

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears!

Good evening all,
that was off course, not really ME speaking here, this is a quote taken from a play written by ... Shakespeare.

It is not a very appropriate welcome either to a fine audience as present here this evening. A better welcome to all of you would be something like, my dearest fellows and academics, captains of industry, politicians (if any), dear locals, welkom, soyez les bienvenus, herzlich willkommen, benvenuti, välkommen, welcome all...

A crucial advantage of being a local, here and now, a local being someone living more or less closely to the bespoke Remo landfill site, is that it has only taken me 5 minutes to get here tonight, something most of you can hardly claim.

But that very short distance to the Remo landfill site also has been, for the last decades, a major inconvenience, and though our aspirations as a group go way beyond the NIMBY-policy, we do represent an important stakeholder in this matter and that is what this evening is about.

Most of the locals here got involved in the project "closing the circle" some six and a half years ago. At that time, the Flemish consortium of ELFM planned their worldwide first international symposium on Enhanced Landfill Mining, here in Houthalen. Now please remember, or bear in mind that for the outside world, ELFM still is nothing more than digging up a multimillion m³ mixed solid waste deposit, for example here in our village.

So the Flemish consortium, the forerunner of Eurelco, wisely esteemed that a theme of such importance such as digging up, exposing to sorting techniques of whatever kind and a transformation into whatever resource, well, such a theme would definitely need a quadruple helix approach. So, apart from the industry, the academic world and the public authorities, the general public now got involved as part four of the helix.

Again, before one asks whether the consortium had chosen the quadruple helix approach, just because it would look nice in the communication, well, let's not forget some (or should I say most) of the European landfill sites are still nothing more than badly aging dumps and do not exactly enjoy a bright reputation. The only way to overcome this stigma of newbies making money at the expense of the relatively quiet local life, is involving the public opinion. And this, long before the first bulldozers, shovels and excavators arrive on site for what would be a project unknown to the general public.

So, inviting local population into the quadruple helix is more than showing off – it can or WILL be a vital element in the acceptance of the project, be it ELFM in general or CTC at Remo specifically.

A lifetime ecologist and renown (or rather feared yet respected opponent of the local deposit) was contacted and asked if he was willing to bring together some neighbours, living more or less closely to the landfill site, and defend together with them, the local interests, being amongst others the fears, the doubts of the local population about health, safety, mobility, environment.

Over the last six and a half years, the locals have presented themselves as a critical, yet highly interested stakeholder and indeed ever since, they have never stopped listening, asking, informing themselves and finding their way in both technical and community-shared questions.

Today, the locals present here (by the way, those are only 10 or 12 of them, representing a group over twice as numerous), welcome YOU, other constituent parts of the quadruple helix, and we want to share with you, as we have always done vis-à-vis the other stakeholders, our questions, our concerns, our anxieties – relentlessly but always in a respectful way.

We look forward to an interesting discussion this evening and hope that many of these occasions might follow!

In the meantime, enjoy your meal, and I wish you an inspiring evening.