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Flemish Agency for Local and Provincial Government
and the civic integration policy



Flanders



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Colophon

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Preface

The Agency for Local and Provincial Government is an autonomous agency within the Flemish public administration. It gives support to the Flemish Government, which is competent for drafting the policy.

The Agency works at the service of the municipalities and cities, the provinces and for the local authorities coming under the competence of these. Civic integration policy is also part of its assignments. We want to make sure that local authorities, provinces and the organisations involved in the (civic) integration of citizens are able to offer quality services.

Through these assignments the Agency operates in policy domains which directly affect the citizens. The local authorities constitute the democratic level citizens are most familiar with, as these are the authorities which are most visible and tangible to them. Urban policy has specific tools for reinforcing the livability and attractiveness of the bigger cities. (Civic) integration policy aims to offer citizens optimal opportunities for success in Flemish society.

The federated states occupy a specific position within the Belgian state structure. The Flemish Parliament has the legislative power to issue Flemish Parliament Acts, which are on a par with federal laws. There is no hierarchical relationship between the federal authorities and the regions, which gives the Flemish authorities the opportunity to fully cater to their proper needs and administrative culture in their regulations and policy.

As the name suggests, the focus of local and provincial government is on the internal workings of the authorities, with few international or European stresses at first sight. Still, European policy and European regulations increasingly influence the range of action of local and provincial government. Local administration has therefore become very much European administration as well. The Flemish Government explicitly prioritizes the added value of an efficient, effective and qualitative public organisation, even in its international policy. The Agency for Local and Provincial Government is supporting this evolution.

Local authorities experience that European and international institutions take decisions which directly affect them, without them being sufficiently involved or heard in the preparatory process. The Flemish Government acknowledges the need for a bigger involvement of the European Member States and local authorities in international policy.

Following the coming into effect of the Lisbon Treaty, at least the European Union has gone some way towards this objective. The Treaty guarantees the constitutional autonomy of its Member States, which implies regional and local self-government amongst others. The principle of subsidiarity, which is also a basic principle of the internal administrative organisation in Flanders, has a prominent place in the Treaty. There is a growing interest for multi-tiered administration throughout the international work field. Belgium and its federated states, amongst which Flanders, can boast years of practical experience in this field, which we are eager to share with our European partners.

Nowadays, supranational cooperation is a simple must. Cross-border exchange of experiences is a source of inspiration and mutual enrichment. Let's seize all opportunities in this respect. United we are stronger.

Guido Decoster
Administrator General
Agency for Local and Provincial Government

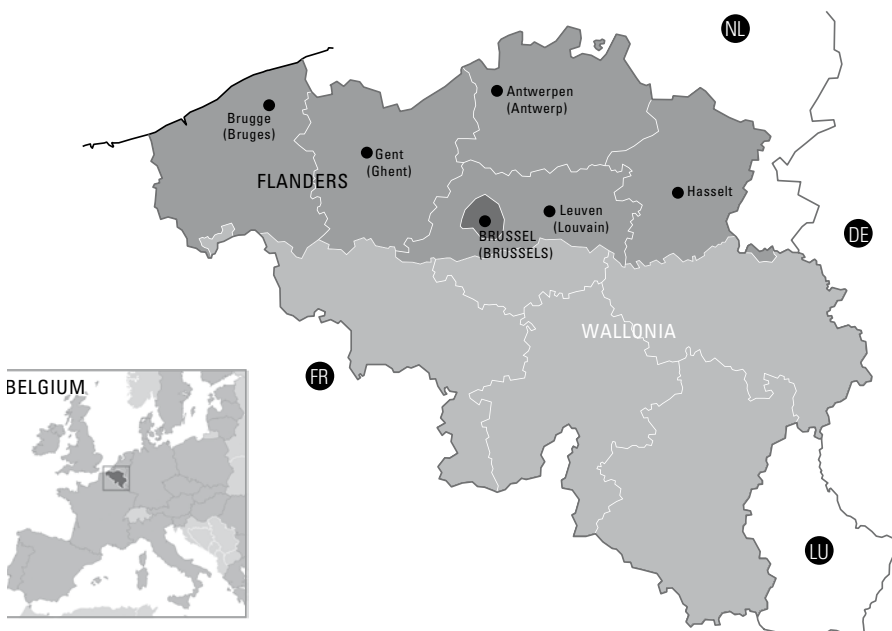
Royal Ballet of Flanders




The Royal Ballet of Flanders was founded in Antwerp in 1969 by Jeanne Brabants and would develop into the largest classical ballet company in Belgium. The ballet is often on international tours and mainly performs repertoire work. The Royal Ballet of Flanders has its home base in Theater 't Eilandje in Antwerp, which also houses the company's studios, workshops and rehearsal rooms.

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Marriage, the federal state !



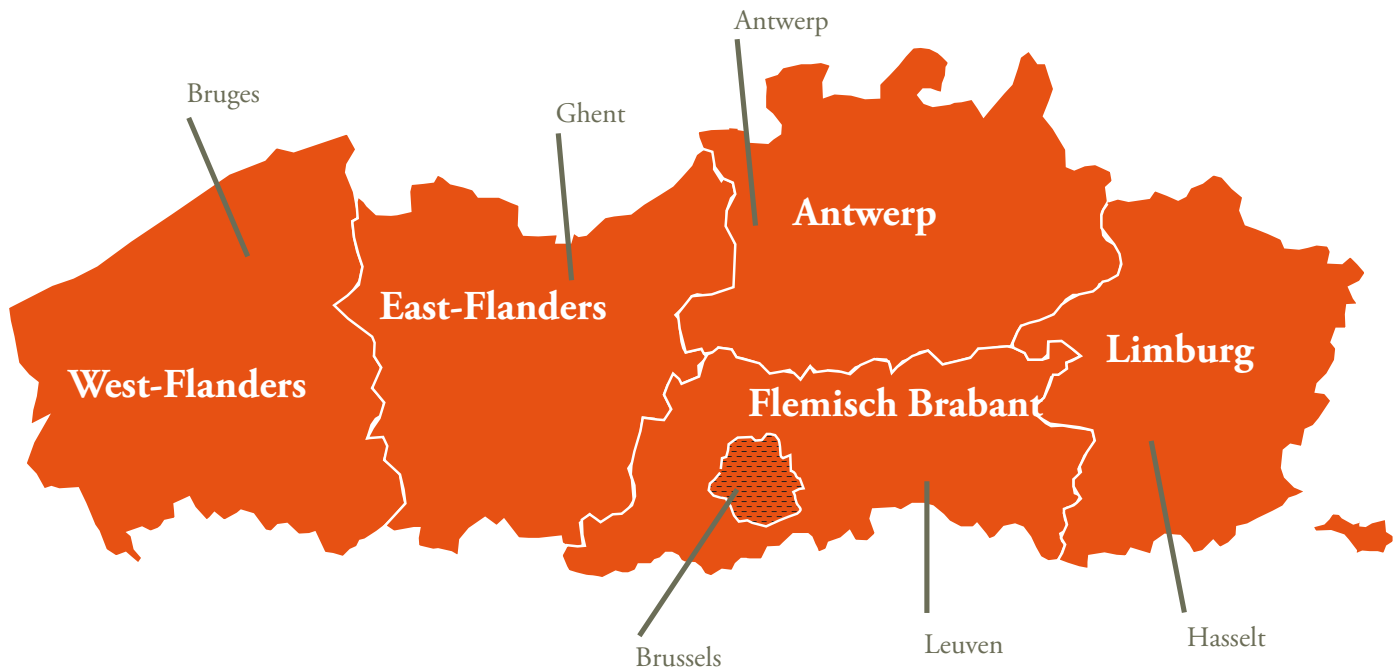
In Jan van Eyck's portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his wife, there is at first glance nothing that would strike the eye as being particularly or strikingly special, yet, on closer scrutiny, it becomes clear that Van Eyck incorporated in it symbols that, according to the art historian, Erwin Panofsky, are unmistakable references to a sacrament (sacrament of marriage). In the background hangs a round mirror, but the reflection in its background shows not only the two subjects of the painting but also two other figures. These are presumably Van Eyck (this seems also clear from the prominent wall inscription above the mirror that reads "Johannes de eyck fuit hic" - Van Eyck was here) and a friend of Arnolfini and his young wife, likely the witnesses at the wedding. Also depicted on the frame around the mirror is the Passion of Christ.

The chandelier has only one candle burning in broad daylight, which may point to the presence of the all-knowing Christ: it stands as a symbol for his eye. Arnolfini and his 'wife' stand side to side and the impression is created (as they are holding hands and Arnolfini has vertically raised his hand as a sign of fidelity) that they are in the midst of an actual wedding ceremony. The little dog in front likewise symbolises fidelity. The fact that the shoes have been removed points to the couple standing on consecrated ground that may not be soiled.

Although the homely atmosphere in the picture creates a feeling of true reality, it is nevertheless imbued with disguised symbolism that places the emphasis on the sacrament of marriage. The woman's protruding stomach is not a sign of her pregnancy, as is frequently thought, but rather evidence that she is following the fashion of wanting to be seen "on the fat side", since at that time "fat" meant that one had enough to eat, hence was wealthy.

The Flemish provinces and municipalities

Flanders is a region within the federal Belgian state structure. It is composed of 5 provinces and 308 municipalities. The map below shows the Flemish provinces and their capitals.



Local authorities in Flanders

Currently, Flanders has 308 municipalities. In the seventies, Belgium underwent drastic changes at the local level of government. Between 1964 and the 1977 merger operation the number of Belgian municipalities fell from 2359 to 589, which represents a 75% decrease. The decision thereto was taken by the central level with an eye to achieving greater professionalism and a more efficient use of resources.

Division and extension of duties

Municipalities and provinces are autonomous and democratic authorities, which determine their own priorities and the way in which they implement their policy. The administrators are accountable to the population, which elected them directly through democratic elections.

The municipality is thus competent for all matters which have not been withdrawn from their competence by higher authorities. Moreover, since the seventies the laws and parliament acts have explicitly assigned ever vaster tasks contained in missions to local authorities, e.g. in the fields of spatial planning, gas, water and electricity supply, domestic waste collection and processing, economic expansion, cultural and social policy. The competences devolved to the Regions and Communities following the state reforms have thus been shared with the local authorities.

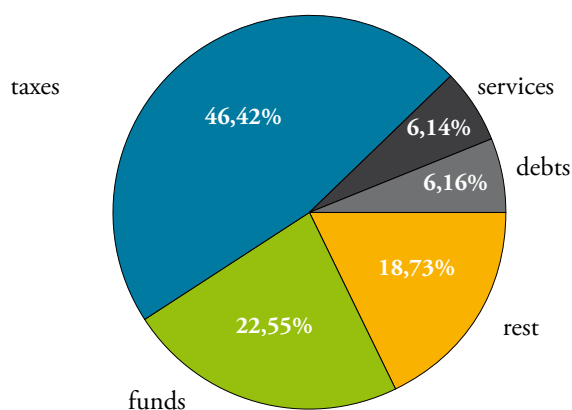
The Flemish authorities concluded policy agreements with the municipalities, in the fields of mobility, environment, youth work, culture, out-of-school care and urban policy, amongst others.

Financing

The municipalities and provinces levy taxes in order to be able to finance their activities. Fiscal levies are their major source of revenues. Apart from these, local authorities derive revenues from the charges for the services they offer, some of which are not for free. For some public assignments they also receive grants from the Flemish or federal authorities, as is the case for education and police work.

The fiscal capacities of municipalities and provinces vary strongly from one municipality or province to another. These capacities are subject to the incomes of their residents, the revenues from the real estate tax and the presence of industry. In different municipalities similar tax rates can yield widely divergent revenues per inhabitant.

In order to partly correct these inequalities a number of financing funds have been set up. These funds are means to distribute the available resources among the authorities so that all of them have enough administrative leeway and are able to offer quality services to their population.



Operation of local and provincial authorities

The most important local and provincial authorities are the municipal authorities, the inter-municipal partnerships, the provincial authorities and the openbare centra voor maatschappelijk welzijn or OCMWs (public centres for social welfare).

Municipalities

The way in which a municipality is organised will to a large extent determine how citizens approach their environment and society. Are the streets tidy? Are domestic waste collection services provided? Which cultural events are organised? Is it a safe environment where one can be oneself? All these things are determined by the municipality. Citizens feel most closely related to the municipal level.

The 2005 Flemish Parliament Act on municipalities governs the operation and organisation of local authorities. In keeping with this Flemish Parliament Act the municipalities contribute to their citizens' wellbeing and to the sustainable development of the municipal area.

Apart from their constitutional competences, municipalities also have competences which have been entrusted to them, on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity, through or by virtue of the law or the Flemish Parliament Act.

Thanks to the principle of open government laid down by law, the administration has become more transparent to citizens, including at the local level. The Flemish Parliament Act on municipalities also defines procedures for involving citizens in the policy, among other things via referendums and petitions.

Organisation and operation

Each municipality has a regulatory body, which is the municipal council. Depending on the number of inhabitants, the number of council members varies between 7 and 55. The council is elected every six years. The meetings of the municipal council are usually public.

Each municipality has a Board of Mayor and Aldermen, which is the executive body of the municipality. The aldermen are elected among the municipal council members. The Board of Mayor and Aldermen is a collegial body which takes decisions with a majority of votes.

The Mayor of each municipality is appointed by the Flemish Government from a list of council members compiled by the municipal council. Exceptionally, the Mayor can be appointed from outside of the municipal council. His or her duty is to enforce public order and to implement laws, Flemish Parliament Acts and implementing orders.

Each municipality has a municipal secretary and a financial manager. The municipal secretary is in charge of the general management. The financial manager is responsible, among other things, for drawing up multi-annual financial plans, for the annual budget and for internal credit adjustments. The municipal secretary, the financial manager and certain senior officers together form the management team.

Introduction of new management techniques

Through the Flemish Parliament Act on Municipalities Flanders introduced new management and market-oriented reforms at the local level. Municipalities must draw up a strategic multi-annual plan and link this to a financial multi-annual planning. The policy plans in the various domains contain obligations to achieve results. Local authorities also draft a staffing requirements plan and perform staff evaluations. Citizens must be approached as customers by the service providers.

The possibility of establishing private law autonomous agencies is an example of a public private partnership which offers municipalities the opportunity to work together with external actors who are active in certain policy areas.

Inter-municipal partnerships

The set of duties of the municipalities has become extremely vast and complex. Moreover, there are duties and projects that exceed the boundaries of municipalities and that are financially unfeasible for individual municipalities. In order to be able to realise these duties and projects, a cooperative venture is set up between different municipalities, i.e. the inter-municipal association. Such an association performs duties of general interest, often with regard to utilities (electricity, gas, water, TV distribution), domestic waste processing, social housing, crematoria, regional development, etc.

Although an inter-municipal partnership is in essence an association of municipalities (pure inter-municipal association), private partners may participate as well (mixed inter-municipal association). The provincial authority also participates in some of these inter-municipal associations. These partnerships occur in different types and have either legal personality or not. Two or more municipalities can form a partnership without legal personality to realise a specific project of municipal interest, without conferral of management. These are the inter-local associations.

Flanders: Presentation of a Belgian federated state

Geographically

Flanders is the Dutch-speaking federated state of Belgium, a Western European federal monarchy, bounded by the North Sea to the west, by the Netherlands to the north, by Germany and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg to the east and by France to the south. Together with Wallonia, the Brussels-Capital Region and the German-speaking Community Flanders is part of the Belgian state structure which is founded on the language use.

Flanders is home to 60% of the Belgian population which amounts to nearly 6.2 million residents. It has a very high population density of 456 inhabitants per square km.

The languages

Three official languages are spoken in Belgium: French in the south, Dutch in the north and German in the east. The Dutch and French-speaking parts of Belgium are separated by a 'language border'. After the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century large groups of German Franks established themselves on the territory of Belgium as it exists today. In the north the German Franks were in the majority, whereas in the south they were a minority. Both in the north and in the south the minority took over the language and culture of the majority. As a result, a boundary arose between the Germans in the north and the Romans in the south.

When Belgium was established the language use was embedded as a fundamental right and freedom in the 1831 Constitution. During the second half of the 19th century the Flemings insisted on the Dutch language being recognised as equal to the French language in bilingual Belgium.

In 1921, Belgium was subdivided into two monolingual areas (Flanders and Wallonia) and the bilingual area of Brussels. In 1932, Dutch became the teaching language in all Flemish primary and secondary schools. In 1931, the university of Ghent was permanently dutchified.

The language border became legally effective on 1 September 1963 and divided Belgium into four language areas: the Dutch area (Flanders), the French area (Wallonia), the German area (Eupen-Sankt Vith) and the bilingual French-Dutch area (Brussels and its nineteen municipalities which would later become the Brussels-Capital Region).

Since the 1993 state reforms the Constitution has stipulated that Belgium is a federal country. The Belgian politicians have both democratically and peace-

fully created a unique federal system to preserve the unity of the country and at the same time give large autonomy to the federated states.

Flanders has resolutely chosen Brussels as its capital because it is a cosmopolitan city where many nationalities live together and where the Dutch-language culture used to occupy a prominent position. Brussels also houses the headquarters of numerous international institutions. The buildings of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of Ministers define the townscape around the Schuman Square and the Leopold Park. Brussels is also home to NATO headquarters.

Communities and Regions

Institutions and competences

Belgium is subdivided on the basis of its official languages. This subdivision is constitutionally embedded. The Constitution stipulates that Belgium is a federal State which is composed of Communities and Regions (Article 1 of the Constitution).

There are three Communities that are competent for person-related matters, such as culture, education, welfare, health, sport:

- the Flemish Community
- the French Community
- the German-speaking Community.

In addition, there are three Regions that are competent for territorial matters, such as environment, spatial planning, housing, mobility, infrastructure, economy and employment:

- the Flemish Region
- the Walloon Region
- the Brussels-Capital Region.

In Flanders the Community and the Region have been amalgamated and the competences are executed by the Flemish Government and the Flemish Parliament. In the French and German-speaking parts of Belgium the Community and regional competences are exercised by separate governments and parliaments.

The Belgian Regions have far-reaching autonomy and competences. The regional Acts have been placed on an equal footing with the federal laws and the regional parliaments are equivalent to the federal parliament.

Foreign policy

With regard to their own competences, the Regions pursue their own foreign policy and they can even represent Belgium in the EU. To this end a rotation system is agreed between the Belgian authorities.

Since the 1993 state reform the Flemish authorities can conclude international treaties for each of their competences in keeping with the 'in foro interno, in foro externo' principle. Flanders also has its own diplomatic representatives. In addition, Flanders has about one hundred representatives worldwide for international enterprise, agriculture and tourism.



There are also three types of partnership with legal personality:

1. Project associations: Partnerships without conferral of management, whose aim is to plan, implement and monitor a clearly specified project.
2. Service-providing associations: Partnerships without conferral of management, whose aim is to provide a clearly defined supporting service to the participating municipalities, possibly for different policy areas.
3. Authorised associations: Partnerships with conferral of management to which the participating municipalities entrust the implementation of one or more clearly specified competences regarding one or more functionally coherent policy areas.

Openbare Centra voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn or OCMWs (public centres for social welfare)

The public centres for social welfare (OCMWs) come under the municipalities. OCMWs have a social duty. The OCMW aims to help people to the extent that these are able to take their lives into their own hands and lead lives respectful of human dignity. The duties of the OCMWs pertain to the fundamental social rights of the inhabitants: affordable and quality housing, proper healthcare and sufficient income. OCMWs make sure that people who require assistance are integrated into society.

Fighting deprivation is one of the most important types of social service. The assistance which OCMWs provide to deprived groups has evolved these past years from financial aid or help in kind to a more empowering form of assistance. Examples of this include the right to social integration through employment and budget assistance.

The services provided by OCMWs are very diverse: curative or preventative, material, social, medical or psychological. To this end, OCMWs have rest homes, service flats, social rental offices, day-care centres, etc at their disposal. They also work together with other social organisations to shape their policy. They are not just important for the implementation of policy, but also act as a driving force, motor and inspiration for local social policy.

Organisation and operation

Just like municipalities, OCMWs have a number of (political) administrative bodies and administrative services. The most important are the OCMW council (with chairperson), the permanent bureau and the special committees. The council is responsible for designing the OCMW policy.

The chairperson of the OCMW council directs any activities of the OCMW. Apart from being council chairperson he or she also acts as chairperson of the permanent bureau and the special committees. The chairperson is the key figure within the OCMW and is in addition a member of the Board of Mayor and Aldermen.

Provinces

The province is the intermediate level of government, in between the Flemish and the municipal levels. As laid down in the Flemish Parliament Act on provinces, they are competent for regulating the provincial interests. These include:

1. defending the supra-local interests: supra-local means that they exceed matters of local municipal interest;
2. providing support at the request of other authorities;
3. taking initiatives with an eye to establishing cooperation between authorities.

Organisation and operation

Just like municipalities, provinces have an elected body, viz. the provincial council. Depending on the number of inhabitants of the province, the number of council members may vary between 75 and 84. Provincial council members are elected every six years.

The provincial executive is the executive body of the province. It has six members who are chosen from the provincial council. The provincial executive is chaired by the provincial governor. He or she is appointed by the Flemish Government and is the face of the province. He or she represents the federal and Flemish Governments and in this capacity exercises the administrative supervision over the local authorities.

Related bodies and institutions

Autonomous municipal and provincial companies

Provinces and municipalities can establish autonomous companies with a separate legal personality. They freely decide on how to manage their goods. Under certain conditions they can also participate in other enterprises.

Police zones

The organisation of the police is to a large extent a federal matter which comes under the authority of the Minister for Home Affairs. Yet, the local authorities can also exert influence on the operation of the police. They can for instance decide to establish a police zone together with adjoining municipalities. On average 10% of the municipal resources is spent on the police zone.

In single-municipality zones the municipal council, the Board of Mayor and Aldermen and the Mayor are competent for the organisation and management of the local police corps (approval of budget, appointment or promotion of staff,...). In multi-municipality zones these duties are entrusted to a police council, the police board and their chairman. The federal legislator continues to be responsible for the general organisation of the police and the policy regarding the police.

Forms of worship and central church councils

Belgium has six recognised forms of worship :

- the Roman Catholic forms of worship
- the Protestant forms of worship
- the Anglican forms of worship
- the Israelite forms of worship
- the Islamic forms of worship
- the Orthodox forms of worship.

At the local level each recognised form of worship has its own local religious community. These are public institutions with legal personality, which are in charge of providing the material conditions which enable the exercise of the worship and the preservation of its dignity. They also take care of the maintenance and preservation of the buildings and the management of the goods. The financial planning of the administration must be approved by the municipal council. In municipalities with four religious communities or more a central administration must be established.

Urban policy



The Flemish authorities pursue an active urban policy which is mainly oriented towards the two metropolitan cities of Antwerp and Ghent and the 11 regional cities of Aalst, Bruges, Hasselt, Genk, Kortrijk, Leuven, Mechelen, Ostend, Roeselare, Sint-Niklaas and Turnhout. Because Flanders also wants to co-support urban developments in the bilingual area of Brussels Capital, the Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie or VGC (Flemish Community Commission), representing the Flemish inhabitants of Brussels, is also involved in Flemish urban policy.

The Flemish urban policy is aimed at countering the urban exodus, especially of young families with children, and at enhancing the democratic base. The Flemish urban policy is implemented in close partnership with the cities and pursues a qualitative, sustainable and democratic development of the cities. In the past years pioneering work was done and a more integrated policy was realised at the Flemish level.

The urban policy makes use of the following instruments:

- the City Fund
- city contracts
- urban renewal projects
- the City Monitor.

With the City Fund the Flemish Government seeks to support the thirteen central cities and the Flemish Community Commission for Brussels in the pursuit of a sustainable urban policy to achieve the following objectives:

- To increase the liveability of the cities, both at city and at neighbourhood level
- To counter dualisation
- To increase the quality of the democratic administrations.

Through the city contracts the Flemish cities and the Flemish Government aim at an inclusive approach and implementation of concrete city projects in a mutual partnership. The Flemish Government considers city contracts an important priority to achieve smooth inter-administrative cooperation and a more customer-oriented service provision. They contain commitments made by both the Flemish Government and the city, with respect for the developed city vision. Each city contract consists of two parts: a general part on housing, which is identical for all thirteen cities, and a city-specific part.

With the urban renewal projects the Flemish authorities want to offer cities financial support in the realisation of well-founded and well-thought out urban renewal projects of a multi-functional nature. These projects must act as a lever in a neighbourhood, quarter or city part and create a new dynamics.

The City Monitor records how liveable cities are and how sustainable their development is. This instrument encompasses 190 indicators which are fleshed out for each of the thirteen central cities. The idea is for everyone involved in the development of the city to use the City Monitor to learn and to underpin discussions and choices. This instrument especially wants to feed the strategic policy of the city council.

(Civic) Integration policy

Civic integration



Flemish society is increasingly characterised by diversity. The Flemish population consists of people coming from all corners of the world. Although this leads to opportunities it sometimes also puts the social cohesion under pressure.

Civic integration is an ideal way to give new Flemings the opportunity to participate in society. By attending a civic integration programme new Flemings learn how society functions and on which values and norms it is founded. In addition, they learn to participate actively in society.

Ministers of worship who have an ideological function in a local church or religious community that is recognised by the Flemish authorities must also follow a civic integration programme. The Agency for Local and Provincial Government informs them about this and refers them to the welcome office.

Who are the people integrating?

The civic integration policy is intended for foreigners aged 18 and more who come to Flanders or Brussels to reside there for a long period of time. Foreigners with temporary residence status and asylum seekers who submitted their application for asylum less than four months ago are excluded from civic integration. The target group of the civic integration policy also includes Belgians who were not born in Belgium and at least one of whose parents was not born in Belgium. Next to adults, foreign-speaking minor newcomers also belong to the target group of the civic integration policy.

Civic integration programme

The civic integration programme has a primary and a secondary component. The primary civic integration programme is coordinated by the welcome office and is composed of a training programme, supported by the individual assistance of the person integrating. The training programme consists of Dutch language courses, social orientation and career development courses.

People integrating who have regularly attended the training programme receive a certificate of civic integration. This will allow them to enrol for the secondary civic integration programme, which is provided by the ordinary facilities. The person integrating can, for instance, follow vocational training or entrepreneurship training. He or she can also decide to continue studying Dutch, to enrol in higher education or to do volunteer work.

Welcome offices

The welcome offices coordinate the primary civic integration programme and assist the course participants from the moment they register up to the moment they obtain the civic integration certificate. To organise the civic integration programme the welcome office works together with several partners: the Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling or VDAB (Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Agency), the Huis van het Nederlands (Dutch Language House), the adult education centres, the adult basic education centres and the university language centres. There are eight welcome offices spread over Flanders

Civic integration policy

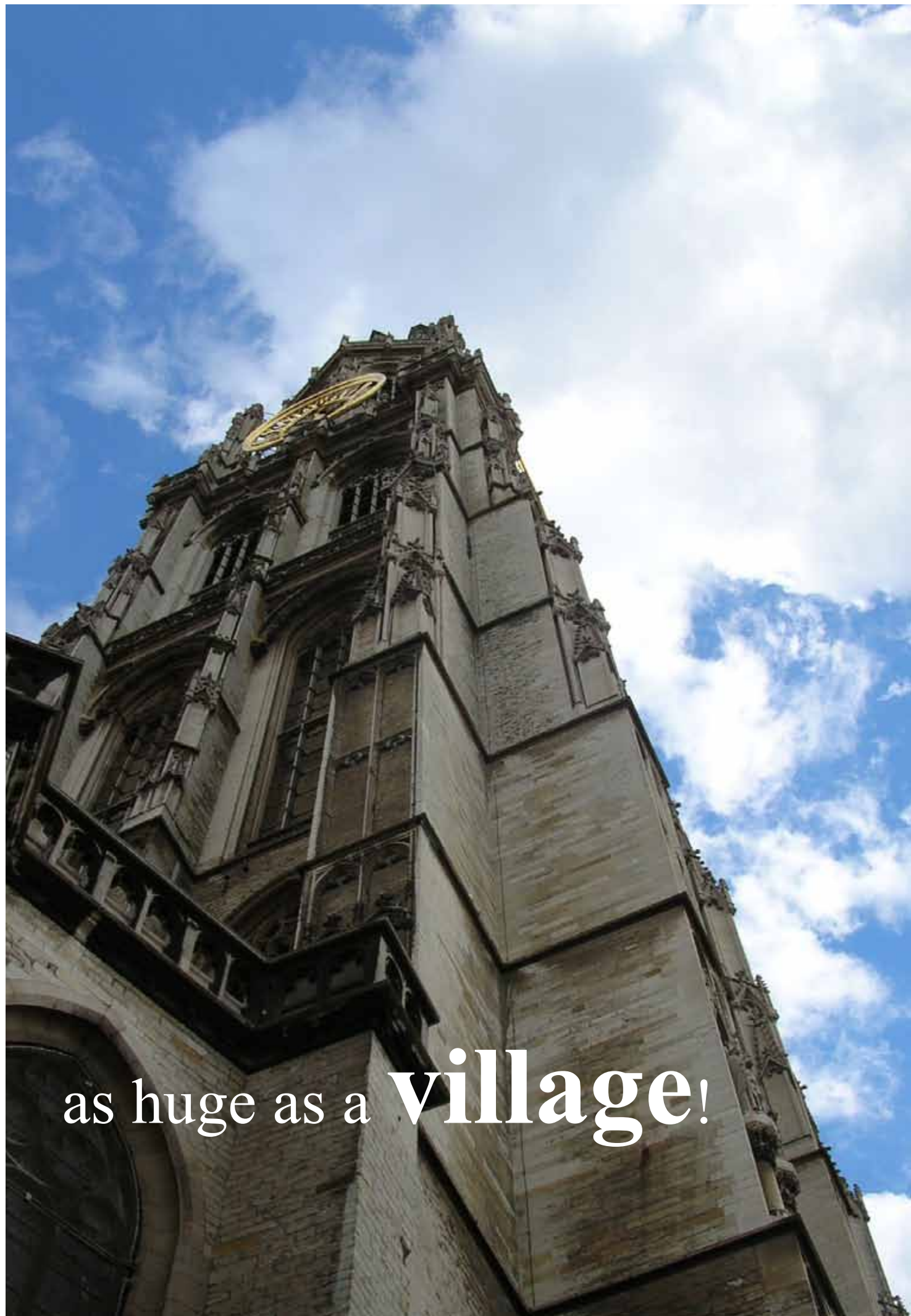
The Flemish authorities are responsible for the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the civic integration policy, formerly referred to as the minorities policy. This civic integration policy is both inclusive and coordinated. It is inclusive because all Ministers involved in the civic integration policy and their agencies are responsible for meeting the objectives. The policy is coordinated in order to preserve its coherence as a whole and to avoid overlaps and contradictions.

The civic integration policy is oriented towards five target groups: immigrant citizens who are residing here legally, recognised refugees, travelling population groups (caravan dwellers and occupational travellers), people integrating and people without papers.

The civic integration centres support facilities and local authorities in order to allow them to increase their accessibility to ethnic/cultural minorities. They also take initiatives of their own to make coexistence in diversity possible. There are eight civic integration centres in Flanders and Brussels.

The civic integration services set up initiatives to improve the accessibility of local authorities and their services to ethnic/cultural minorities. In addition, they promote the co-existence in diversity within their sphere of action. Civic integration services are always municipal services. Flanders counts 38 civic integration services. Next to this, the Vlaams Minderhedencentrum (Flemish Minorities Centre), which is a support centre for civic integration centres and services, and the forum of ethnic/cultural minorities are subsidised.

Currently, the Flemish authorities subsidise nine services for social interpretation and translation. Social interpreters and translators help bridge the language gap between foreign speaking clients and Dutch-language services and facilities. Schools, hospitals, public services, welfare organisations, etc. can make use of this provision.



as huge as a **village!**

Agency for Local and Provincial Government

In general

The Agency for Local and Provincial Government functions as a central Flemish administration for the municipalities and provinces and for the related public authorities. The urban policy and civic integration policy also belong to the Agency's duties.

Within the Flemish Government the Flemish Ministers who are competent for local and provincial government, urban policy and civic integration carry political responsibility for these competences as a whole. The Agency for Local and Provincial Government supports the Ministers in their duties. It prepares decisions, implements them and makes proposals for improving the policy. In doing so, the Agency takes account of its six main duties:

1. It prepares the administrative regulation and organises the elections for the municipal and provincial councils.
2. It finances the local authorities and provinces through public funds.
3. It handles complaints about the administration of the local authorities and provinces, and supervises these authorities.
4. It coordinates the civic integration policy.
5. It pursues a specific urban policy.
6. It offers local authorities and provinces support in their policies.

The mission of the Agency is as follows:

“To establish a framework for a high-quality, efficient and coherent Flemish policy regarding local and provincial government, cities and (civic) integration, in order to enable the local and provincial authorities and organisations from the (civic) integration sector to provide a high-quality service to the public.”

To govern a municipality, province or OCMW is not an easy task. The authorities have competences in a wide range of social sectors. The legislation is often complex and changes rapidly. It is an important duty of the central administration to assist the local authorities with advice. This is done by disseminating information, organising consultations, answering the questions of local authorities in a customer-friendly way and monitoring data about the local authorities. This coaching role will grow even more important in the coming years.

A number of duties of the Agency for Local and Provincial Government in greater detail

The preparation of the administrative regulation

The Agency for Local and Provincial Government supports the Minister in the development of regulations on the administrative organisation and the operation of local and provincial authorities. The regulation on urban policy and civic integration is also supported by the Agency.

Besides the organic rules applicable on the local and provincial administrations, the regions have been competent for the regulation on the material organisation and functioning of the church councils of the recognised forms of worship since 1 January 2002. Apart from this, they are also competent for cemeteries and burials.

Local elections

The agency is in charge of the organisation of the elections for the municipal and provincial councils and also provides support in the preparations of the elections of the Flemish Parliament.

The October 2006 municipal elections were the first to be organised by the Flemish authorities. The next elections are due in 2012.

The federal authorities continue to be competent for the organisation of the Flemish elections. The Agency for Local and Provincial Government does, however, provide support in the counting and processing of votes. It also publishes the results.

The distribution and management of government funds

In order to somehow correct the unequal fiscal capacities of the municipalities and provinces a number of financing funds have been established. These funds are used as an instrument to distribute the available resources over the authorities.

The Municipal Fund is the most important financing fund for the municipalities. Municipalities generating lesser revenues of their own (for instance, as a result of a less wealthy population) receive more resources from the fund and vice versa. Municipalities are entirely free to spend these resources. In 2009, the Municipal Fund amounted to almost 2 billion Euros. It grows each year by 3.5%.

The allocation key of the Municipal Fund is based on the standards specified in the table below.

		%	%
Special financing	Special financing (inhabitants) for Antwerp and Ghent	30	40,8
	Special financing (inhabitants) for Bruges	1,6	
	Special financing (inhabitants) for central cities	6,2	
	Special financing (inhabitants) for provincial cities (2%) and coastal municipalities (1%)	3	
Centre	Active population employed in the municipality	4	8
	Pupils and students in secondary and higher education of all networks	4	
Fiscal	Value of personal income tax (inversely proportional)	19	30,2
	Revenues from real estate tax	11,2	
Open space	Forests, gardens and parks, wastelands, surveyed waters, acres, pastures, recreational domains and orchards	6	6
Social standards	Widows, disabled people, pensioners and orphans	1	15
	Unemployed people with a low level of education	4	
	Births in deprived families	3	
	Social rental apartments	3	
	People receiving the minimum subsistence income	4	
		100	100

The Provincial Fund is the counterpart of the Municipal Fund: it supports the five provinces.

The City Fund is an instrument for the Flemish urban policy. The money is intended for the large cities of Antwerp and Ghent, for the regional cities of Aalst, Bruges, Hasselt, Kortrijk, Genk, Leuven, Mechelen, Ostend, Roeselare, Sint-Niklaas and Turnhout, and for the Flemish Community Commission in Brussels. The goal of the City Fund is to increase the liveability at the level of the cities and neighbourhoods. It is designed to counter dualisation in the spatial, economic and socio-cultural fields and to give the cities additional impulses to raise the quality of their administration. The Flemish Government makes the resources available on the basis of a policy agreement it concludes with the cities.

Specific subsidies to local authorities for some real estate investments

Subsidies are granted to local authorities that do not belong to the funds because they require separate financial support due to their specific nature.

It concerns subsidies for:

- repair works to rectories and churches for a recognised form of worship,
- the construction, alteration and repair of meeting centres for free-thinkers,
- the construction of crematoriums,
- the construction, clean-up and renovation of caravan sites.

Apart from the payment of the aforementioned subsidies the Agency also provides technical and administrative support for the subsidy dossiers of the Fund for Cultural Infrastructure, more specifically the subsidised large cultural infrastructures and the sectoral infrastructural subsidies.

The administrative supervision

Local authorities and provinces are autonomous and democratic authorities. When performing their duties and responsibilities they are obliged to observe the law. They must abide by the principles of good governance, such as economy, fairness and proportionality. In order to guarantee this, the legislator has organised a form of administrative supervision. The Agency takes care of the preparation of the supervision, which comes under the discretionary authority of the Flemish Minister for Local and Provincial

Government, the governors and the Commissioner of the Flemish Government for inter-municipal partnerships.

Several types of supervision are exercised. The general supervision is exercised when a complaint is made. The approval supervision applies when a decision can only be implemented after the Minister has given his or her approval. A local authority can only carry out expropriations, for instance, after the Minister has given his or her authorisation.

The Flemish Minister for Local and Provincial Government is responsible for this administrative supervision and can annul certain decisions of the local and provincial authorities. As representative of the Flemish Government the governor too can suspend certain decisions.

Vlaamse adviescommissie voor Volksraadplegingen (Flemish Advisory Committee for Referendums)

In accordance with Article 2 of the Establishment Decree of 8 July 1977 the Flemish Advisory Committee for Referendums, at the request of the Flemish Government, gives advice on the application of the administrative supervision over the decisions whether or not to organise a referendum.

Any questions from authorities or private initiators about the organisation of a referendum are presented to the Committee. This means that the Committee already gives advice during the preparatory phase of referenda. The Agency for Local and Provincial Government takes care of the secretariat of the Committee.

Coordinating policy on diversity with respect to other policy areas

The Agency for Local and Provincial Government assists the Minister for Civic Integration in the coordination of the Flemish diversity policy. This means that the Flemish Ministers, each for their own policy area, commit to pursuing an inclusive policy, which they will spontaneously extend to include all (allochthonous and autochthonous) Flemings. All Ministers will consult with the Minister for Civic Integration when their area has a common ground with civic integration. In this way they safeguard the consistency of the policy.

Development of a knowledge centre on local and provincial authorities

The Agency for Local and Provincial Government systematically registers all kinds of data about the local authorities and provinces. This concerns information which the cities and municipalities supply to the Agency for Local and Provincial Government within the framework of administrative supervision, or information which they receive from other public bodies. These data are processed and returned to the authorities via a website or publications. The idea is for the authorities to use these data to further support their policies. Thanks to this information, the authorities can adopt a similar work method and learn from this for the future.



Our luck!

Lucky Luke is a cartoon strip, created by the Flemish artist Maurice De Bevere under the pseudonym Morris. The cartoon started out as a parody on the film genre, the Western - at the time very popular. Noteworthy is the cinematic style of the drawings. Decors, scenery, the many props, changing camera angles, montage... everything has been well studied and reproduced in a recognisable style by the designer. Some of the shots took up the entire width of the page in imitation of the wide screen. Likewise the wealth of detail is characteristic.

Many heroes of the silver screen are being introduced into the cartoon sequences, as well as other famous personages and people drawn from Morris's direct environment. Everybody is given a fitting protagonist or secondary role, fully recognisable by his or her personal style. In the passing of time, most of these actors have by now passed away and today are unknown to the younger generations. As a result, direct recognition is by now lost.

Morris was carefully documenting each of his stories, using, amongst others, movie advertising posters. But since he could not lay his hands on these, he had to steal them from their display cases, using his friend André Franquin as a look-out. These posters (all with torn-off corners) have been preserved.

The international mission of the Agency for

Local and Provincial Government

Europe and the EU



The international sphere of action and the European influence are gaining importance for local and regional authorities. The European regulation is extending to the local public sector, whereas this sector hardly has any say in the European decision-making process. Through contacts with the competent services of the other EU Member States and with the European institutions, the Agency for Local and Provincial Government tries to enhance the impact of the local and regional sectors.

Although not claiming the thematical responsibility for itself, the Agency wants to achieve better consultation between the thematically competent Flemish services that implement the European regulation, and the local authorities. This is achieved through supplying information on regulations which are of interest to the local and regional authorities, in cooperation with other Flemish public agencies.

Agency employees sit on administrative steering groups that bring the Flemish policy in line with the European regulation. They make sure that account is taken of the specific features that apply within their sector.

With the support of the recently established Vlaams-Europese Verbindingsagentschap or Vleva (Liaison Agency Flanders-Europe) opportunities for cooperation and information exchange are detected and created. For this purpose, the proximity of the European institutions and the presence of the country and regional representations in Brussels are also made the most of.

The Agency likes to use the Brussels forums to present its instruments for urban policy or civic integration to the international public, for instance

Cross-border cooperation and Benelux

Strong focus is put on the cross-border cooperation between local authorities, both in the Benelux and in EU context. Flanders is a partner in the first European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) that was established within the European Union, namely the Eurometropole EGTC Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai. The Agency for Local and Provincial Government develops the regulation and prepares the accession of new partners to this grouping.

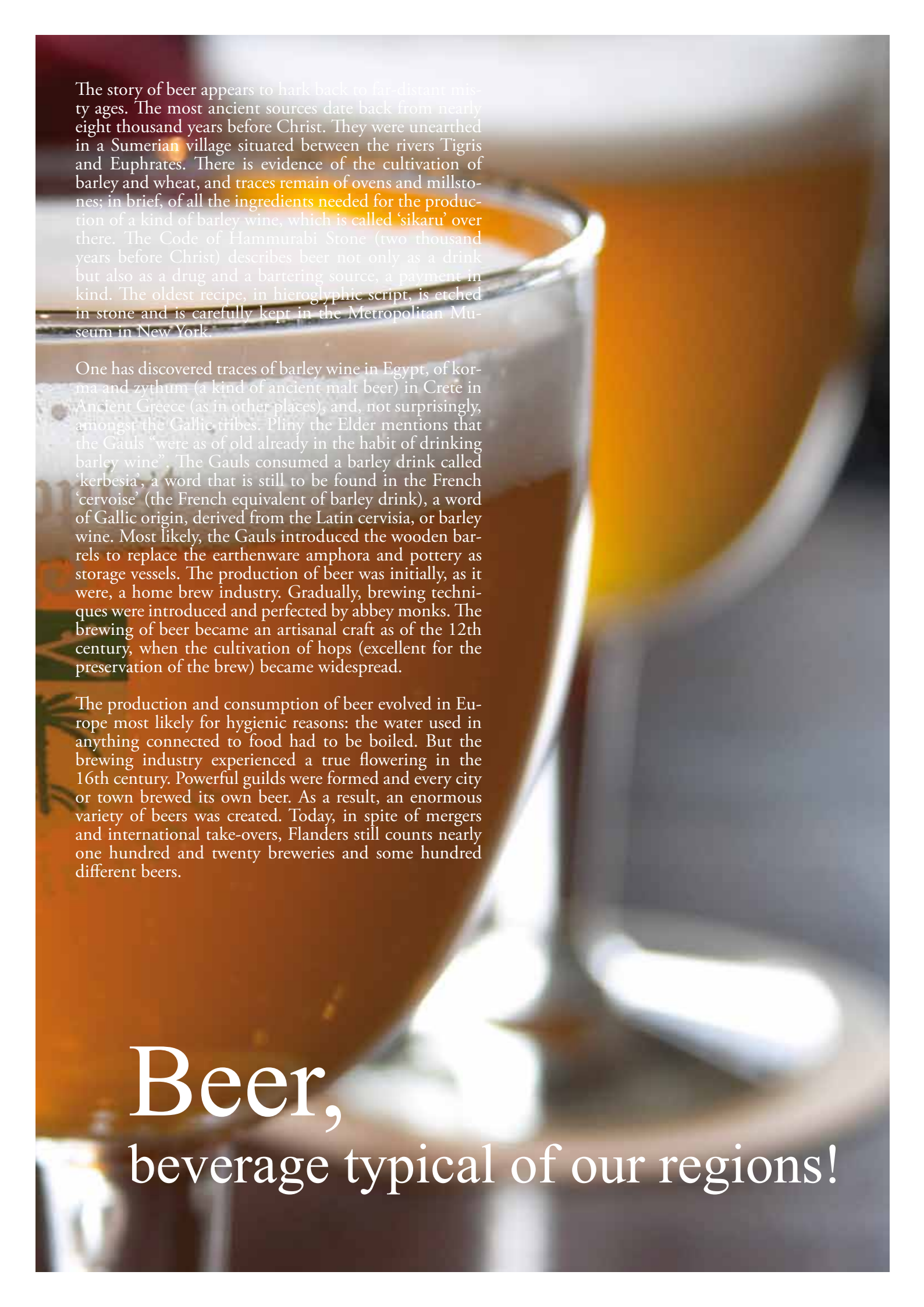
At Benelux level the Agency participates actively in the reform of the Benelux regulation in consultation with the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

Council of Europe

In the Council of Europe as well the Agency acts as representative of Flanders in the committees that are responsible for local and regional democracy. This forum offers the opportunity to actively exchange information and to establish contacts with other European states, including those that have not yet acceded to the EU.

Foreign delegations

Being an expert in the operation and regulation of the local sector, the Agency also gladly gives presentations to foreign delegations visiting Flanders. Delegations have been welcomed from all continents. Attention is paid to the organisation of the competences for local authorities within the Belgian state structure, cooperation between authorities and the financing of local authorities.



The story of beer appears to hark back to far-distant misty ages. The most ancient sources date back from nearly eight thousand years before Christ. They were unearthed in a Sumerian village situated between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. There is evidence of the cultivation of barley and wheat, and traces remain of ovens and millstones; in brief, of all the ingredients needed for the production of a kind of barley wine, which is called 'sikaru' over there. The Code of Hammurabi Stone (two thousand years before Christ) describes beer not only as a drink but also as a drug and a bartering source, a payment in kind. The oldest recipe, in hieroglyphic script, is etched in stone and is carefully kept in the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

One has discovered traces of barley wine in Egypt, of korma and zythum (a kind of ancient malt beer) in Crete in Ancient Greece (as in other places), and, not surprisingly, amongst the Gallic tribes. Pliny the Elder mentions that the Gauls "were as of old already in the habit of drinking barley wine". The Gauls consumed a barley drink called 'kerbesia', a word that is still to be found in the French 'cervoise' (the French equivalent of barley drink), a word of Gallic origin, derived from the Latin cervisia, or barley wine. Most likely, the Gauls introduced the wooden barrels to replace the earthenware amphora and pottery as storage vessels. The production of beer was initially, as it were, a home brew industry. Gradually, brewing techniques were introduced and perfected by abbey monks. The brewing of beer became an artisanal craft as of the 12th century, when the cultivation of hops (excellent for the preservation of the brew) became widespread.

The production and consumption of beer evolved in Europe most likely for hygienic reasons: the water used in anything connected to food had to be boiled. But the brewing industry experienced a true flowering in the 16th century. Powerful guilds were formed and every city or town brewed its own beer. As a result, an enormous variety of beers was created. Today, in spite of mergers and international take-overs, Flanders still counts nearly one hundred and twenty breweries and some hundred different beers.

Beer, beverage typical of our regions!

Interest groups

Vereniging voor Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten or VVSG (Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities)

The VVSG is the member organisation of all the Flemish municipalities, all OCMWs, nearly all police zones, inter-municipal waste associations, inter-municipal associations for regional development and other inter-municipal partnerships. The aim of the VVSG is to help affiliated local authorities in meeting their policy objectives. The association works for the benefit of both political representatives and officers of the administration. As representative discussion partner it defends the interests of the local authorities with respect to other authorities and third parties. The VVSG is organised around three key tasks:

1. support and service provision (providing information, advice and training and other services) to the members,
2. defence of interests,
3. the promotion of first line authorities and network organisation.

Vereniging van Vlaamse Provincies or VVP (Association of Flemish Provinces)

The basic duty of the VVP is to make the provinces better, more reliable and increasingly transparent so as to allow them to grow into the regional authorities of the future. This general description can be translated into three duties:

1. Above all the VVP defends the interests of the provincial level of government in the Brussels political landscape. The VVP develops joint positions for matters that are of direct or indirect joint provincial interest. It organises the joint action of the provinces in their contacts with the Flemish, federal and European authorities. In addition, the VVP builds a network with social, cultural and economic organisations that are active on the Brussels political landscape.
2. The VVP acts as the platform for cooperation between the 5 Flemish provincial authorities with regard to the development of new initiatives, consultations, the exchange of experience and knowledge, the clustering of expertise,...
3. The VVP fosters innovation processes and methodologies for the benefit of the provincial management, such as the introduction and promotion of the methodology of 'area-based action', and stimulates European (cross-border) developments. The VVP is also a tenderer in project realisations for Flanders.

Kenniscentrum Vlaamse Steden (Knowledge Centre for Flemish Cities)

The Knowledge Centre for Flemish Cities wants to reinforce 'urbanity' in Flanders in all its facets. 'Urbanity' is an essential aspect of a sustainable and democratic policy. For this reason the knowledge centre promotes learning processes in the cities and reinforces the network of cities. It seeks to contribute to improving the urban organisation and service provision of the urban policy.

The activities of the knowledge centre are centred around five pillars:

1. Gathering and opening up knowledge: collecting implicit and explicit knowledge and making it accessible.
2. Developing knowledge: detecting new knowledge needs and attuning the knowledge to these needs.
3. Mediating knowledge: providing answers to (ad hoc) knowledge questions.
4. Establishing networks: facilitating and reinforcing interaction and exchange of experience between the cities.
5. Influencing policy: influencing the urban policy of other authorities on the basis of knowledge.



Chocolate, mmmmmmmmmmmm...

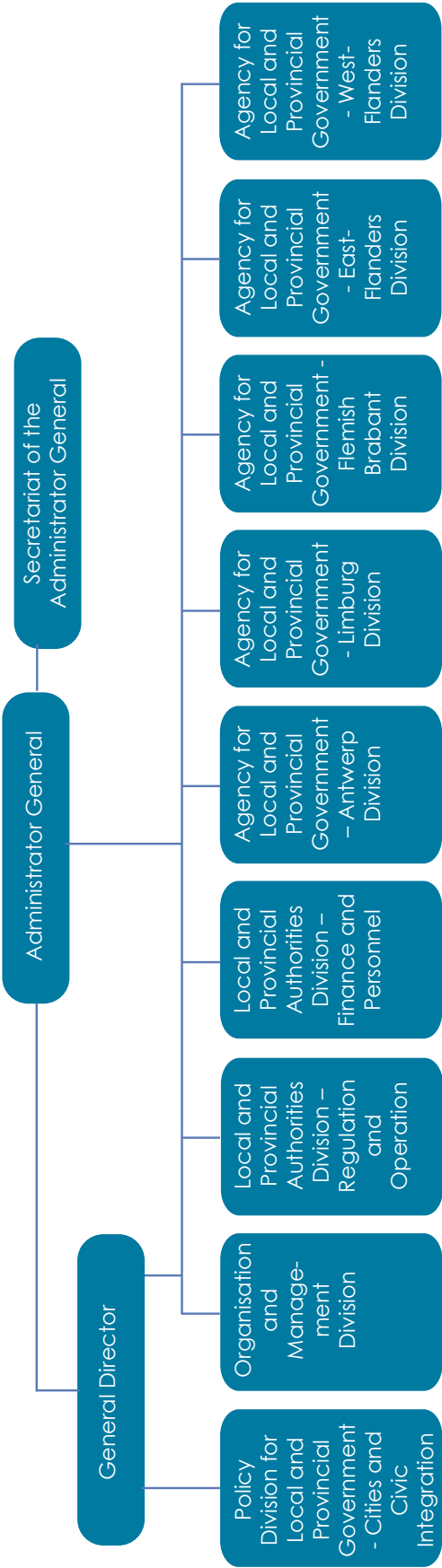
Most likely, Jean Neuhaus is the creator of the well-known bite-sized chocolate bonbon called 'praline'. Neuhaus was the son of a Swiss pharmacist who in Belgium had opened a pastry shop in the 'Brusselse Koninginnegalerij' – the Queen's Gallery in Brussels. His family had already for years made pharmaceutical confections. In 1912, he created the first chocolate bonbon with a filling, which he named 'praline', a name with a lengthy ancestry. The Chef of Cesar de Choiseul, Count de Plessis-Praslin (1598-1675), a marshal, minister, and diplomat under King Louis XIV, had already in the 17th century made a chocolate bonbon, without however today's typical filling. The word 'Praline' is derived from the Count's name (Praslin).

Organisation of the Agency

The Agency for Local and Provincial Government is composed of nine divisions. Four central divisions are located in Brussels. They are in charge of preparing, evaluating and coordinating policy. In addition, a provincial division has been set up in the capital of each province. These five divisions mainly take care of the first line contacts with the local authorities. The Agency employs a total of 439 people. More information about the operation of our Agency and about the Flemish authorities is available at the following sites:

- www.vlaanderen.be
- www.flanders.be
- www.vlaanderen.be/regering
- www.vlaamsparlement.be
- www.vlaanderen.be/internationaal
- www.binnenland.vlaanderen.be

Organigram





www.binnenland.vlaanderen.be

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