



# C·REAL

Creation of a  
holistic methodology for  
Renovation Advice with focus on  
Lending solutions differentiated  
by Target Group



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**Acronym:** C-REAL

**Title:** Creation of a holistic methodology for Renovation Advice with focus on Lending solutions differentiated by Target Group

**Coordinator:** Dubolimburg vzw

**Consortium:** Dubolimburg vzw, Provincie Limburg, Onesto Kredietmaatschappij nv

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## WP5– Target group of ACO's– D5.4

Report containing results of the questioning of key actors in pilot projects phase I and conclusions/desired adaptations to methodology and prototypes

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**Author's Note:**

**Target Group(s):**

*Members of the consortium (including Commission Services)*

*Peers – renovation advisors*

*Syndics*

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## 1 C-REAL in a nutshell

The main objective of C-REAL is to establish a permanent, structural collaboration between a mortgage lender (Onesto) and a renovation adviser (Dubolimburg) to increase the degree of renovation and improve renovation quality in the province of Limburg. In addition to this and to achieve full customer satisfaction, an effective cooperation between the renovation adviser and contractors will be set up. Actively involving lenders to encourage home owners and home buyers to renovate provides significant added value.

Lenders play a crucial role in purchasing and are frequently in contact with purchasers. Moreover, based on the existing customer relationship regarding the home, lenders can address owners directly. It is of great importance to lenders that homes that they finance are made optimally energy-efficient and are refurbished qualitatively, as it is believed to reduce their financing risk.

A supply of financing options, combined with a range of services to provide advice and guidance for the renovation, and timely and qualitative execution, provides all parties with significant added value, which paves the way for a clear, solid and scalable business model. In setting up these structural collaborations and offering integrated home renovation services, we will focus on the following 3 target groups, guiding them through the whole customer journey. We want to support new home owners, existing mortgage clients and ACO's.

## 2 Executive summary

This deliverable is the result Task 5.7: evaluation of pilots I methodology adjustment:

- satisfaction survey of participating ACO's and key-actors and self-evaluation. Recording success factors of and obstacles for the tested renovation supervision
- bundling the lessons learned from pilots I and adapting the methodology and prototypes based on them.

We provide an overview of the key people and organizations involved and show how they can optimally play their role in an ACO's customer journey.

Furthermore, the C-REAL approach on several key moments of the customer journey and the accompanying communication materials that were developed are discussed in detail.

## 3 Methodology of evaluation

Methodologies and tools were enhanced continuously following the principles of the agile methodology of project management rather than working by the rigid time scheme used by the Waterfall methodology.

As a consequence we left the predefined path of designing a prototype – testing it on a small group of users (Pilots I) – gathering feedback after finishing the whole process – enhancement of prototype – testing on a larger scale (pilots II).

In this deliverable our experiences will be presented based on the (already refined) customer journey of an ACO engaging with a renovation consultant to carry out renovation works. For every step in the CJ experiences of the key actors will be described and the process of agile enhancement of the step/methodology will be explained.

Since we have not yet gone through the full CJ for any of the pilots, and the end of the CJ of pilots I coincides with the beginning of the CJ of pilots II, this process is also not yet complete. Evaluating and constantly adjusting in a flexible manner is a process that will continue over the entire project period.

## 4 The key actors

We have been continuously been gathering feedback from or giving feedback at the key actors below during the whole tested customer journey.

In fact, the representatives of all of the following key actors were also part of the expert groups that took part in the working sessions to develop the first version of the customer journey at the beginning of the project period, even before the start of the first series of pilots.

### 4.1 Renovation advisors

As renovation advisor Dubolimburg is an operational partner within the consortium, so their feedback was easy to gather. The execution of pilots I has to be seen as a constant process of self-evaluation. With every new pilot, insights from the previous pilots were used to put into practice a better version of the customer journey.

### 4.2 financial advisor

As a lender and as an operational partner within the consortium, Onesto was very well placed to provide the pilots of the most appropriate and feasible financial advice and to gather feedback on the specific needs of an ACO.

### 4.3 Syndics pilots I

During informal discussions, feedback was collected which was then implemented in the adapted methodology.

For instance, there was a request to take a holistic look at the matter in addition to energy advice since in some cases other, unresolved issues are a block to taking energy-saving measures.

Syndics also have little time and too little technical knowledge. Moreover, they are not compensated extra for tasks that are added because of planned renovations. They do not know how to approach these renovations or how to find a suitable architect.

They need a guide to show them the way and this goes beyond the purely technical part. For example, legal advice on which building parts belong to the community can help settle discussions and find consensus on a plan of action.

### 4.4 Co-owners pilots I

From the working groups come the same requests for help as from the unionists, namely for a guide to help them decide by making all the framework conditions clear to the whole

group, by describing the best options in an objective way and by offering concrete solutions at technical, legal and financial level.

There is not only a need for total renovation advice in the sense that the building needs to be looked at technically as a whole and in the long term.

There is a demand to also provide clarity on the legal aspects of co-ownership and to offer a financial solution. How will works be financed? Establish a reserve fund, work out a collective solution in which each buyer can participate without obligation and get their own financing solution or an ACO loan? The renovation consultant should also be able to answer these questions for every single owner.

#### **4.5 Municipalities**

Most larger Limburg municipalities are interested in offering the renovation advice to owners of an apartment building permanently. Specifically, within C-REAL Genk, the city of Genk finances extra coaching and guidance of co-owners. This extra budget gave room to look beyond the purely technical advice and to put maximum effort into the 'coaching' of the ACO and the guidance of topics that go beyond the purely energy-related.

#### **4.6 NAV (umbrella organization of Flemish architects)**

NAV represents the interests of Flemish architects. Since the cooperation of an architect is often desirable or even mandatory when an apartment building is renovated, a smooth cooperation with the renovation consultant is key to come to a future proof renovation without lock ins.

Whereas a few years ago NAV had a negative view of the renovation consultant because the latter was labelled as a competitor with insufficient expertise, there is now a great willingness to work together.

#### **4.7 Embuild Limburg (umbrella organization of Flemish contractors)**

As a partner of the larger-scaled Limburg construction companies, Embuild Limburg provides a wide range of advice and training. Embuild is committed to offering its members a large network by organizing and supporting various events.

#### **4.8 Bouwunie Limburg (umbrella organization of Flemish contractors)**

Bouwunie Limburg unites the self-employed and SMEs from the various construction subsectors and defends their interests. It provides specialized advice, engages in lobbying and offers a platform where fellow construction SMEs can meet.

The people mapping out the path for Bouwunie are contractors, managers who have put their own money into their business, who are taking risks and want to create something.

#### **4.9 Energy House Limburg**

Energiehuis Limburg has been providing energy loans since 2009. Since 2018, it expanded its remit to include advice on energy-saving measures for every inhabitant of the province of Limburg.

It is the largest of the 19 Flemish Energy Houses. In terms of both the number of participating municipalities and the number of loans granted. Dubolimburg (renovation advice) and Onesto (lender) are operational partners of Energiehuis Limburg.

#### 4.10 Flemish government – VEKA

VEKA's mission is to prepare, stimulate, coordinate, implement, monitor and evaluate policy initiatives in the field of energy and greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to the transition to a climate-neutral and sustainable society in Flanders, deploying policy instruments in a cost-efficient and high-quality manner and taking into account the social and economic impact.

C-REAL continuously feeds findings from its pilots back to VEKA. In this way, the insights and recommendations gained can be faster implemented in Flemish energy and climate policy.

#### 4.11 CIB – association of Flemish syndics

CIB Flanders - in full Confederation of Real Estate Professions Flanders - represents besides the Flemish real estate sector, also the Flemish syndics.

This organization has proven to be important as a communication channel for C-REAL towards the Limburg Syndics. CIB supports C-REAL by spreading communication on events for Syndics and by recognizing C-REAL infossessions as accredited training for Syndics.

## 5 The customer journey

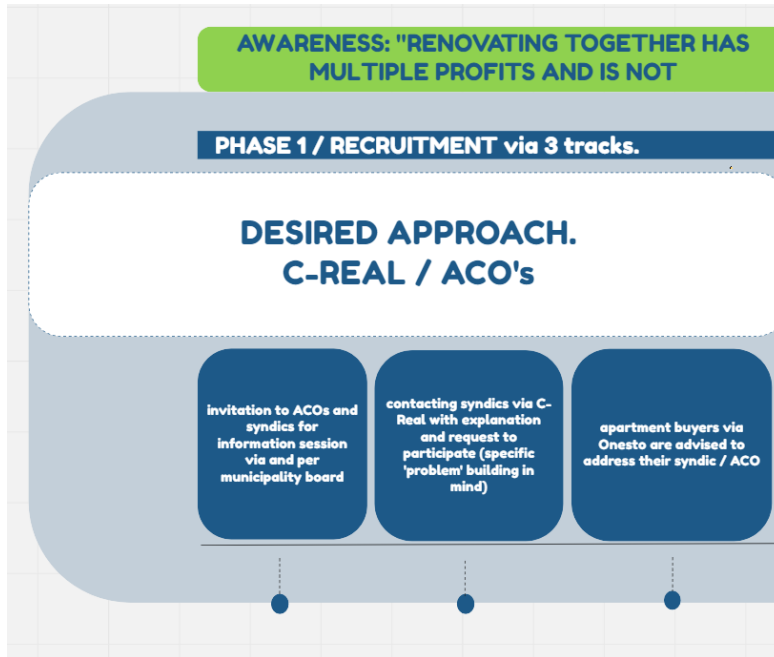
### 5.1 First version of the CJ

During a co-creation process with all stakeholders, a first version of the customer journey of an ACO was drafted. We initially divided the CJ in three phases: recruitment, proposal, execution of works.

#### 5.1.1 Recruitment phase:

Recruitment can be committed via three tracks:

- An invitation to ACO's and syndics for an information session via and per the municipality board
- Contacting the syndics via C-REAL with an explanation of the project and the request to participate, with a specific problem of the building in mind
- The individual buyers of apartments via Onesto are advised to address their syndic of ACO



### 5.1.2 Proposal phase

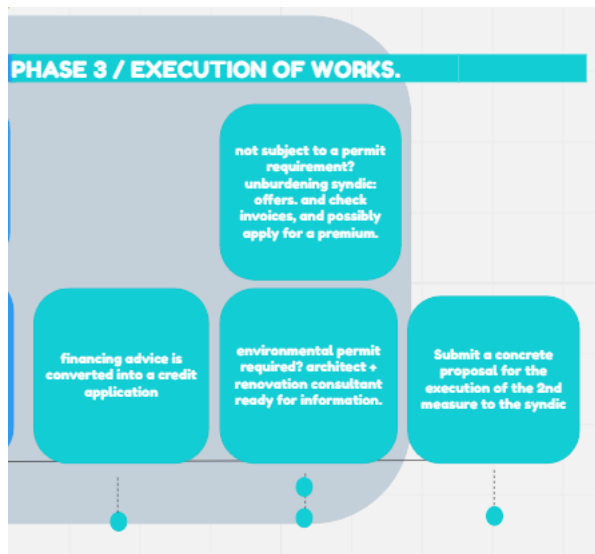
First a technical visit is paid to the building and the apartments, secondly a technical advice with an estimate and financing advice is made. Following an interim technical advice is proposed to a smaller group with the focus on the needs and to create a support base. This is followed by a presentation of the technical advice including financing solutions to the general meeting of the ACO; it is important that there is a point of contact for the customers where they can gather more information



### 5.2 Execution of works



The financing advice is converted into a credit application, the permits are checked (if necessary). Furthermore, we have to do everything to unburden the syndic, even apply for premiums and subsidies if useful.



This preliminary Customer Journey was explained more elaborate in D 3.1, that can be downloaded from the C-REAL website.

### 5.3 The process of refining the C

Contacts with key actors (other renovation advisors, other projects,..) and an audit by an expert in behavioral change learnt that rather than finding ways to communicate the technical advice in a comprehensible way, the involvement of co-owners at the earliest stage can pave the way to a unanimous decision to renovate at an annual general meeting of co-owners.

Because of the obvious need for coaching of the ACO, an additional trajectory of co-creation between the ACO and the renovation adviser before delivering the actual advice, was drawn up.

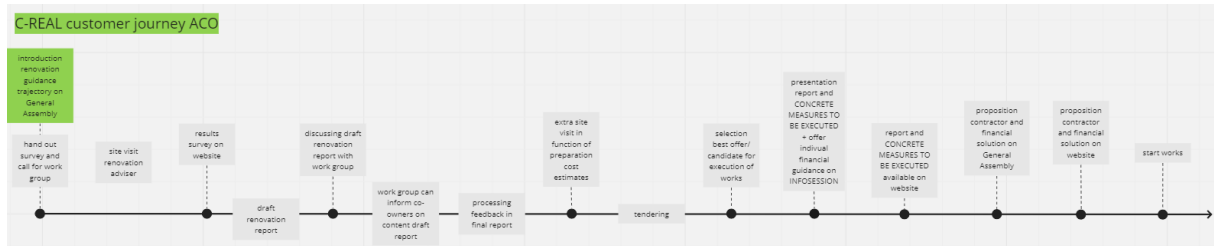
Since not every co-owner will be convinced from the start to participate in the customer journey, it is necessary to make sure every co-owner can enter it at its own pace, to that effect we had to provide multiple points of entry.

By compiling a working group with co-owners, their members can become ambassadors for the rest of the co-owners.

A survey is drawn up, on the one hand to investigate the concerns of the co-owners, on the other hand to increase their involvement.

A transparent communication on every aspect of the customer journey is key in order create a successful co-creation trajectory, in that respect the necessary communication material was developed.

## 5.4 Current version of CJ and how we continuously enhanced the components based on feedback of the key actors



Based on the feedback we collected during the implementation of the various trajectories, the processes and prototypes were constantly adjusted.

For example, the presentation of the C-REAL renovation guidance at the general assembly of co-owners was constantly being adjusted. The message, the presentation, was sharpened. Consideration was given to when we should speak (preferably at the beginning so that any other issues do not interfere with our message). Feedback from the syndics that too many expectations were created among owners if we highlighted the technical advice too much (while certain diagnostic studies were not in the advice) was also taken into account. As a result we currently focus on the journey that we take together and emphasize the aspect of co-creation. The renovation advisor as a guide and as part of the working group, rather than the renovation advisor focusing purely on the technical aspects of the building. We find that this approach is successful and increases the owners' willingness to listen.

We also noticed that when the trajectory can be tailored to the specific needs of the ACO's, this contributes to the success of the co-creation process. In other words, we are flexible with the customer journey as we outline it, so that we can respond to the specific needs of an ACO. Of course, this is done without losing sight of the end result. That is providing total renovation advice and guidance on the implementation of the advised works with the intention of making the building future-proof.

## 5.5 CJ's components highlighted

### 5.5.1 Introduction - survey - working group composition



We invest in a collaboration with the group of co-owners from the start of the project. During the general meeting, the guidance process is presented, with a request to complete the survey and form a working group. During the presentation, emphasis is placed on the co-creation process with the renovation advisor as a guide. The importance of clear communication cannot be overstated.

### **5.5.1.1 Methodology and prototypes**

#### *5.5.1.1.1 Intro renovation guidance (presentation)*

This document will be placed as downloadable at the [C-REAL website](#)

#### *5.5.1.1.2 Survey*

A link to each survey will be placed as downloadable at the [C-REAL website](#). The online survey will be announced on a poster with the QR code that leads to the survey. Co-owners can hang this call to participate in the survey in the entrance hall.

#### *5.5.1.1.3 Web page for ACO*

##### *Public web page on C-REAL website*

Every pilot has its own public [C-REAL webpage](#) with general information.

##### *Private webpage with downloadables and state of play*

Information on the pilot that is private, is placed on a separate webpage that is only accessible for the co-owners. On this webpage all necessary documents consultable, a state of play of the renovation guidance is presented. We noticed that the idea to be involved and informed makes that co-owners are reassured and are more receptive for the ultimate renovation advice.

#### *5.5.1.1.4 Info session for Syndics and co-owners of C-REAL pilots (ACO café)*

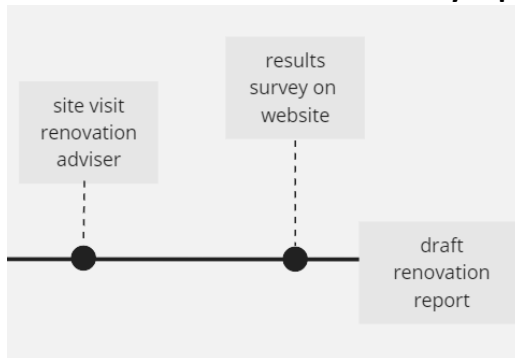
In cooperation with the city of Genk, an 'ACO café' was organized on October 25<sup>th</sup> 2022. There, 133 Syndics and co-owners of the Genk C-REAL pilots received information on the latest financial instruments for ACO's and on how to reach consensus within an ACO using the ladder of behavioural change. Besides a reiteration of how the C-REAL co-creation process works, a state of play of the C-REAL pilots was given. It was striking that both syndics and co-owners were very interested, not only in the technical renovation advice, but certainly also in the tailor-made financing solutions for a ACO, as included in MijnVerbouwLening.

More info on this event and the presentations: [133 deelnemers voor infosessies renovatie appartementen | C-REAL](#)

### **5.5.1.2 Key actors involved**

- Renovation advisor
- Syndic
- Co-owners
- Municipalities

## 5.5.2 Site visit and draft advisory report



### 5.5.2.1 Developed prototypes

#### 5.5.2.1.1 Template for renovation advice for multi family home

Based on existing templates for renovation advice, a new template containing all the necessary topics was compiled. This was organized according to the format of the GRO, the new Flemish sustainability measuring instrument.

The content of this template was explained more elaborate in D5.2 that will be made available via the [C-REAL website](#).

#### 5.5.2.2 Key actors involved

- Renovation adviser
- External experts (e.g. concrete decay, technical installation audits, legal expert)

## 5.5.3 Consultation with working group - feedback in final advice



The renovation advisor discusses the draft advice with the working group, with the aim of gathering feedback that can be incorporated into the final design of the advice. In this way, the advice can be optimally adapted to the ACO's needs. Giving the ACO the opportunity to contribute to the advice from the outset, will increase support for the acceptance of the energy-saving measures that will be ultimately proposed.

### 5.5.3.1 Developed prototypes

#### 5.5.3.1.1 Tool for drawing up a financial scenario on the long term

Once the ACO has taken the first step and commissioned renovation advice, the estimated cost of the works is often a huge barrier.

However, the cost price is relative. After all, the renovation works not only contribute to a reduction in energy costs and a more pleasant living environment, but also to an improved property value.

To convince the ACO of this, it is important for the ACO to get a realistic picture of what the costs and returns are of a scenario with and without renovation. Given the high investment costs, these scenarios should take into account available financing options.

To be credible, the data used in these scenarios should be recognizable to the ACO. A mere theoretical example of 'a building' is not recognizable and convincing enough. This means working with the real data and assumptions of the ACO in question. Consequently, real energy consumption, real common costs, real price increases, real financing costs and real reserve capital need to be identified.

Drawing up such scenarios or business cases requires not only strong Excel skills and a basic knowledge of financial mathematics (concept net present value, annuity, perpetuity, etc.) but also knowledge of the TCO (Total Cost of Ownership) of maintenance costs. However, these skills are not among the basic competencies of syndicates, whereas they are precisely the ones who are closest to the ACO to convince it of the usefulness of a renovation.

TCO-templates that can be used for drawing up such scenarios already exist today. Unfortunately, these templates are not accessible enough for the target audience of syndics, because they require the user to have the above-mentioned skills. There was therefore a need for a tool that was accessible to syndics and tailored to the ACO, which was developed and tested within C-REAL.

The template makes it easy to visualize and compare the evolution of costs and revenues of the various scenarios over a 20-year period (with or without financing and taking into account realistic price and index evolutions).

The template can also be used by the syndic to prepare an investment dossier to the banks. By making the template more accessible, yet realistic and recognizable to the ACO, we expect not only that syndics will more frequently enter into the renovation dialogue with the ACO, but also that this dialogue will be conducted more objectively (more based on figures and common sense).

Consequently, future investment cases may be better prepared administratively, as a result of which we expect a reduction in the 'renovation credit administrative burden' perceived by banks.

We note that the banking sector has so far played a rather reactive role in offering financing products to ACO's in which the 'administrative burden' (opaque accounting ACO's, structuring and follow-up of the project, interactions with the syndicates, etc.) is considered one of the causes.

This is also reflected in the duration of the credits offered which are mostly limited investment credits at 10, max 15 years. However, such terms are too short to finance works

with a TCO of e.g. roof, façade (30y), so the financial threshold for owners to renovate remains too high.

By removing a significant part of this administrative burden, we hope that banks will become more interested in offering ACO loans in the future, thereby increasing the financing opportunity for ACO's.

#### 5.5.3.1.2 Loan for ACO (*MijnVerbouwLening*)

In the classic financial market, only a handful of expensive credit solutions tailored to an ACO were available until recently.

Bank ACO credits are the most obvious. However, they always need to be coupled with expensive credit insurance, to be taken out through one monopolised player. Their maturity is usually limited to 10 years, which hinders monthly affordability. In very exceptional cases (if linked to a detailed long-term plan), a bank dares to deviate from this and go up to 15 or maybe 20 years. On top of that, the interest rate is often higher than the prevailing market rate, given the heavy administrative burden on the bank.

A (too) short financing period, a high interest rate and an expensive guarantee insurance is unfortunately the combination that maintains the unanswered demand for an affordable financing solution for VMEs.

Thanks to pressure from various projects and initiatives including C-REAL, the Flemish government recently came up with a more appropriate solution.

Since 1 September 2022, any ACO can lend up to €60 000 interest-free via *MijnVerbouwLening*, supplemented by €25 000 per individual housing unit. For an ACO of 20 units, that makes 560 000 euros financeable at 0%. Moreover, you can extend the term to 25 years. That makes a monthly repayment for an amount of 560 000 euros in the best case (spread over 300 months) just 1 866 euros.

But even with the *MijnVerbouwLening*, there are still pitfalls to overcome.

First of all, this loan must be applied for at and approved by the Flemish Energy Houses. Today, however, these do not have the necessary capacity and know-how for this. Especially if the loan amounts exceed 250,000 euros, it is a big risk for a local energy house to accept such a loan without a professional analysis of the accounting figures of the ACO.

From within the sector, there is therefore a zealous plea for the government to add an extra guarantee for larger loan amounts (> 250 000 euros). That way, the Energy House bears (part of) the risk not solely, but the risk is spread over several parties. Ideally, an independent party could be in charge of analyzing the figures, which would then give the green light to the Energy Houses.

Secondly, the *MijnVerbouwLening* is only intended to carry out energy works. Structural or quality works cannot be included.



To conclude, we can state that at present, an ACO therefore still needs to use a combination of loans to solve all its needs. The administrative burden remains high for the ACO and the Syndic. Financing often remains unfeasible, meaning that at this point too few concrete renovations can be carried out. Nevertheless C-REAL will continue to lobby with the Flemish Government to remove the last barriers to granting a long-term credit, thus paving the way for ACOs to carry out in-depth renovations in the near future.

### 5.5.3.2 Key actors involved

- Energy House Limburg
- Flemish government
- Insurance companies
- CIB – association of Flemish syndics
- During an info session organized in cooperation with the municipality of Genk, the above described financial tools were presented to a group of syndics.
- Co-owners
- It was also confirmed by the co-owners of the pilots during the same information session that providing the ACO with tailored financing could remove the main barrier to achieving a future-proof renovation of their building.

### 5.5.4 Establish priorities - request tenders



#### 5.5.4.1 Methodology and prototypes

##### 5.5.4.1.1 Collective of architects

A call to join a collective of architects to carry out renovations of old apartments was launched in collaboration with NVA, the representative organization of Flemish architects. The need to be able to refer to an architect with experience in both renovations and apartments emerged after the start of the first pilots. An environmental permit for instance is often required and then the renovation advisor should pass on his task to an architect who will work with the renovation advice. In order not to delay the renovation process while looking for a suitable architect, it is useful to already have a list of interested candidates.

##### 5.5.4.1.2 Collective of contractors

To be able to bring together offer and demand, i.e. to lead the ACO to a reliable executor of the recommended works, the renovation advisor has to be able to rely on a structural cooperation with the building sector. To that effect C-REAL initiated setting up an structural collaboration with contractors and with architects. The outcome of the latter task is described more elaborate in deliverable 6.3 that will be made available on the [C-REAL website](#).

#### 5.5.4.1.3 Organization of Aandag – recurring event to connect building sector and renovation advisory organizations

Efforts were made to raise awareness of the renovation advisor profession among the construction industry and to convince building professionals of the benefits of a structural cooperation with renovation advisors. To that effect Dubolimborg organizes an annual event for the building sector. All Limburg architects and contractors will be invited for an evening of pleasure and networking, with the aim of recruiting architects and contractors for the collective.

#### 5.5.4.2 Key actors involved

- NAV (umbrella organization of Flemish architects)
- Embuild (umbrella organization of Flemish contractors)
- Bouwunie (umbrella organization of Flemish contractors)
- Stebo (other renovation advisor, also operational partner of Energiehuis Limburg)

#### 5.5.5 Informal information session for ACO

Presentation of report and implementation of measure – overall and individual financing advice



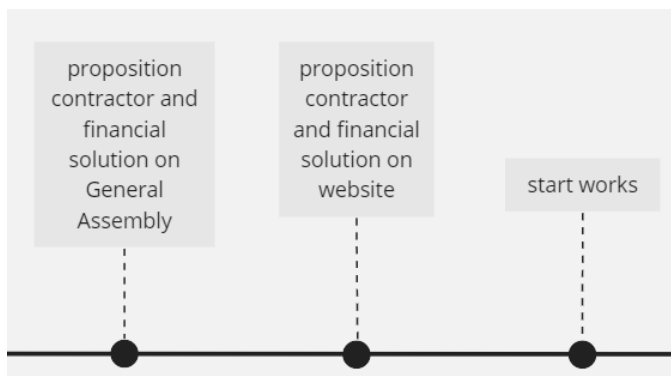
#### 5.5.5.1 Methodology and prototypes: to be developed

##### 5.5.5.1.1 Key actors involved

- Renovation advisor
- Financial advisor
- Co-owners
- Syndic



## 5.5.6 Approval on GA - start of works



### 5.5.6.1 Methodology and prototypes: to be developed

As currently none of the C-REAL pilots have come to this point in the customer journey, so far no feedback was gathered. It seems clear though that a proper guidance and communication during the first steps of the trajectory are key to the success of this phase. At this point most parts of the role of the renovation advisor will be taken over by the architect (if applicable) and the contractor.

The exact role of renovation advisor in this phase has to be designed, but it goes without saying that the renovation advisor will remain available for the syndic or the co-owners in case of concern or questions.

### 5.5.6.2 Key actors involved

- Renovation advisor
- Co-owners
- Syndic
- Contractor
- Architect

## 6 CRM – documenting pilots

'Synergy' was chosen to collect and analyze certain data from the different pilots in a structured way. Furthermore, other documents (plans, advice, personalized communication materials,...) are collected per pilot on the C-REAL sharepoint.

Among other things, the time path of the customer journey, the investment cost of the advised measures and the realized energy savings are thus mapped. Until now, the pilots are not sufficiently advanced to be able to analyze the data above mentioned.

## 7 Conclusions and recommendations

Despite the fact of only having guided the customer journey of the first group of 6 pilots only partly, we can already draw some conclusions and make some recommendations on how to approach ACO's for renovation guidance.

- The renovation advice should never be limited to advising on energy saving measures only. A holistic approach that contains also advice or guidance on financial, legal, structural and social topics is necessary for an ACO to be able to execute a deep renovation.
- The renovation advisor has to be a guide that leads the way in co-creation with the syndic and the co-owners, not a technical expert that gives advice without input from the ACO.
- Communication is key. All of the co-owners have to be informed about the guiding trajectory from the very first start. This will take away their concerns and mistrust and it will increase their engagement.
- The ideal customer journey has to be balanced against the flexibility for a tailor made advice without losing sight of the ultimate goal to achieve, namely deep renovating and a future proof building.
- Structural cooperations with all stakeholders pave the way to a smooth customer journey.
- Finding a suitable, tailor made financing solution remains the main barrier for a deep renovation of an apartment building. As such a solution is hard to establish on the traditional banking market, this must be seen as a task for the Flemish government. With the recent MijnVerbouwLening, a good start was made, but some issues still have to be tackled.