

*The role of STR's during Pandemic and the Antwerp wave:
supra-local approach to a local pandemic resurgence:
preconditions, tools, approach: lessons learned and critical
success factors*

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Immediately at the outbreak of the Corona crisis in Belgium, the governors were closely involved in managing the crisis. In early March 2020, the governors were instructed to ban major events by police decree. Some of the governors proclaimed a provincial phase in anticipation of the federal phase. From then on, all governors consulted daily, much later at two-day intervals and eventually weekly to help manage the sanitation crisis. The roles of the governors were very diverse and evolved throughout the crisis. Because of the specificity of the epidemiological context in the province and/or a number of cities and municipalities, it could also diverge between the respective provinces.

What were those roles? Once the federal phase was formally declared, all necessary measures to protect the people's health and to safeguard the health care system were taken by the National Security Council. From then on, the governors consulted daily and, as the situation stabilised, less frequently with the government's National Crisis Centre. The governors informed the Crisis Centre about the situation on the ground and in particular about the many needs they detected. Especially in the initial phase, there were an immense number of needs.

Some of the most important needs were: 1) good, up-to-date and accessible data of the situation on the ground. In the beginning, everyone was steering blind while a clear and accurate picture was absent; 2) the necessary protective equipment and its proper distribution among health workers in primary care, hospitals and residential care centres; 3) clarity and unambiguity about the measures taken and the many problems of interpretation in the field. 4) the problem of tracing and source detection and the follow-up of home isolation and quarantine. Governors, together with their Emergency Planning Departments and Crisis Cells, were in permanent contact with all mayors and their emergency planning coordinators.

In this way the mayors were profoundly informed about the situation and the (interpretation of) measures. Conversely, the governors received the necessary feedback on interpretation and application problems and needs in the field and were able to escalate unsolvable questions, propose solutions and/or solve problems themselves to the best of their ability.

Gradually, the role of the Governors changed in the sense that they became actively involved in preparing the next phases of crisis management and the gradual phasing out of measures. More concretely, this involved the search for ways to enable more and more activities of our social, economic, leisure, socio-cultural life and pleasure, as well as to make events possible again.

In the summer of 2020, Antwerp was confronted with a so-called 'summer wave': a spectacular increase in infection rates. Co-commissioned by the National Safety Council, I worked together with the National Crisis Centre, many virologists, the Provincial Crisis Cell and in close consultation with the 69 mayors to draw up specific measures for Antwerp in order to bring the figures back to the national average by the beginning of the school year. Thanks to the efforts of all Antwerp citizens, this was achieved. Since then, the Antwerp crisis meetings have been extended to include a weekly consultation with the so-called First-line Zones or Primary Health Care Zones in particular on testing, local outbreaks, local contact tracing and source research, vaccinations, etc.

From October 2020 to May 2021, a so-called smart lockdown was in effect in Belgium. From January onwards, the governors concentrated on - in addition to an adapted continuation of the previous assignments - : consultation with the National Crisis Centre, with the mayors, with the Provincial Crisis Cell and an and an extensive Provincial Crisis Cell to keep the finger on the pulse - among other things on certain assignments related to the vaccination campaign, which is extremely successful, especially in Flanders.

Since October 2021, Belgium has unfortunately been confronted with a new increase in infection rates. It is to be expected that the Consultation Committee will take new, highly targeted measures.