



Sustainable & creatives cities: urban policy in Flanders

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Investing in a sustainable future

By 2030, Flanders will have a million more inhabitants than it has today. This population growth poses major spatial, social and ecological challenges *and* opportunities for Flanders, especially for its cities.

The Government of Flanders views cities as the engine of society, places where solutions for social challenges are found innovatively. This is why the Government of Flanders' urban policy stimulates cities to evolve into sustainable and creative places. The aim is to provide a sustainable future for everyone.

Flanders stimulates its cities by providing both subsidies and expertise. It promotes innovation, knowledge development and exchange of experience between all those who are involved in building sustainable cities. The urban policy is a specific competence of the Government of Flanders, which also has a Flemish Minister for Cities. Not only is the urban policy embedded in the general policy of the Government of Flanders, but, since 2000, it has also consisted of a specific policy for which there is a budget of EUR 147 million. Flanders forms a partnership with its cities to conduct this urban policy.

The policy mainly supports the cities of Antwerp, Brussels (by way of the Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie/Flemish Community Commission), Ghent, Aalst, Bruges, Genk, Hasselt, Kortrijk, Leuven, Mechelen, Ostend, Roeselare, Sint-Niklaas and Turnhout. Twenty-one smaller cities can rely on subsidies for urban renovation.



Housing

Antwerp - Military Hospital becomes green lung of the city 01

A new sustainable neighbourhood will be built at the Military Hospital site near the station in Berchem (Antwerp). The neighbourhood will accommodate not only over 400 homes, apartments and lofts, but will also provide locations for shops, offices, workshops and hotel, restaurant and catering facilities. A green space of 1.65 ha will be provided as a place where local residents will be able to relax, walk, cycle and play.

Pilot projects based on innovative housing projects

There is a need for affordable residential accommodation in Flanders, but at the same time, we must also have a qualitative and more economical approach to using the public space available. Five design teams have carried out design research on the potential of and preconditions for innovative housing projects in Flanders. This research is being used as the foundation for five pilot projects to bring about a mix of residential environments.





Turnhout - affordable housing in the heart of the city 02

The city of Turnhout has made 49 building plots available to people planning to build their own homes there. These parcelled lots are located in what is almost the very centre of the city. The surrounding area was made as attractive as possible for young families with children. The high quality public area has little car traffic and cyclists and pedestrians can cross it in all directions.

A different perspective on young families' motives for moving out of or staying in cities

Why do young families leave the city? Why do some of them continue to live in the city? Many cities rack their brains over these questions. Traditional motives often quoted, such as the prospect of having children and accompanying need for more space and a larger garden, do not explain everything, however. A team of young researchers went to Mechelen to put these questions to young families in personal, in-depth interviews. This did not result in a ready-to-use manual, but it did inspire 85 recommendations. It is clear that the key lies in the way in which urban residents use and experience space, and in the recommendation that these designs be field-tested among the families.

Space

Ghent - old docklands become urban beach and meeting place 03

Creating the urban beach and its accommodation turned the bleak, desolate wasteland of Ghent's old docklands into a cosy and charming meeting place, free of charge and accessible to everyone. This temporary function introduces Ghent's residents to a (previously) unknown part of the city, which will be developed into a new residential zone in the near future.





Brussels - the city as a playground for grown-ups 04

The CLIP (City Life Imagine & Play) project creates a playground for grown-ups in Brussels. This is just what the doctor ordered to escape the daily chaos and commotion. It offers room to think and act outside the box, unaffected by predictable patterns.

How to use space intelligently?

The current population trends in Flanders pose major challenges to the cities in terms of physical accommodation, such as the construction of schools, facilities to care for children and the elderly, etc. Fluctuation in population growth also changes the needs for facilities over time. The Government of Flanders financed research on “adaptable, combinable and multi-purpose infrastructure” in cities, which shows the challenges and obstacles facing the policy.

Child-friendly

Bruges - child-friendly action plan 05

Bruges aims to improve play opportunities in the city through its Play Space Policy Plan (*Speelruimtebeleidsplan*). It has drawn up an integrated action plan to construct new spaces for children to play in or to redesign existing squares. This not only involves traditional playgrounds, but also parks, squares, streets, hangouts and play forests, which were given a complete make-over. The city also drew up a manual explaining to developers how they can develop their parcelling or new housing projects in a child-friendly way.



05

Brussels - Extended school 06

The Flemish Community Commission (Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie or VGC) created an after-school care, a day care centre, a meeting place, a parenting support initiative and the Academy for Music, Speech and Dance at the Nieuwland Campus in the City of Brussels. The VGC wants to use this "extended school" to unite the three main contexts forming the children's existence: school, home and play.



06



Ghent - children personally assign functions to empty spaces in the city 07

The socio-artistic organisation Rocsa invited children and teenagers to talk about the quality of life in their neighbourhoods. Rocsa helps them to use their imagination and living environment to work out functions for the many empty spaces (pending further urban development) through discussions, drawings and walks.

ECO-LOGICAL

Sint-Niklaas - new sustainable residential neighbourhood 08

The neighbourhood currently known as Clementwijk on the northern outskirts of Sint-Niklaas will be expanded into a sustainable and green residential area. Initially, Clementwijk² will be able to accommodate 400 energy-efficient homes intended for various groups of residents, and a large nature park measuring 4 ha. The second stage will involve expanding the neighbourhood to 700 homes, which will include public amenities such as a school, child care facilities and a local shop.

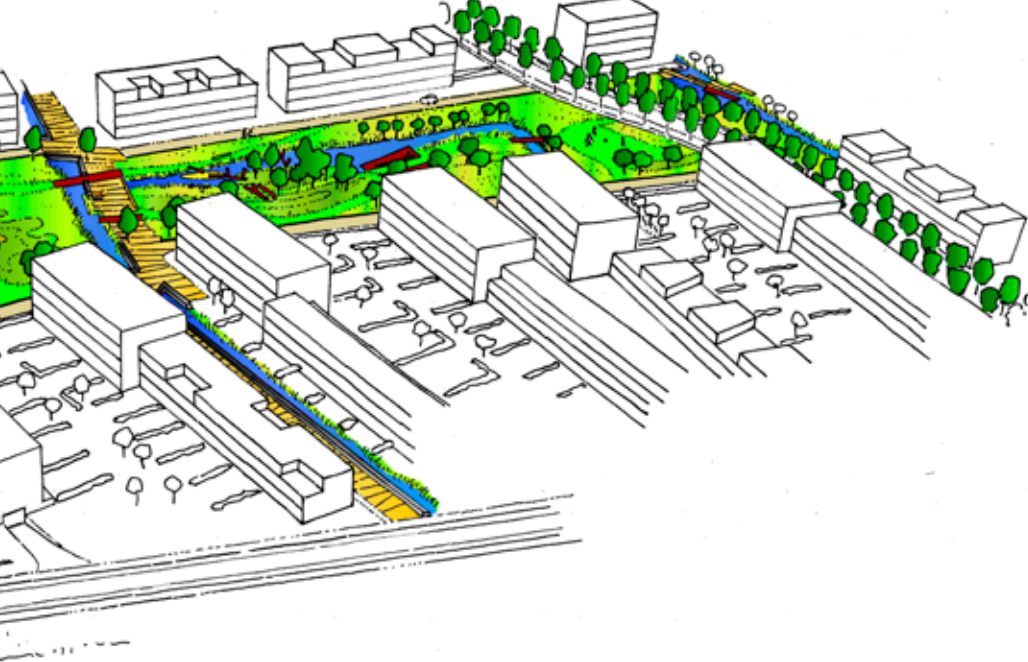
Leuven - arts sector reduces ecological footprint 09

The Green Track project reduces the ecological footprint of Leuven's arts sector. This project is based on a sustainability charter, an action plan for the arts sector and the exchange of experience with colleagues and the public at large.

08



09



URBAN AGRI- CULTURE

Leuven - food strategy for the city

The objective of a food strategy for the city of Leuven is to create a future in which the city's residents will enjoy the nourishment of tasty and healthy food in a sustainable, climate-neutral and socially fair manner.

Ghent - creative city picnic connects producers and consumers 10

"Boer'nBrood" is a creative city picnic where as many products as possible are obtained from producers in and around Ghent. Boer'nBrood lets people taste food that is produced completely locally, coming straight from the farm to peoples' plates at several locations in Ghent. A lavish picnic buffet was provided in a surprisingly urban farm theme setting.



MOBILITY

Hasselt - smart and sustainable deliveries 11

Hasselt is an out-and-out shopping city. Its centre is growing rapidly, and more and more businesses are opening their doors. They want their goods to be delivered on time, and often at the same time. But the ensuing traffic congestion, air pollution and noise nuisance was threatening to spoil the shopping experience. Therefore, the city worked together with the tradespeople to find a workable, sustainable and customer-friendly solution: CityDepot, a (logistics) service centre on the outskirts of town.



11

Roeselare - new station area provides the city with oxygen 12

The station and the neighbourhood around it are undergoing a thorough renovation. A more spacious and low-traffic station square, with new bus and train stations, will be constructed. This makes it more traveller-friendly and convenient, and will improve the local residents' quality of life. The area surrounding the station will become a more pleasant place to work, live, shop and travel.



12



Research on implementing bicycle sharing in Flemish cities 13

Antwerp has had a successful bicycle sharing system for several years now. The Government of Flanders is investigating whether smaller cities can also set up successful bicycle sharing systems. The research is being carried out by developing scenarios for the cities of Ghent and Roeselare.

SOCIAL

Ostend - transit homes 14

The city council provides housing and housing guidance to residents whose homes have been declared unfit for habitation and who cannot find any immediate alternative. People hit by this issue can find temporary peace and quiet in a transit home. The lay-out of the building is so flexible that it provides housing solutions for both singles and large families. Housing supervisors help people in their search for a new and suitable home so that other issues can also be dealt with gradually.





Antwerp - neighbourhood garden helps break social isolation 15

Luchtbal is a neighbourhood in Antwerp that is cut off both physically and socially from other parts of the city. These barriers are also a symbol of the lack of belief that local residents have in their own self-worth. The “Le Collier Jardin” project, which involves residents maintaining a chain of gardens, encourages them to break through their social isolation and to take initiatives.

Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent & Sint-Niklaas - Neighbourhood stewards

Neighbourhood stewards guide newcomers to the community of their new neighbourhood by properly informing them about their rights and duties and about community habits (no noise at night, waste collection, school attendance, etc.). Attention is devoted to young people in particular. Neighbourhood stewards talk, chat and have conversations with “old” and “new” residents to improve mutual understanding and mediate in any disputes. They intervene if there is public nuisance by reporting this to the competent services.

SHARING

Aalst - Local barter 16

LETS is short for Local Exchange Trading System, a bartering system for goods and services. In the late 1990s, the residents of Aalst set up a pilot project, which now enjoys a wonderful image all over Flanders. The people from Aalst can call on the network for all types of chores and services (child care, painting, yard maintenance, running errands, etc.). Services are not paid in cash, but by a service in return. This is not necessarily done by returning a service directly, but by returning it within the network.





Private car sharing 17

The Government of Flanders is supporting 11 cities to start up 40 private car sharing groups in one year. Private car sharing is organised by individuals, families or organisations. In Flanders, this initiative runs concurrent with the services provided by (professional) car sharing companies. Private car sharing has several social advantages. Participants travel by car less frequently and cycle or use public transport more often. This reduces CO2 emissions and improves the health of those participating in the project. Reducing the number of cars also reduces the need for parking spaces and creates more public spaces. Last but not least: private car sharing strengthens the community feeling in the neighbourhood.

INNO- VATION & CREATIVE ECONOMY

Kortrijk - island inside the city becomes centre for arts and innovation 18

Connecting within the spectrum of arts, economy, entrepreneurship, education and creative citizenry is encouraged on the Buda Island. In brief, this is where people and organisations from different sectors and from different backgrounds connect.





Genk - mining site becomes breeding ground for innovation **19**

The city of Genk re-designated the Winterslag mining site to meet the need for new urbanism and expansion of the urban economic fabric. C-mine has become a meeting place for people who want to activate their senses through various forms of creativity and creative innovation, either professionally or in their spare time.

Brussels - Micro-market supports artists and designers **20**

MicroMarché is a local market where designers or artists having no official status are offered the opportunity to test their products with limited financial or administrative expense. Design objects, clothing, books, accessories, furniture, paintings and jewellery are sold here. Artists are given the opportunity to present their goods and to try them out on the public.



CREATING THE CITY TOGETHER

Meeting day “Thuis in de Stad/At Home in the City” 21

It's not only the authorities that shape a city; entrepreneurs, citizens, associations and scientists also help create it. Once a year, these sections of society cross the confines of their sectors and policy areas and meet on the “At home in the City” day. They share their knowledge, exchange experiences and establish new contacts. There is a different theme every year.

Urban programmes

Cities and the Government of Flanders join forces by using urban initiatives to create a multidisciplinary programme for the cities and their surrounding regions. These programmes offer a solution to the spatial, ecological and social challenges brought about by population growth in Flanders and by global climate change. This is an administratively innovative process because the solutions developed through the programme can be implemented in other Flemish



cities and municipalities. In this way, the Government of Flanders recognises the pioneering role of its cities.

PARTICIPATION

Mechelen - neighbourhood manager acts as go-between for residents and city council 22

Every neighbourhood in Mechelen has a neighbourhood manager who bridges the gap between the neighbourhood and the city council. These neighbourhood



managers identify what the residents want and what bothers them and, in so doing, they promote social cohesion in their neighbourhood or village. Thanks to the neighbourhood managers and the neighbourhood committees, made up of local volunteers, the city is able to significantly improve the quality of the residents' living environment and to involve them in policy-making.

Genk - residents work on creating a stronger, more caring society 23

Genk's mining history and the migrant workers who are an integral part of it caused the city to develop into one of Flanders' most multicultural cities in the early 20th century. More than half of the city's inhabitants are of non-Belgian origin. This compels Genk to continuously question and renew the community model for this multicultural city. The population is encouraged to join forces in thinking and working to create a stronger, more caring society by holding discussions in the city under the slogan "The Genks - We make the City". Some forty volunteers from Genk ("challengers") take to the streets with topics of their own personal choice. They talk to other Genk residents and organise discussion evenings and outdoor activities to find out what people in the city find important.



CAPACITY BUILDING

City Monitors: Flanders records the sustainability of its cities

The City Monitor is a set of some 200 indicators recording the quality of life in the cities and showing how sustainable it will be to develop them. The City Monitor is based on central and city databases and on surveys of the cities' inhabitants. The release of the new City Monitor in 2015 will include the release of a Child Monitor, which will investigate how child-friendly cities are.

Expert guidance in the design of urban renovation projects 24

The Government of Flanders grants "concept subsidies" to cities when immature urban projects need a boost. The cities can use these subsidies to hire an experienced designer who can shed a different light on certain issues. For example, by calling in the assistance of external experts, the city of Deinze managed to turn an isolated project for reconvertng a former factory into an extensive urban project by incorporating river banks, squares, parks, urban amenities and residential units. When the





concept had been worked out, it was granted a subsidy so that it could be completed, and received the Flemish Government Architect Award in 2013.

Flemish Cities Knowledge Centre

The Flemish Cities Knowledge Centre was founded in 2007 at the prompting of thirteen central cities and the Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten vzw (the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities npo). The Knowledge Centre aims to reinforce the development and exchange of knowledge among cities themselves, as well as between cities, institutions and actors in urban society in order to support an innovative, effective and efficient local urban policy. From this knowledge base, the Knowledge Centre intends to influence the urban policy agenda. In addition to the continuation of the Housing and Europe programmes, the second cooperation agreement (2012-2016) focuses on transition/transformation and demographic challenges (capacity issue facilities, thoughtful management (claims) of scarce space in the context of a growing city).

Smart Cities Inspiration Blog

Urban sustainability, carbon-neutral cities, cities as places where smart technologies make a difference, etc., each city wants to reach these goals and improve durability and sustainability for its citizens. But the path towards green growth is not always easy. What are the social effects of the measures? How can durable actions be financed? Who is the lead partner and takes the steering role and what roles can other actors have in the process? The “Thuis in de Stad/At Home in the City” blog wants to be an inspirational guide for all these questions.

To the blog:
blog.thuisindestad.be

POWERED BY ...

The projects in this publication were realised with the support of the urban policy of the Government of Flanders. The urban policy provides the following:

- Structural funding of the cities through the **City Fund**. The cities use this to increase their quality of life and the quality of their local government.
- Subsidies and expert guidance for **urban renovation projects**.
- Funding for **experimental urban projects** developed by urban associations and the presentation of the **At Home in the City award** for city councils' **innovative urban projects**.
- Cooperation between cities and various policy areas of the Government of Flanders through **urban programmes**.
- Funding **neighbourhood stewards** who guide newcomers through life in their new neighbourhood's community by properly informing them of their rights and duties and about community habits.
- **Capacity building and knowledge exchange** by means of research into various urban subjects, monitoring of the liveability of cities (**City Monitor**), the Flemish Cities Knowledge Centre, conferences and master classes, publications, websites and an inspirational blog. Support in European programmes such as Urbiscoop (the Benelux's urban consultation platform), ERDF and JPI Urban Europe.

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