CIVIS Alliance – Open Lab Project
Impact Assessment Report

01 – PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Title of the project Public Makers

Project coordinator Fanny Sbaraglia (ULB)

Universities involved ULB (proponent / coordinator); Aix-Marseille Université (partner – academic support. Laurine Basse); Université de Lausanne (partner – academic support, Prof. Alain Kaufmann, ColLaboratoire).

Hub theme Cities, spaces and mobilities

Duration of activities Oct 2025 _ April 2026

Place of the activities Brussels

02 – PARTNERS/TARGET AUDIENCE

Number of internal and external stakeholders involved in and impacted by the project

INTERNAL (All CIVIS universities)				EXTERNAL (All CIVIS cities/regions)	
Academics	Researchers	Students	Admin personnel	Citizens	Other - please specify
3	1	37			8

Non-university associations and organisations that have been involved in the project

ASSOCIATIONS/ORGANISATIONS		
Name	Country	Description
Actiris	Belgium	Administration
Perspective.Brussels	Belgium	Administration
Centre de Crise - Service Public de Wallonie (CORTEX)	Belgium	Administration
CAPAC	Belgium	Administration
Lecture publique x Musées – FWB	Belgium	Administration
SPP Intégration sociale	Belgium	Administration
Easy.brussels	Belgium	Administration
NIDO Lab – SPF BOSA	Belgium	Administration

03 – PROJECT IMPACT

Social dimension

The Public Makers 2025–2026 cycle generated social impact first through the collaborations it created. The project established eight distinct co-creation partnerships with public administrations spanning every level of Belgian governance: federal (NIDO – SPF BOSA, CAPAC, SPF Sécurité sociale), the Walloon Region (Centre de crise – SPW), the Brussels-Capital Region (perspective.brussels, easy.brussels, Actiris) and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (Lecture publique). Each administration committed a named mentor who formulated a real policy challenge and accompanied a student team through diagnosis, fieldwork and prototyping — a sustained engagement rather than a one-off consultation.

Diversity was structurally embedded in the design: 37 Master's students from different faculties and disciplines formed eight interdisciplinary teams, so that each challenge was approached from complementary perspectives. Inclusion was central to the challenges themselves: teams worked on discrimination in the job search (Actiris), non-take-up of social rights (CAPAC), social-ecological protection of exposed populations (SPF Sécurité sociale) and valuing the lived experience of front-desk users (Proxiris).

The project also contributed to the transnational collaboration within CIVIS: UNIL and AMU joined ULB in a shared monitoring committee, laying the foundation for replicating the course across the three universities in 2026–2027. The co-creation was made tangible through two collective moments: the final jury (15 April 2026) and the public poster session at the "Transformer l'action publique" festival (USquare, 22 April 2026).

Cultural dimension

Public Makers produced its cultural impact by generating transferable pedagogical knowledge and connecting sectors that rarely design together. Its central output is a methodological guide (2nd edition, 2025–2026), authored by Fanny Sbaraglia and Léna Bonte (ULB, Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences), documenting the full co-creation methodology across four phases — exploration, immersion, deepening and action — and drawing on design-thinking, collective-intelligence and public-policy-analysis tools. Conceived as a living student resource, it equips each interdisciplinary team with diagnostic and prototyping instruments reusable beyond the course; an English edition is in preparation.

As a 10-ECTS interfaculty unit built on real "wicked problems", the course functioned as a pedagogical laboratory whose methodology is shared with CIVIS partners through the Open Lab network. Its cultural reach widened through the breadth of challenges addressed — including the FWB Lecture publique case on capturing citizens' cultural expectations to shape public programming.

The cycle culminated in two public moments: the final jury (15 April 2026), a cross-learning exchange between academia and the public sector, and a poster session where the eight student teams presented their prototypes at the "Transformer l'action publique" creative and scientific festival (USquare, 22 April 2026) — a public-facing event placing the students' work alongside researchers, administrations and civil-society actors before a broad audience.

Economic dimension

The economic value generated by Public Makers lies less in direct revenue than in the tangible benefits delivered to its partner administrations. Over the cycle, eight public administrations each received a documented diagnosis, a policy brief and a tested prototype addressing a real operational challenge they had formulated themselves — deliverables comparable to consultancy or applied-research services that public bodies would normally have to commission externally. In effect, the project channelled interdisciplinary academic capacity toward concrete administrative needs at no cost to the partners, producing usable tools such as, e.g., a serious game on crisis management (Centre de crise – SPW), a user-experience listening device on non-take-up of social rights (CAPAC), an immersive data-collection tool for front-desk services (Proxiris) and an early-warning instrument for social-ecological protection (SPP Sécurité sociale).

Several of these prototypes were designed to be directly appropriated and implemented by the administrations, extending the project's economic footprint beyond the course: a prototype adopted internally saves the partner the cost of developing it and can improve the efficiency of the service concerned.

For the university, the project's durable economic contribution is a documented, transferable course model and guide that substantially lower the cost of replicating the initiative across CIVIS alliance.

Added value for the beneficiaries

For **students**, the primary beneficiaries, Public Makers created value that a conventional course cannot: rather than analysing public policy in the abstract, they diagnosed a real challenge, conducted fieldwork, and built and defended a working prototype before the administration concerned. This experiential format developed transversal competences — interdisciplinary teamwork, policy analysis, prototyping, written (policy brief) and oral communication — while fostering a civic posture: learning to act on the complexity of public action rather than merely observe it. The interdisciplinary team composition, mixing faculties and backgrounds, was itself a source of learning, exposing each student to reasoning and methods outside their own discipline.

For the **partner administrations**, the added value lay in gaining an external, user-centred perspective on problems they face daily, brought by teams free to question established framings and to place citizens' and users' lived experience at the centre of the analysis.

Public awareness was a further benefit. Beyond the closed final jury (15 April 2026), the students presented their work to a broad, mixed audience at the public "Transformer l'action publique" festival (USquare, 22 April 2026), giving visibility to a co-creation model still uncommon in higher education and opening it to citizens, researchers and civil-society actors alike.

Relevance to the context

Public Makers is strongly anchored in its Brussels context. The 2025–2026 cycle worked exclusively on challenges formulated by administrations operating in and around the city, across federal, regional (Brussels-Capital and Walloon) and Community levels — from employment and anti-discrimination (Actiris) to social rights (CAPAC), crisis management (SPW), territorial planning (perspective.brussels) and cultural access (FWB). The course thus responded directly to concrete needs expressed by the public bodies that shape everyday life in the region, positioning the university as a resource for its local ecosystem rather than an observer of it.

Internally, the project reflects a deliberate institutional strategy. As a 10-ECTS interfaculty course involving 37 Master's students from different faculties, it operationalises ULB's commitment to civic, challenge-based education and to opening the university to its territory. It is embedded in the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences and driven by the Policy Lab, whose sustained work on the science–public-policy interface gives the initiative institutional depth and continuity beyond a single funded cycle.

The context is also transnational by design. Anchored in Brussels for its deepening year, the course is built to be transferable: the collaboration with AMU and UNIL, and the bilingual guide in preparation, are the concrete means through which a locally rooted initiative is being extended to other CIVIS territories in 2026–2027.

Explain how the project has fulfilled the goals and objectives of the European project CIVIS2 (Erasmus+, 2022 - 2026)

WP2 – Civic engagement and challenge-based education strategy. The course operationalises the WP2 objective of *building bridges between the academic world and local social, economic, political and cultural stakeholders*: eight administrations spanning the federal, regional (Brussels-Capital and Walloon) and Community levels each entered a semester-long co-design relationship with an interdisciplinary student team, rather than a one-off exchange. It also served the objective of *setting up and sharing tools to tackle societal challenges*: the methodological guide consolidates the course into a shared, transferable Open Lab framework built on an existing format — directly feeding the WP2 milestone of *tools and processes for Open Labs*. Each team's diagnosis, policy brief and prototype constitutes exactly the kind of *product,*

process and policy recommendation drawn from the Open Lab's intersectoral knowledge that WP2 calls for, generated at the interface between academia and public administration.

WP4 – Local to global civic engagement projects. Public Makers embodies the WP4 task of *developing service-learning and internship through challenge-based projects with societal stakeholders*: students worked in the service of real administrative needs, and psychology students in particular completed the cycle as a supervised internship. As a concrete, repeatable Open Lab initiative producing policy recommendations, it contributes to the WP4 milestones of a *list of civic-engagement projects* and *policy recommendations from Open Labs*. Its local-to-global trajectory is deliberate: rooted in Brussels for its deepening year, it established a shared monitoring committee with AMU and UNIL to replicate the course across the three universities in 2026–2027 — supporting the WP4 aim of *transnational Open Labs involving several local ones* and of *sharing expertise and best practices among Open Labs*.

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