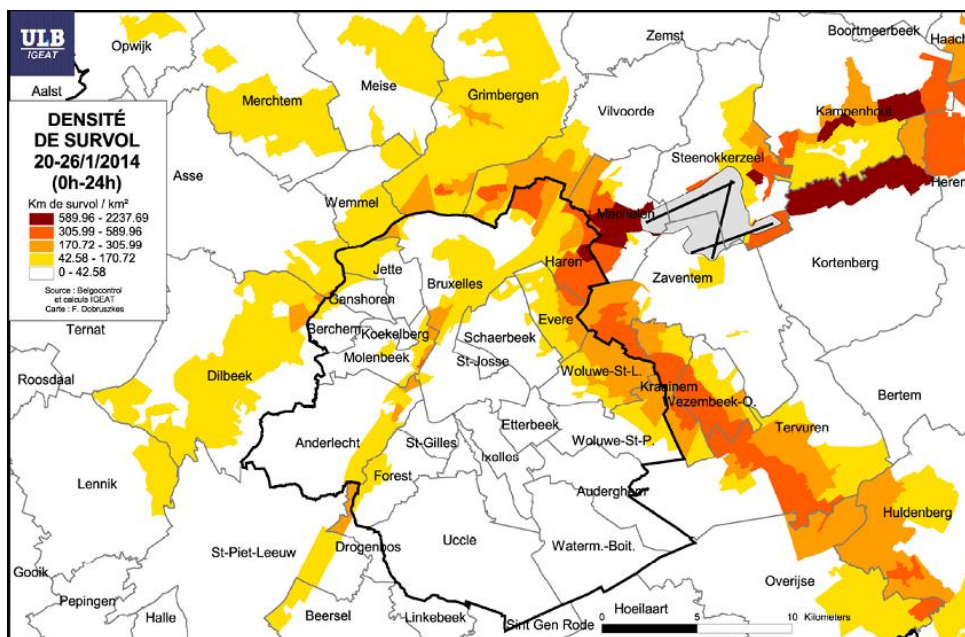
⁷ As the studied site is essentially Francophone, it probably contributes to the over-representation of Francophone petitioning mobilizations and to hides any Dutch-speaking petitions from the Flemish peripheries of the north and east. However, the other consulted sources suggest that this petitioning phenomenon was unprecedented in the context of mobilizations around the Zaventem airport.

unprecedented provided to us by the owner of the lapetition.be site : all the traces left by the signatories of the different petitions initiated on this site⁸.

Combining these data (cf. Box 1) with other statistical data, with a long-term analysis of media, administrative and electronics and with observations and interviews made with some of the mobilized actors, it is possible to show that even if, according to a reading in terms of NIMBY, there is a strong correlation between the municipalities impacted by the new plan and the dynamics of the mobilizations, an ecological and comparative analysis of this mobilization makes it possible to highlight the weight of the social variables in the capacity to mobilize, even with NICT.

This example will also be an opportunity to highlight the benefits of taking into account the spatialization of mobilizations and, more broadly, of political behavior (Auyero, 2005; Hmed, 2009), against the tendency to act as if protests were deployed on the "head of a pin, in a non-space, a geographically undifferentiated world" (Massey, 1984, p.4).

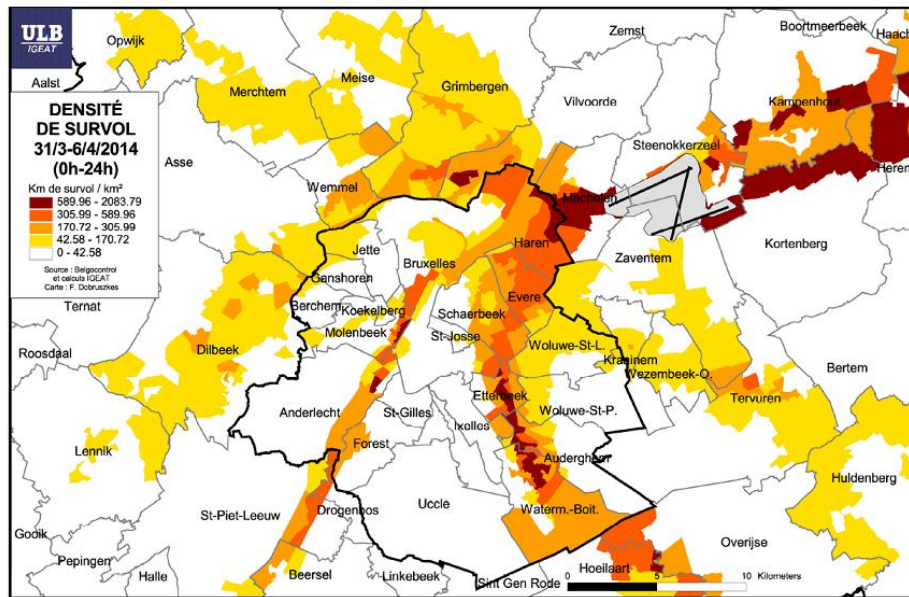
Map 1: Overflight Density Day + Night (20-26/01/2014)



Source : Dobruszkes, 2014.

⁸ The data was made available in an anonymous form and was carried out as part of a project financed by the French National Research Agency (ANR APPEL "Multidisciplinary Analysis of Online Petitioning") for the benefit of a French and Belgian team including sociologists, political scientists, lawyers, language specialists and computer scientists.

Map 2: Overflight Density Day + Night (1/03-6/04/2014)



Source : Dobruszkes, 2014.

Box 1: Some methodological considerations

As part of this research, the owner of the site lapetition.be sent us data that were divided in five separate files. Four are related to petitions, two related to petitions promoters and one to signatories. We have identified the petitions relating to the overfly of Brussels (24 726 signatures) from this anonymised file, containing nearly 4 million lines. We have especially a set of information relating to these signatures: the time stamp of the signature and its validation, the nationality, the place of residence, the postal code, the declared profession of the signatory, as well as any comments. However, this information is unequally ascertained. For example, in the case of petitions relating to the nuisance at Zaventem airport, the profession of the signatories was not informed in the vast majority of cases, which limits any possibility of taking this variable into account in our analysis at this stage.

In light of the reliable available information, we focused our study on the geographical distribution of signatories and of petition initiators in order to determine the geographical positioning of the signatories by recontextualizing these data. This study rests therefore only slightly on the evolutions of the debates after the month of January 2015. Indeed, the data of the database stop at this date (moment of the extraction of the data). As a result, we do not have similar data relating to the mobilizations which may have followed the withdrawal of the "Wathelet Plan" and, in particular, those which now result from the decision of the Government to enforce the "Gossuin Decree" of 1999.

Finally, let's focus on the delineation of our investigative material. It is essentially centered on a specific online petition site. As such, the used data cannot be considered as a

reflection of all the mobilizations relating to the airport of Zaventem or even of all petitions, online or not, which circulate on the question. However, the studied site was the main Belgian site of online petitions over the period, and thus probably the main relay of online petitioning mobilizations relating to Belgian controversies, at least as far as Francophone mobilizations are concerned. Moreover, the other data collected do not reveal petitioning mobilizations of this magnitude via other channels. However, in order to clarify the limits and possible possibilities for generalizing our conclusions, we have planned to carry out a study of the online petitions on these issues which have been disseminated by other means, via French, Dutch or English-speaking sites.

I-Mobilizations against the Wathelet plan, a typical example of the NIMBY syndrome?

Since the founding works of Mancur Olson, the paradigm of rational choice has tended to predominate in the study of collective mobilizations. While protest actions in Western democracies multiplied, while new actors participated in this "participatory revolution" (Kaase, 1984), analysts set out to understand how and why actors mobilize in spite of the paradox of collective action.

However, this question seems more or less relevant depending on the type of studied mobilization. From this point of view, NIMBY mobilizations would be, for example, exceptional forms. Of course, some costs might be associated with these mobilizations. However, the selective advantages linked to such actions and the rather clear outlines of the "relevant community of collective action" (Segrestin, 1980) would make it easier to circumvent the paradox. The profits derived from the action being supposed to easily exceed the incurred costs.

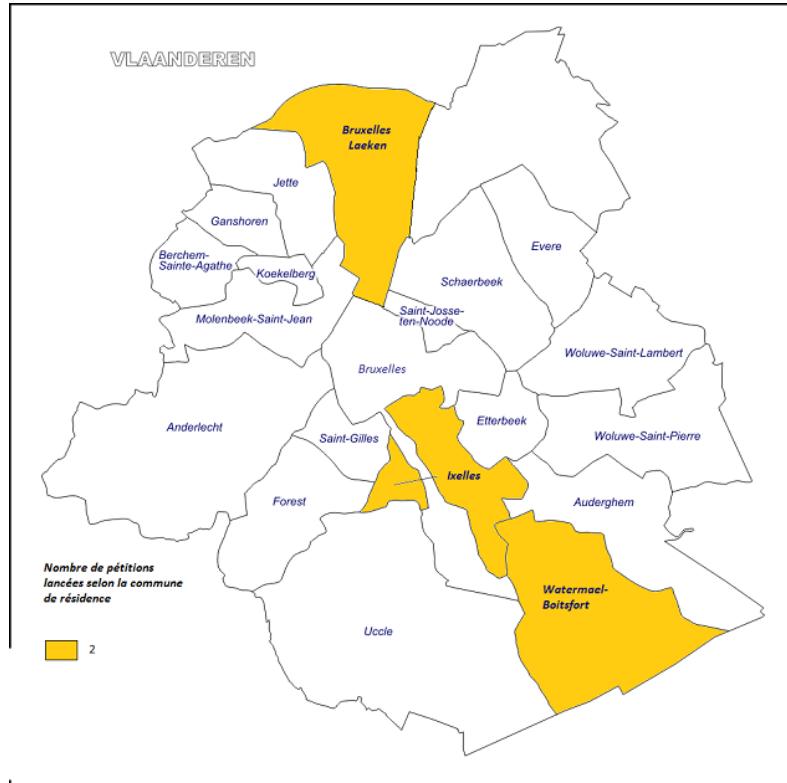
The study of petitions initiated against the nuisances linked to the Zaventem airport tend indeed to go in this direction. First, as we have said, when one analyze the comments associated with signatures, and in particular the recurrence of the economic and "egoistic" arguments put forward: as Christiane summarizes (Ixelles, 31/03/2014), "It should not be forgotten that those who buy in Zaventem buy a price in knowledge of causes and therefore do not have to complain after" (sic). Interviews with some of the petition entrepreneurs confirm this point. Thus, the initiator of the petition "Stop flying over Brussels, Canal area" (No. 11929, 16/09/2012) reports directly its action to the nuisances that it undergoes and even to the syndrome NIMBY: "when it [the use of a new route] has been presented to us as a distribution of nuisance for everyone. No, I did not agree, because before I had no nuisance, I found that the airport could develop without having more nuisances. Obviously, it is always the phenomenon "Not in my backyard" (interview, 06/2017). He even points out that the dynamics of petitions are directly related to the evolutions of the nuisance and that, for instance, he is prompted to reactivate his petition "according to the nature of the presence of the nuisance".

But, this conclusion seems also more generally to be induced by the locations of mobilization promoters and signatories. It is possible to show a strong correlation between these spaces and the zones impacted by the new plan.

Indeed, each petition reflects, in one way or another, the current situation concerning the air route of the aircrafts taking off from Zaventem. The first two petitions, both of which date back to 2008, call into question for the Anciaux plan, which will soon be repealed. The next one, dating from 2012, challenges the overflight of the "Canal Zone" : When the initiator is asked why he has launched this petition, his first answer is : "the petition project has emerged because I am a resident of this place". Finalluy, the last six, of 2014, denounce all or part of the "Wathelet Plan". The Brussels map of the residences of the petitions'initiators is instructive since it shows a concentration of initiatives on certain territories.

Of the nine petitions, two are initiated in Walloon Brabant, two in Laeken, two in Ixelles, and two in Watermael-Boitsfort. The origine of only one petition has not been identified (map 3).

Map 3: The initiators of petitions relating to the nuisance of the airport of Zaventem according to their residential municipality



There is indeed a strong relationship between this mapping of the petitioning initiatives and the existing nuisances. Laeken has frequently suffered nuisances due to the "Chabert" and "Canal" routes, while the four petitions coming from the southeast of the RBC all denounce the "Wathelet Plan" of 2014, which precisely has the specificity of introducing a new air route causing significant nuisance to the eastern part of the region.

The distribution of signatories according to their residential municipality is also instructive to determine the geographical anchorage of those who mobilize via the petition against the Wathelet plan. For instance, petition 14178 ("For a lasting solution to the overflight of Brussels, against the dispersion plan"), signed by more than 20,000 people, presents the following distribution:

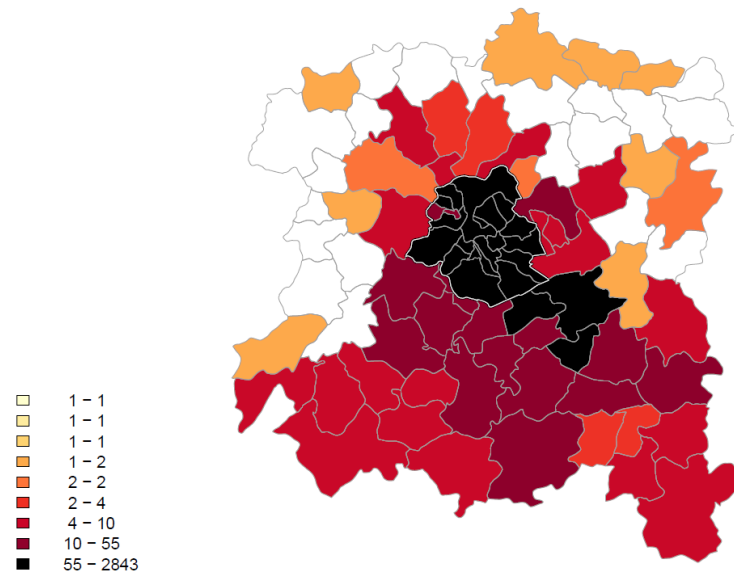
Table 1: Signatories by municipality. Petition 14178 "For a lasting solution to the overflight of Brussels, against the dispersion plan"

| | Number of signatures | Population (2013) | % of population |
|-----------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Auderghem | 2946 | 33085 | 8,9 % |

| | | | |
|--|------|-------|-------|
| Watermael-Boitsfort | 2152 | 24614 | 8,7 % |
| Etterbeek | 2582 | 47023 | 5,5 % |
| Woluwé St-Pierre | 1435 | 41124 | 3,5 % |
| Moleenbeek | 3090 | 95861 | 3,2 % |
| Ixelles | 2553 | 85274 | 3 % |
| Woluwé St-Lambert | 1071 | 54144 | 2 % |
| Bruxelles (excluding Laeken and Neder-Over-Heembeek) | 1330 | 93987 | 1,4 % |

The distribution of signatures according to the municipality shows a rather strong mobilization of the individuals directly concerned by the nuisances. More than 7600 signatures come from residents of the municipalities of Watermael-Bosvoorde, Auderghem and Ixelles, which are directly affected by the creation of the new route known as the "wide left turn" route. More than 3000 signatures come from residents of Etterbeek, affected both by this new road and by the strengthening of the "Canal Route". The municipalities of Brussels-city (excluding Laeken and NOH) and above all of Moleenbeek, overflowed by the "Canal Route", provide more than the 4400 signatures. Beyond these cases, signatories that do not reside in the RBC are extremely minor, since they are 1089 in total, or 5% of the signatories.

Map 4: Petition signers by residential municipality. Petition 14178



Simultaneously, as we have seen, the municipality of Watermael-Boitsfort had launched its own petition, denouncing for its part the only "wide left turn" route. The geographical distribution of the signatories gives the following results:

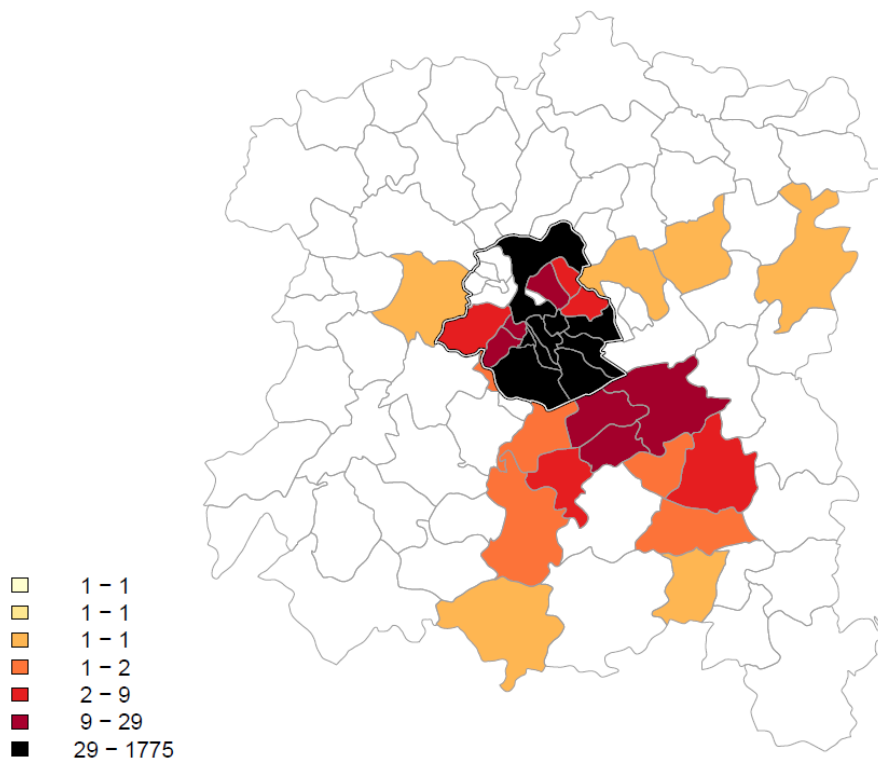
Table 2: Signatories according to their place of residence. Petition 14184 "No No fly over Watermael-Boitsfort"

| | Number of signatures | Population (2013) | % of population |
|------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Watermael-Boitsfort | 1843 | 24614 | 7,5 % |
| Auderghem | 417 | 33085 | 1,3 % |
| Ixelles | 124 | 85274 | 0,1 % |
| Etterbeek | 93 | 47023 | 0,2 % |
| Woluwé St-Pierre | 57 | 41124 | 0,1 % |
| Uccle | 37 | 81699 | 0,0 % |
| Bruxelles (or Laeken et NOH) | 32 | 93987 | 0,0 % |

First, the title of the petition itself, "No fly over Watermael-Boitsfort", focuses attention on the situation of the only municipality of Watermael-Boitsfort when the text more generally denounces the "new air route overflying Evere, Etterbeek, Auderghem and Watermael-Boitsfort". Thus, while the text refers to four municipalities with a total population of 144,000 inhabitants, the title only evokes the only municipality of Watermael-Bosvoorde which has fewer than 25,000 inhabitants, or about one-sixth of the total. It should also be noted that the

municipalities of Schaerbeek, St-Josse and Ixelles, but also that of Brussels with respect to its northern part, are not mentioned at all although they are directly on the trajectory of this route.

Map 5: Petition signers by residential municipality. Petition 14184



The way in which the petition is argued presents the issue under a heading and a text that are less "gathering" for the people of Brussels than the petition 14178. Significantly, most of the signatures come from residents of the municipality of Watermael-Boitsfort (1843 signatures). There are less signatures, but still substantial in the neighboring municipality of Auderghem (417 signatures). The other municipalities have far fewer signatories, although those who are placed on the new route have the highest levels (Ixelles, Etterbeek, Woluwé St-Pierre). Non-residents of the RBC are only 92 to sign the petition, or 3% of the total.

The distribution of the signatories thus seems to confirm the close relationship between nuisance and petition mobilization. The massive over-representation of the signatories from Watermael-Boitsfort also seems to indicate that the framing of the petition text and especially of its title closely ties the choice to sign. Thus, the signatories of petitions opposing the "Wathelet Plan" live almost exclusively in municipalities that are directly concerned by the nuisance caused by the plan. The mobilization might then be almost exclusively explained by a NIMBY effect, the new technologies having only played a facilitating role.

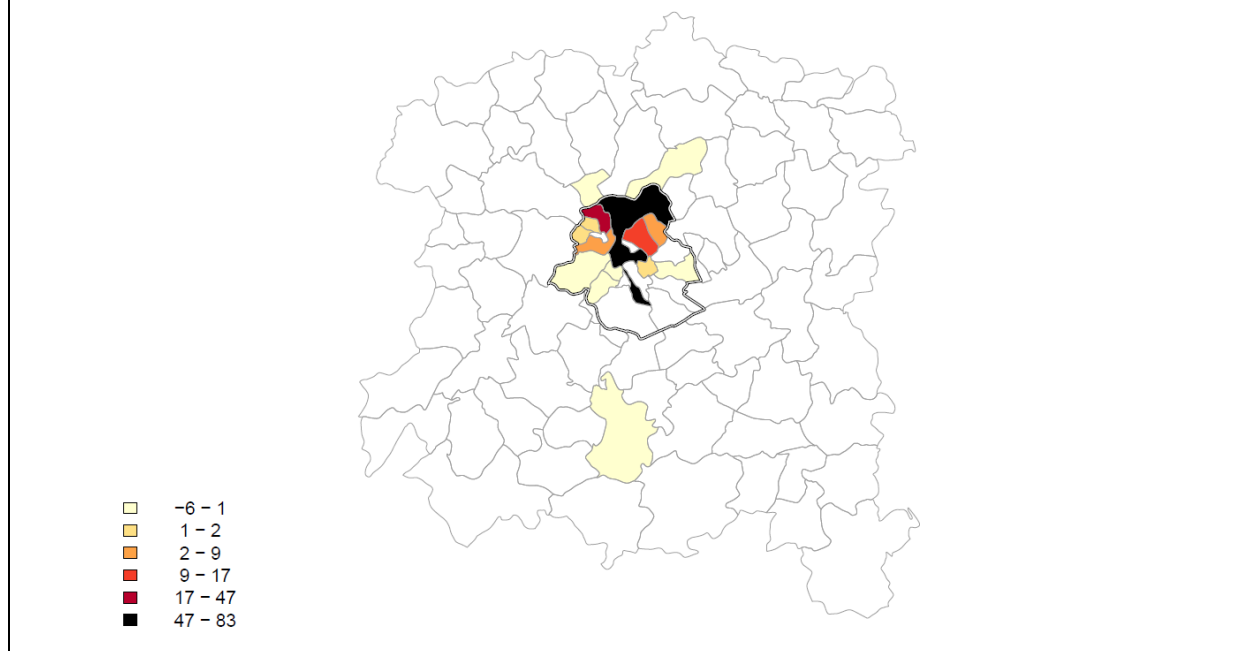
This conclusion seems to be corroborated by the fact that in the rare petitioning initiatives initiated on the lapetition.be site against the airport nuisances before the Wathelet plan, the inhabitants of the municipalities of Watermael-Boitsfort and of Auderghem are very poorly represented.

For example, in the case of petition 3057, dated 2008, entitled "Too many aircraft in our sky - Te veel vliegtuigen in onze lucht " and which disputes the over-use of the "Canal Route" (without mentioning it explicitly), most of the signatories come from the same neighborhood as Zoubida Jellab, the initiator of the petition (see Table 3). Some residents of neighboring municipalities, Jette and Schaerbeek, have also signed. Conversely, there is no resident of Watermael-Boitsfort and only one of Auderghem among the signatories (Map 6).

Table 3: Signatories by residential municipality. Petition 3057 "Too many planes in our sky -Te veel vliegtuigen in onze lucht"

| | Number of signatures | Population (2013) | % of population |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Laeken (Bruxelles) | 65 | 60295 | 0,11 % |
| Jette | 19 | 51387 | 0,04 % |
| Schaerbeek | 15 | 131375 | 0,01 % |
| Ixelles | 6 | 85274 | 0,01 % |
| Bruxelles (excluding Laeken and NOH) | 5 | 93987 | 0,01 % |
| Molenbeek | 4 | 95861 | 0,00 % |

Map 6: Petition signers by residential municipality. Petition 3057



On the basis of all these data, it can be concluded that the inhabitants of Watermael-Bosvoorde and Auderghem seemed to have little interest in the issue of nuisances due to Zaventem airport before the Wathélet plan of 2014. On the other hand, they are at the forefront of this type of mobilization when this new plan is put in place which has the peculiarity of creating a new route that is precisely carrying nuisances on their until then largely spared municipalities which had. As such, according to a NIMBY logic, the fact that the inhabitants of these two municipalities have massively mobilized seems to be closely dependent on the nuisances they have themselves suffered.

II-The spatialized mobilizations as a result of socially differentiated representations of territories

However, this first reading comes up against the anomalies mentioned in the introduction. Nuisances do not begin with the Plan, but do not create mobilizations of the same form and scope. They do not end with the moratorium, even though petitioning initiatives seem to be less strong.

What is more, NIMBY reading tends to reduce the question of space to a matter of material interest. The use in sociology of the mobilizations of the works of geographers has, however, allowed us to go beyond this reductive interpretation. Doreen Massey (1984) states that "spatial distribution and geographical differentiation can result from social processes, but they themselves have an impact on the functioning of these phenomena. The 'spatial' is not only a result but also a part of the explanation ... ". Indeed, William H.Sewell (2001) has called for a move away from considering space as a go-of-itself or as a background map, but to take it seriously to understand the successes or failures of a mobilization. Space has to be taken as a real variable supporting or constraining the mobilizations. By its physical and morphological characteristics, but also by the differential representations that different groups associate with these places. In other words, different groups can value their living spaces differently, and may have different resources to promote them.

These discrepancies might precisely explain some of the limits of the explanation by nuisances. Indeed, by crossing the RBC map by population density and the map of the routes according to the "Wathelet Plan", it appears that there is no perfect proportionality between the propensity to sign petitions on these issues and the fact of being subject to nuisance.

For example, no resident of very heavily populated territories, such as Moleenbeek and Schaerbeek, have launched petitioning initiative, although these territories have long been affected by nuisances (Nassaux, 2006; Dobruszkes Et al., 2014, Dobruszkes, 2016).

More specifically, by studying in a comparative way the dissemination of the various petitioning initiatives initiated on the lapetition.be site against the nuisances linked to the Zaventem airport, it can be demonstrated that mobilizations might be better explained by the political, cultural and economic resources of the concerned populations than by the objectively experienced inconveniences. Even if these initially self-centered commitments seem to marginally induce a politicization that goes beyond personal interests.

The weight of political and social resources

First, the initiators of these different petitions are generally not rank-and-file-citizens. For instance, the first promoter of the petition which has collected the largest number of signatures (more than 20000) was Sandra Ferretti, a local elected representative of Brussels, then member of the Francophone Federal Democrats party (FDF) and candidate in the European elections for this party. She studied political science at ULB (Université Libre de Bruxelles) and is European lobbyist in cosmetics and medical devices fields. She explains that the Gosuin "noise decree" of 1999 which regulates noise nuisances affecting the RBC has been written by her sister (interview, 06/2017). The second promoter of this petition, Antoine Wilhelmi, for his part, gathers some specific competencies particularly suited to launch an e-petition since he has a degree in law and is "entrepreneur in new technologies". For two months, he moved to the premises of the Icab (Incubatie Centrum Arsenaal Brussel), a start-up incubator in the information technology sector. He devised a system for the automatic distribution of mails to sympathizers, which can be varied according to various criteria, prepared standard letters that can be sent to the political authorities of the country with a simple click, and imagined a survey of the streets in which leaflets are distributed (*Vif/L'Express*, 13/10/2014).

In the same way, Petition 2256, dating from 2008, is initiated by Zoubida Jellab, who is an local ecologist representative of the communal council of Brussels since 2007. Petition 11929 is launched in September 2012 by Christophe Pourtois, who is a long-time member of the Reform Movement (MR), who appears in the petition as "head of the second column on the MR list" and who so multiplied the mandates to the city of Brussels -including president of Board of Directors of the Brugmann University Hospital- that he has been denounced and had to resign from all of them (dhnet.be, 20/06/2017). He recalled that he knew directly "the person who negotiated the plan" and that he "banged him" before launching his petition (interview, 06/2017). Finally, two of those petitions have been launched by municipalities themselves : Petition 14184 (21/02/2014) by the "municipality of Watermael-Boitsfort" and Petition 16432 (20/10/2015) by the "municipality of Jette" (interview, 06/2017).

Each of these promoters thus puts at the service of the petitioning action the political and social resources which are its own, while making the petitioning action a means of promoting themselves personally or collectively : as explained by the questioned representative of the municipality of Jette, "we are quite deprived, and so this petition was a

way of bringing together this problem to come with the petition to Federal Minister Bellot, who does not move too much in this matter".

Moreover, the main elected representatives of the three municipalities with the highest proportions of signatories have certain characteristics which incline them to mobilize on this specific issue. The mayor of Auderghem was Didier Gosuin, the environment minister of the Brussels region who initiates the "noise decree" of 1999. The mayor of Watermael-Boitsfort, Olivier Deleuze, is a member of the Ecolo party. Finally, the Etterbeek municipal council is composed of an LB (List of the Mayor)-Ecolo-PS coalition. The mobilizations were therefore all the stronger when political relays were more disposed to them.

The weight of economic resources

It is also possible to show a close relationship between the average level of income of the inhabitants of the various municipalities and the extent of the mobilization of petitioners.

As it was pointed out, in proportion to the population, Petition 14178 was the most signed in Auderghem, Watermael-Boitsfort and Etterbeek : between 5.5% and 8.9% of the population signed this petition (see Table 1). The mobilization has been much stronger in the municipalities affected by the newly created route than in those crossed by the "canal route" which existed for a long time but whose use was significantly reinforced by the "Wathelet Plan", whereas the appeal text denounces both the new route (referring to the municipalities of Evere, Schaerbeek, Etterbeek, Woluwe, Ixelles, Auderghem and Watermael-Boitsfort) and the increase of the traffic on the "Canal Route" (citing Molenbeek, Brussels City, Anderlecht, Forest, Saint-Gilles and Uccle).

This differential mobilization which might not be explained by the differential grievances closely follows the average earnings differences within the RBC (see Table 4).

Table 4: Average per capita income per municipality in the Brussels-Capital Region (2009)

| Municipality | Average per capita income (2009) |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Watermael-Boitsfort | 17945 |
| Woluwe Saint-Pierre | 17289 |
| Uccle | 16909 |
| Auderghem | 16595 |
| Woluwe Saint-Lambert | 15575 |
| Jette | 13830 |
| Ixelles | 13563 |
| Forest | 13391 |
| Evere | 12979 |
| Etterbeek | 12600 |

| | |
|--------------|-------|
| Koekelberg | 12036 |
| Anderlecht | 11141 |
| Schaerbeek | 10742 |
| Saint-Gilles | 10625 |
| Molenbeek | 9773 |
| Saint-Josse | 7954 |

Source : <http://ng3.economie.fgov.be>

The residents of Watermael-Boitsfort and Auderghem are among the richest municipalities in RBC. Conversely, the municipalities of Etterbeek and Ever, which are also directly affected by the "Wathelet Plan ", and even more because they are potentially affected by the two air routes, are experiencing much smaller petition mobilisations. The two above cited petitions are signed by one resident out of eight in Watermael-Boitsfort and Auderghem. In Etterbeek, the same petitions are signed "only" by one inhabitant out of 17. In Evere, these petitions gather only 168 signatures, that is to say that they collect one signature for 235 inhabitants. There are only 3090 signatures in Moleenbeek (1 for 31 inhabitants) and 123 for Saint-Josse (1 for 221), the two municipalities with the lowest per capita income of the RBC.

This tendency to mobilize more against the "Wathelet Plan" in the better economically endowed municipalities is also verified for the other petitions of the site. The most intense petitioning mobilizations occur in Watermael-Boitsfort and Auderghem, whereas the "poor crescent" Brussels tends to engage little. The "ecological fallacy" does not allow us to conclude that, with identical grievances, the poorest people mobilize less and the richest the more.

However, on the one hand, it does not prevent us from concluding that the barriers to participation and mobilization (Klandermans and Oegema, 1994) are the most easily exceeded in the most privileged context. On the other hand, evidence from other sources suggests that the most mobilized are the most economically and socially endowed. This is suggested by a description of the dynamics of the most effective movement : according to Laurence Van Ruymbeke (Vif/L'Express, 13/10/2014)⁹, "Overflowed Citizens [due to the Wathelet Plan] represent a particular public, with a socio-economic level higher than elsewhere: representatives of the financial, legal, media, artistic filed or consultancy, as well as 500 European officials. The members of the movement have therefore financially supported the protest. A first fundraising event, via a crowdfunding platform, brought in nearly 21,000 euros at the end of May when the objective was to collect 15,000. The counterpart of a donation of 6,000 euros or more was to fly over the house of Melchior Wathelet in helicopter - in order to pass well low". A socially very marked repertoire of action!

Conversely, Sandra Ferretti reports that there was almost no mobilization before the Wathelet plan, because "it did not affect enough people, or it was a neighborhood... Because it is often said "We send them [the planes] right in the middle, it's the fault of the canal, there is nobody there". But in fact, there are many people who live there, but they are not specially ... There are people who are not specially mobilized, who do not want to act. They want to

⁹ Accessed on 26/06/2017 : <http://www.levif.be/actualite/belgique/comment-le-mouvement-pas-question-est-devenu-si-puissant/article-normal-316411.html>

survive. Very low working class... [...] People who are not especially politically enlightened Finally, who do not especially want to commit ... even as a citizen. As I say, they have other problems, other worries" (interview, 06/2017).

This explanation by social and economic resources actually covers two dimensions. The traditional one: that of differential capacities to mobilize according to the available capital. The other, more specific, relating to the differential valuation of the territory to be defended. All the interviewees, for example, underline the difficulty of the inhabitants of Brussels to mobilize themselves and to defend themselves against the various plans, for lack of a sufficient common identity compared to those constituted by Walloon and Flemish identities associated with the other two Regions of Belgium. To mobilize against the Wathélet plan is also to try to defend a Brussels identity against the other two regions. As Christophe Pourtois notes, "[The Brussels region] is a region in its own right, but it has several entities that are federated in geographical territory, and so it is easy to create political arrangements on the back of a population for which there is no common feeling and then a separation,... A socio-economic separation, but also a separation in the mentality and the feeling of belonging to the same group. The separation is a reality, at all levels "(interview, 06/2017). This identity fracture is indeed combined with a social divide which leads the most favored to grant a greater social value to their environment. For example, special cognitive resources are needed to present his environment as Jean-Marie Vanderweerden, "a company manager, active in the field of electronics and maintenance" and initiator of Petition 14222 "A little gesture for a better quality of life in town!" (1/03/2014) against the Wathélet plan, does on his blog (see box n ° 2).

Box n ° 2: Social Capital and Enhancement of its Environment

Extract from the post entitled "About the overflight of the Brussels-Capital Region", published by Jean-Marie Vanderweerden on his blog on 6 April 2014

"My job as an electronics specialist in audio-video, and now in computing, led me to make numerous trips during my interventions at home, so I traveled Brussels through.

In search of a place of residence to deploy my project of life and family, it was only after a long and meticulous research that I had the opportunity to rent a house in the district of my dreams ... This choice of district meets 3 conditions sine qua non: quiet, close to nature and the city.

Thus, since 1984, I live in the "Corner of the Broom". In 1996, I even managed to acquire a small house (quite expensive ...).

The "Corner of the Broom" in Watermael-Boitsfort, is an urban isthmus enclosed in the Forest of Soignes. Perhaps have you already heard of it? It is a small village, almost picturesque, in the city. The area is an area of cultural, historical and aesthetic interest. Besides its peaceful nature, the area is particularly convivial; and its radiant human dimension is reflected in all aspects of everyday life. A small neighborhood school, a supermarket, a merry-go-round, a pharmacy, a church and even a pretty cemetery strengthen the social fabric and ties. Socio-cultural diversity is experienced as a wealth. The neighborhood is full of quality human resources. Its geographical uniqueness is also exceptional: although located 7.5 km from the city center of Brussels, when we open our

doors or our windows we are directly in contact with the forest ... It is everywhere. This forest, which borders Brussels, is a jewel. Until about ten years ago, we frequently crossed squirrels, hares, raptors, foxes and quite a lot of deer. In the spring, observation of fawns was a most enchanting spectacle. A tranquility worthy of the deep Ardennes forests characterizes this entrance of Brussels. It is really good to live in our little corner of Paradise. Finally, it was good to live! (...) "

A politicization by personal interests?

The study of all the petitions initiated on the site against the nuisances linked to the Zaventem airport leads to go beyond the mere observation of differential capacities of the various social environments and areas to mobilize against the attacks on their environment by using new technologies. This observation, which meets the "standardization" thesis (Margolis, Resnick, 2000), that new media would not be able to overcome the "social divide" in terms of political participation, must be completed by noting some effects of the "self-centered" signature of petitions on the signature of other petitions which are less self-centered.

Thus, as noted, residents of the municipalities of Watermael-Boitsfort and Auderghem were poorly represented on the petitions concerning the Zaventem airport initiated before the Wathélet plan. Before this plan, there were no signatories of Watermael-Boisfort and only one of Auderghem's petition on petition 3057 against the overuse of the "Canal route". Similarly, there are no signatures associated with Watermael-Boisfort and four associated with Auderghem in petition 2256 launched in 2008 by two associations of Brabant Wallon ("Too much noise in Brabant Wallon" and "Stop to fly over La Hulpe") in protest of the Plan Anciaux and which receives a total of 628 signatures.

However, it should be noted that at the time of the mobilization against the Wathélet plan, several inhabitants of these towns joined this last petition: 14 inhabitants of Watermael-Boisfort and 10 of Auderghem supported at that time petition 2256. Above all, the inhabitants of these same municipalities are mobilizing relatively strongly on another petition, petition 14238 ("Limiting aircraft flight over Neder-Over-Heembeek"), initiated in March 2014, also in reaction to the Wathélet plan, but which denounces only the reinforcement of the use of the "Canal Route". While the text denounces only one of the routes and, in addition, focuses solely on a single municipality, Neder-Over-Heembeek (NOH), there are equivalent levels of mobilization in Watermael-Boisfort and Auderghem as in Laeken, a municipality directly affected by the Canal route, and more signatures than in other municipalities which are a priori more directly concerned by the petition, such as those of Moleenbeek and Anderlecht (see Table 5).

Table 5: Signatories by residential municipality. Petition 14238: "Limiting aircraft flight over Neder-Over-Heembeek"

| | Number of signatures | Population (2013) | % of population |
|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Never-OH (Bruxelles) | 149 | 17595 | 0,85 % |
| Laeken (Bruxelles) | 46 | 60295 | 0,07 % |
| Auderghem | 16 | 33085 | 0,05 % |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|----|-------|--------|
| Watermael-Boitsfort | 14 | 24614 | 0,06 % |
| Jette | 11 | 51387 | 0,02 % |
| Bruxelles (hors Laeken et NOH) | 9 | 93987 | 0,01 % |
| Ixelles | 6 | 85274 | 0,01 % |
| Moleenbeek | 5 | 95861 | 0,01 % |

Similarly, if one turns to one of the petitions that was initiated after the withdrawal of the Wathélet plan, petition 16432, entitled "STOP over the untimely flight of aircraft over the Brussels Region", launched by the municipality of Jette (20/10/2015) and which gathers 2257 signatures, there is certainly a very high overrepresentation of the inhabitants of Jette (980 of the signatories, ie 1.9% of the population of this municipality), but also a not negligible presence of the inhabitants of Watermael-Boisfort and Auderghem (14 and 21 whereas the impossibility of having the postal codes of the signatories underestimates this number), even though these two communes are no longer directly concerned by noise nuisance.

Moreover, we note that some of the leaders of the mobilization against the Wathélet plan continued the fight thereafter. The "no question" movement is thus one of the 14 associations to ask in March 2017 for "the two-stage suppression of night flights to and from Zaventem national airport by 2019" (dh.be, 7/03/2017). The action initiated by favored groups seems to have in fact twice benefited to less favored populations. First of all because of a driving effect, since, as Sandra Ferretti points out, residents who had long been victims of this noise pollution "have seized the opportunity that others are mobilizing" to act in their turn. "And so they said, 'Well, we have not slept for 2 years!'. Then, by a politicizing effect, since a part of these relatively wealthy inhabitants who mobilized in reaction to the Wathélet plan continued their commitment to this cause - and for others - following this mobilization.

Conclusion:

In summary, from the data at our disposal, we can draw a threefold conclusion.

First, it appears that whatever the period, regardless of the measures implemented and their impact in terms of noise nuisance on their municipalities, the inhabitants of the Brussels "poor crescent" continue to be little mobilized, even though they are the most directly concerned by the various plans that have followed each other over the past two decades. For example, from petition to petition, between 0% and 1.21% of the population of Schaerbeek participates in these mobilizations.

However, it can be seen that when mobilization is wider, in particular via Internet propagation, this allows a slightly larger proportion of these inhabitants to engage: petition 14178, which brings together over 20,000 signatures, gathers 1.21% of the population of Schaerbeek or 3.22% of that of Molenbeek. However, in order to conclude that social participation has been widely expanded thanks to the new media, in line with the 'mobilization' thesis (Hirzalla, et al., 2011), it would be necessary to go beyond the ecological fallacy and to have individual data - which is not the case at this stage for this petition¹⁰ - in

¹⁰ The question about 'profession' is indeed too little implemented for this petition to draw conclusions. However, a questionnaire should be sent to all those registered on lapetition.be, which would overcome this difficulty.

order to verify that it is not the most favored inhabitants of these disadvantaged areas who are the only ones to mobilize.

Finally, we are led to distinguish three periods in terms of petitioning mobilizations on the issue of airport nuisances in the more affluent municipalities of Watermael-Boisfort and Auderghem. A "pre-Wathelet Plan" period, during which very few inhabitants of these municipalities sign. A "Wathelet Plan" period during which the inhabitants of these municipalities are strongly mobilized both in online petitioning and in offline actions around these issues : nearly 10% of the inhabitants of these two municipalities sign. Finally, a "post-Wathelet Plan" period during which the petitioning action of inhabitants of these two municipalities is much weaker than in the previous period, but still exists around a group of individuals whose politicization around of the issue of airborne nuisances seems to have subsisted to the remoteness of the nuisances of their own dwelling.

Thus, in a different form, we would find a theory of 'mobilization', but this time linking mobilizations for NIMBY motives to mobilizations for more exo-centered motives. Participation in actions for its own interests could have the virtue of creating a sort of "foot-in-the-door effect" (Baron, 1973, Contamin, 2001) that would lead some of the mobilized actors to politicize and to engage beyond their own interests. As corporations in the nineteenth century which were initially founded in order to defend professional interests, and which were ultimately at the heart of much wider and interprofessional mobilizations (Segrestin, 1985).

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