

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF MEDIA IN THE BELGIAN CAPITAL?

Brussels
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Brussels, a media city to be?

While it is already well-known that Brussels is an important economic motor for Belgium and Europe's capital, the city so far got not much recognition as media location compared to other capitals like London, Berlin and Paris. The Brussels Regional Government wants to change this and makes the media industry in Brussels a focal point in Brussels' economic development policy. For that reason, the local government plans to support the local media industry through various initiatives. One of these initiatives is a future media cluster, the so-called Mediapark.brussels. The ambition is to make Brussels a new media hub starting with a re-structuring of the Reyers area, the location of the two public broadcasters. **But, is Brussels ready to become a media city that can compete with London, Paris and Berlin in Europe?**

As new data analyses from the Media Clusters Brussels project show, Brussels is already the leading location for media activities in Belgium: **around 40% of value created by the Belgian media industry is being produced in its capital.** The site of Reyers (future location of the Mediapark.brussel) and its surroundings, alone hosts more than 5.000 employees in the media sector. Based on these and other insights from the analyses within the Media Clusters Brussels research project, presented in more detail below, we can conclude that Brussels already regroups an important part of Belgian media activities and institutions clustered in key neighbourhoods of the city, most notably the commune of Schaerbeek where Mediapark.brussels is being developed. The findings show how important the capital of Belgium is for the local media industry. Hence, the Brussels government finds itself in a favourable position to invest in the development of the capital as a media city as important conditions are already met. Still, as the research also suggests, an economically successful media city equally requires a variety of institutions, skilful professionals and creative connections, points that should not be overlooked by the Brussels Government.

The impact of media activities in Brussels and beyond

The media industry creates an important contribution to the Brussels' economy. With 1.699,57 million EUR net added value produced in 2014, the Brussels' media industry contributes 2,4% to Brussels' total economy (71.744,5 million EUR). The annual average growth level of the media industry in Brussels (2,5%) is higher than the overall growth levels of Brussels' economy and Belgium's economy making the industry even more important by every year.

There are more than 16.000 people working in Brussels' media industry, which contributes 2,7% to the total working population of the city. Out of these 16.000 around 14.800 are employees and 1.300 are independents. The biggest part of media employees work in the audio-visual sector, where audio-visual media companies account for around 6.300 employees. A little over 2.900 print employees are active in a variety of companies located around the city. The advertising sector employs close to 3.000 and finally, the new media sector employs 2.500 individuals. Most independents in Brussels' media industry work as journalists or writers (20,0%), Web developers (15,8%), graphic designers (14,6%) or producers (10,1%). If the number of media workers in Brussels is seems stable between December 2011 and December 2015 (last period of data available), a closer look shows a fairly strong decrease in the number of employees (from 16.200 in 2011 to 14.800 in 2015) counterbalanced by a growth in the number of self-employed individuals. Hence, we hypothesize, a change in working conditions.

If we bring this together with the growth in value created, we can assume a strong increase in labour productivity in Brussels' media industry. Brussels' media industry sectors contribute hereby differently. When broken down, the audio-visual sector is the largest sector, adding 828,14 million EUR net added value (48,7%). This is due to several very large players in this sector. VRT alone contributes 11,8% of the total economy of the media industry in Brussels. Only 17 enterprises create around 50% of total net added value of the industry, the biggest including VRT, RTBF, RTL BELGIUM and KINEPOLIS GROUP from the audio-visual sector, ROSSEL ET CIE, VERBRUIKERS UNIE TEST and MEDIAFIN from the print sector, JC DECAUX and IP BELGIUM from the advertising sector.

Brussels creates 39,0% of the total net added value of Belgium's media industry (4.353,90 million EUR) showing how strong media activities are concentrated in the city, which is followed on the level of provinces by Antwerp with only 16,8% and Flemish Brabant with 9,5% of the total value created by Belgium's media industry. When looking at the repartition of media workers across provinces, it is no surprise that Brussels encompasses the most workers (16.169) far in front of Antwerp (7.935) and Flemish-Brabant (7.140). This leading position of Brussel is also supported by the data on postal code areas in Belgium. Schaerbeek in Brussels (1030), location of the future media cluster to be installed by the Brussels' government and the two public broadcasters, is the leading postal code area in Belgium with 12,7% value created, followed by Brussels City Centre (1000), and Sint-Gillis (1060) in Brussels. Only then the first postal code area outside of Brussels can compete in terms of value created: Mechelen (2800) with 4,3%. Looking at the neighbourhoods within Brussels, it is not surprising that Reyers produces the highest share to Brussels' media industry with 28,9% followed by the Etangs d'Ixelles (4,8%) and the Quartier Nord (3,3%).

More information on the research findings, the methodology and visualizations can be found on the website www.mediaclusters.brussels (see Deliverable 2.3a and 4.2a).

What will the future hold?

The Brussels Regional Government identified in its Regional Sustainable Development Plan in 2013, the media industry as one key area for the future economic development of the capital and therefore plans to support the local media through various initiatives. After 3 years, the first initiative, the development of the Reyers area into the Mediapark.brussels takes form. The Brussels Government together with the commune of Schaerbeek, VRT and RTBF have the ambition to develop around the future new headquarters of VRT and RTBF an 8-hectare urban park, which is to become the heart of a new Brussels creative, diverse and lively neighbourhood. Perspective.brussels and SAU are in charge of the development and implementation of this project. VRT and RTBF plan to move to their new headquarters in 2022. At that same time, the first public spaces should be realised, with the first housing projects following in 2024.

The research showed that Brussels is already a leading media location within Belgium. Reyers and Schaerbeek already attract a lot of media activities to the city. This is an important condition if an area is supposed to be developed in a successful media city that can also internationally compete. Without pre-conditions like the agglomeration of media institutions and media workers, the attempt to start a media hub out of nothing seems unrealistic. However, MCB research suggests that besides the agglomeration of media activities, more conditions need to be met to form an economically successful media cluster. Not only is the presence of media companies necessary but also a supporting network of institutions, the right know-how of the media workers and the possibility for them to exchange knowledge and create spillovers effects. Even though the conditions to form Brussels into a media city are convincing, in practice much more details need to be considered than only focussing on creating space.

More information about the plans of the Brussels Regional Government can be found in the press dossier and on the website www.mediapark.brussels.

About Media Clusters Brussels

Media Clusters Brussels – MCB – is a collaborative and interdisciplinary research project of the three leading universities of Brussels, VUB, ULB and USL-B. The aim is to analyse the many facets of the media industry located in the Brussels Capital Region and explore the development of clusters. Hence, this project aims at creating socio-economic value for the media industry in the Brussels Region and beyond by providing decision-makers with the in-depth knowledge regarding the media industry while accompanying the phases of implementation of the Mediapark.brussels at Reyers.

More information on the MCB project can be found in the Leaflet and on the website www.mediaclusters.brussels.

Please find all press material, including the press release in three languages, infographics with visualizations, the MCB leaflet and links to digital visualizations of the findings also online at:

<http://mediaclusters.brussels/press-desk/>

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UPCOMING

Make your voice as media professional heard! Fill in our survey!

Deadline: April 2017

www.mediaclusters.brussels/brussels-media-survey/

Join us at the EMMA preconference "Creative clusters, media hubs and beyond"!

Deadline: May 2017

<http://www.vub.ac.be/en/events/2017/creative-clusters-media-hubs-and-everything-in-between-putting-theory-to-the-test>