Extinction Rebellion Etterbeek

HOLISTIC COLLECTIVE

Summary

XR Belgium, of which XR Etterbeek forms a part, is the Belgian branch of Extinction Rebellion, a global network that uses non-violent direct action to try to force governments to act on the climate and ecological emergency. Its development over time involved a fairly quick rise, followed by a degree of decline soon after (due to the COVID-19 epidemic) and a shift towards localisation, i.e. smaller-scale action. XR did not become a mass movement in Belgium with significant political-social impact. It did develop a specific organisational structure and collective identity, and many individuals were trained and empowered to stand up when the time comes.

Why is it a case of energy citizenship?

Although Extinction Rebellion is a global network, a closer look at the national/local "branches" shows that their demands and framings can differ. Regarding Extinction Rebellion Belgium specifically, one of their three main demands is *"that the Government enacts a comprehensive, legally-binding National Emergency Plan which phases out the extraction and import of fossil fuels by 2025".*

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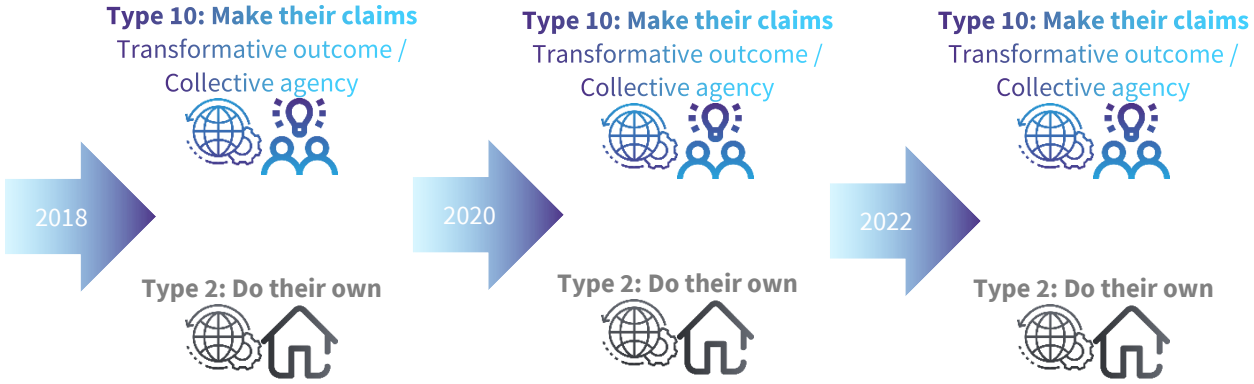
Goals

1. Having a state of climate and environmental urgency declared in Belgium;
2. Developing a mass civil disobedience movement;
3. Raising public awareness about climate urgency and the environmental crisis.

The story and the typology

XR Etterbeek is a local group within the Extinction Rebellion Belgium movement. It has remained quite stable in terms of aims, principles, and narratives since its start in 2019. Thus, throughout its history, the type of energy citizenship enabled by this case has remained unchanged. As XR is a social movement with essentially transformative goals that fundamentally contest the current energy system, the ideal type of energy citizenship is also reflected in this, it being a social movement with transformative outcome orientation (Type 10).



Case history summary

For the summary methodology, click HERE!

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Phase 1: Rise of XR in 2018-2020

The XR movement had a tremendous impact when it started in the UK in 2018. XR Belgium and its local groups, such as XR Etterbeek, joined the movement early on (XR Belgium in 2018, XR Etterbeek in 2019) and made use of the formats and structures developed by XR UK.

The rise of XR attracted many activists, who saw an opportunity to make – collectively and under an inspiring, internationally recognised banner – a bigger impact. Many XR members were engaging in environmentally conscious behaviours before joining the movement, but the movement allowed them to make them more visible and join forces with like-minded people.

Creating XR was an initiative that appeared to have the potential to spur collective change. Thus, the ideal energy citizenship type of XR Etterbeek is defined as a transformative social movement (Type 10). Moreover, as many activists continued with their individual energy citizenship practices, inspiring and learning from others in the movement, household-level individual agency is also supported by the case as a secondary energy citizenship type.

Main type: Make their claims
Transformative outcome / Social movements agency

Secondary type: Do their own (in the household)
Transformative outcome / Private in the household agency

Phase 2: COVID-19-related disintegration, 2021-2022

The COVID pandemic and associated limitations on public gatherings hit this energy citizenship initiative particularly hard. The latter involved quite a strong blow for the just emerging XR Belgium (including the organisation in Etterbeek), and it may now have lost the momentum to become a mass movement with a major political-societal impact. However, a specific organisational structure and collective identity have been developed, and many individuals have been trained and empowered to stand up when the time comes.

Main type: Make their claims
Transformative outcome / Social movements agency

Secondary type: Do their own (in the household)
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Phase 3: Localised action, 2022 -

The objective of creating a mass movement with significant national-level events/actions has been forestalled and partly abandoned. However, action at the local level continues, still guided by essentially the same principles, aims, methods and objectives, albeit with a somewhat reduced focus and localised targets proportional to the smaller-scale activities (e.g., organising XR cafés to introduce people to the movement, the activists and the issues).

Some of the ambitions of creating a mass civil disobedience movement were fulfilled by the case joining Code Rouge,[1] a coalition of social movements. This coalition involves addressing broader societal struggles beyond environmental issues, such as socioeconomic inequality and gender disparity.

	Individual			Collective	
Reformative	1. Do their bit (in the household)	3. Do their bit (within organizations)	5. Make their voice heard	7. Do their share	9. Do the job
Transformative	**2. Do their own (in the household)**	4. Do it their way (within organizations)	6. Make their vote count	8. Go ahead	**10. Make their claims**

Main type: Make their claims
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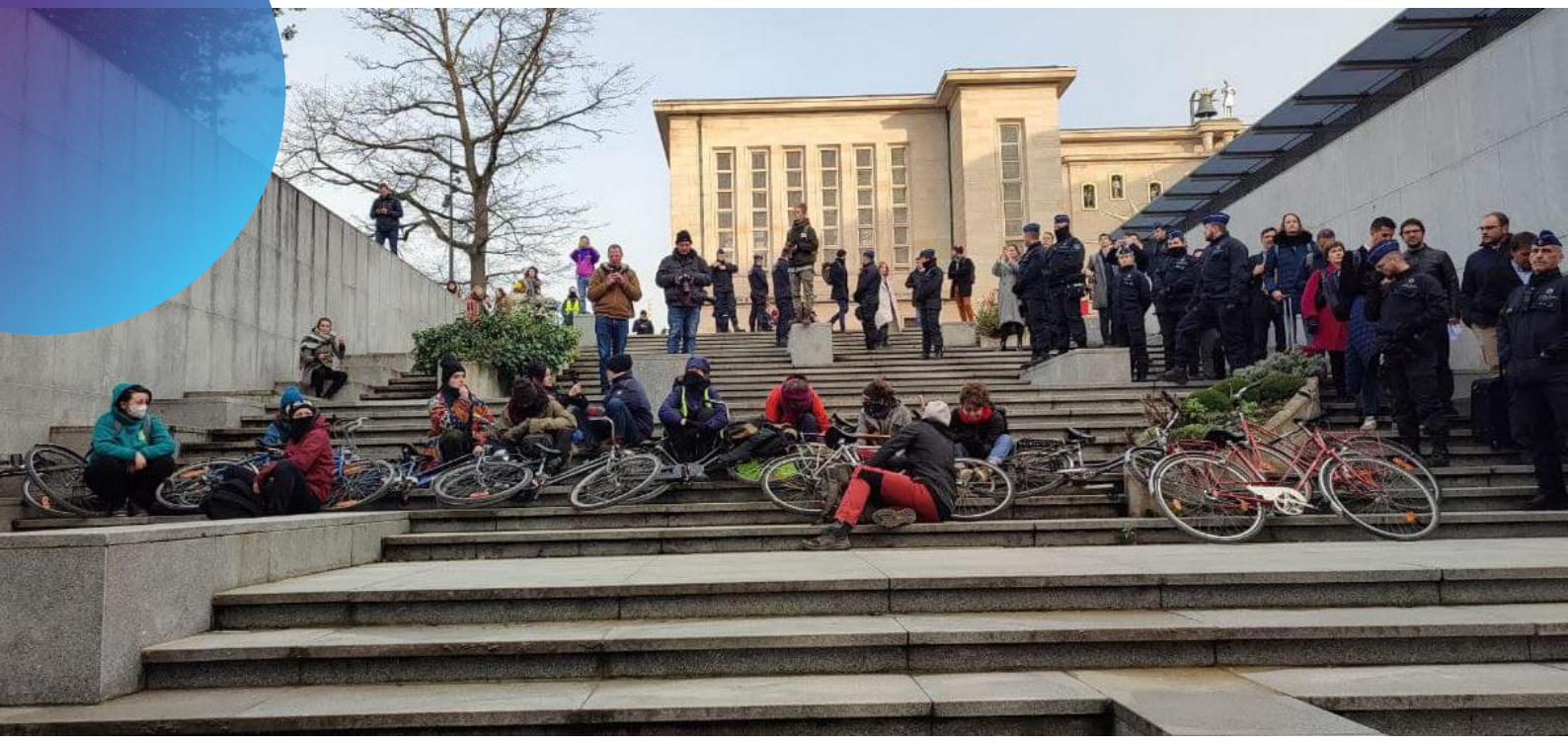

[1] Code Red is a civil disobedience movement created by activists and supported by different organisations and action groups who are working on environmental issues.

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The aspects of energy citizenship

XR challenges representative democracy regarding its incapacity to act on the climate/environmental crisis. In doing so, XR is also very strongly committed to alternative modes of (horizontal; inclusive) decision-making and direct democracy (they demand the establishment of a Citizens' Assembly with extensive executive power). ***XR is strongly committed to effective citizen control, and to the fundamental democratisation of society.*** *Their internal decision-making is in line with these principles/objectives.*

Citizen control

Citizens exert effective control, and their votes have to be taken into account

The 'climate emergency' framing and the key demands imply calling for government to be constrained by environmental limits and ceilings. *The communications of XR do not include extensive quantification of such limits, but it is their demand that decision makers at all levels adhere to these. This emphasis on a ceiling-setting government and the enforcement of ecological limits is a key element of XR objectives/strategy, however.*

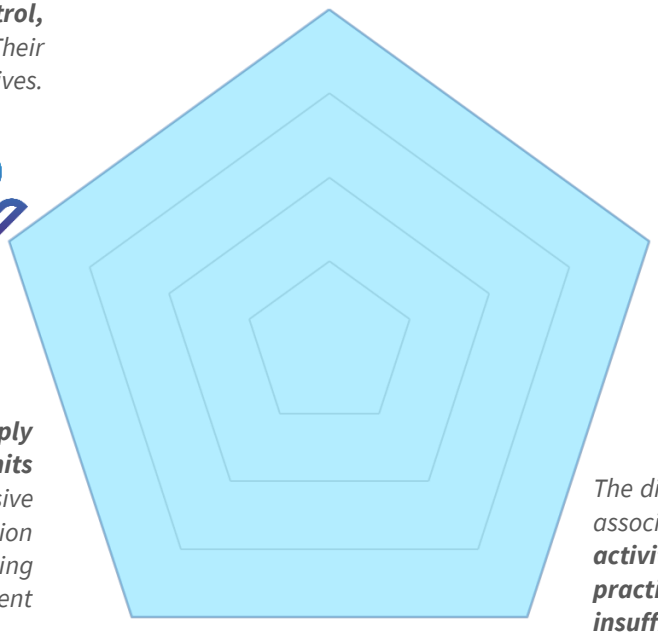
Carbon limit

Explicit recognition with mention/objective of reaching the max. carbon footprint

One of the core demands of XR Belgium is that ***a Citizen's Assembly is installed, with the means and the executive power to ensure decisive action*** *(to steer society away from climate crisis). "A Citizens' Assembly, equipping our regions and communities with the resources and the authority to ensure a managed transition to an equitable post-growth society".*

Democratic energy future

A more democratic energy future is a core concern of the case, and is part of the vision



FOCUS ON GENDER ISSUES

The XR Belgium website includes several principles that ***underline the organization's commitment to radically democratic, inclusive governance that actively redresses power imbalances.*** *Notable examples are the following principles: "We welcome everyone and every part of everyone working actively to create safer and more accessible spaces. We actively mitigate [campaign] for breaking down hierarchies of power for more equitable participation."*

Equity and justice

Involvement is fully open

The distinctive feature of XR is the narrative about climate urgency and the associated necessity of taking decisive action to address this issue. ***The activities of XR typically address environmentally unsustainable practices and laws that exemplify how current environmental policies are insufficient or too permissive of environmentally damaging practices****. Environmental sustainability is a core issue: for example, this is clear from their activities against the 'Salon d'Auto' (which glorifies cars and car culture), a convention for private jets, fast food and the associated animal exploitation, and the production/export of pesticides.*

Environmental sustainability

Environmental sustainability is a core issue, and is considered in goal setting

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Further information

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www.extinctionrebellion.be/en/
www.extinctionrebellion.be/en/local-groups/etterbeek

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References

- Website of the case
  - www.extinctionrebellion.be/en/
  - www.extinctionrebellion.be/en/local-groups/etterbeek
- Vadovics, E., Szőllőssy A., and Vadovics K. (2023). Introduction and Methodology for the EnergyPROSPECTS Detailed Case Summary Reports. EnergyPROSPECTS (PROactive Strategies and Policies for Energy Citizenship Transformation). Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10075408

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