

gent:

GHENT MAKES ROOM



Young in Ghent

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FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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**Ghent: child and
youth-friendly city**



Preface

When the new city council took office in 2013, the local authorities decided to place particular focus on child and youth friendliness in the city's mission. They set themselves a challenging ambition: Ghent had to become the most child and youth-friendly city in Flanders. After all, a city that is beneficial for its children is also beneficial for any of its citizens. Both young and old benefit from more green spaces, safer traffic and relaxed shopping.

Five years have passed, and a wide range of measures and initiatives have been taken: from BabySpots to support for young entrepreneurs, from childcare to play elements, and from family and community liaisons to intense guidance for young refugees.

The commitment to help build a child and youth-friendly city was strong: numerous city services have developed a reflex to take into account the

interests of children and young people. Schools are more than ever embedded in city life. Hospitality owners provide high chairs, play areas, changing tables, etc. Numerous organisations ensure an impressive range of childcare, play and support services. Residents start play streets, demand more open space or contribute in a different manner.

As a complete list of all initiatives would be far too extensive to present here, we limit ourselves to the following overview of our joint efforts. A mix of interviews, reflections and some remarkable projects offers insight into Ghent's strategy to build a child and youth-friendly city. This strategy furthermore goes way beyond great playground structures and fun activities for children and youngsters. The city is undergoing a radical change. In Ghent, we always take into account all children and young people, including the most vulnerable ones.

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Is our city heaven on earth for every child? Unfortunately this is not the case: One in four Ghent children is born into poverty. Here and now, in our city and in our times, some families do not know where they will sleep or what they will eat.

We simply cannot accept this. So our mission is not yet accomplished. Plenty of challenges remain. Persistence and perseverance are essential to defend the interests of all children and young people.

Building a child and youth-friendly city is a collective effort. We would like to thank all who have supported this ambition over the past few years: all city services, public social welfare centres, schools, childcare initiatives, civil society organisations, hospitality businesses and the countless Ghent residents who have committed to

making Ghent a better place for children and young people.

We simultaneously hope that everybody will continue on the same path with the same enthusiasm and perseverance. This will enable us to turn Ghent into an even more caring, safe, healthy and pleasant city.

Child secretary of Ghent and the 'Ghent, a child and youth-friendly city' team

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107

— 0 TO 4 YEARS —

15.031

— 5 TO 9 YEARS —

14.541

— 10 TO 14 YEARS —

12.580

— 15 TO 19 YEARS —

12.510

— 20 TO 24 YEARS —

16.669

NUMBER OF SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

8.910

(18% of children grow up in a single-parent family)

NUMBER OF FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

28.083

(23% of the total number of families in Ghent)

NUMBER OF BIRTHS

1 in 4

children grows up in poverty

NUMBER OF BIRTHS

3.198



Number of children in nursery schools

10.709

Number of children in primary schools

11.771

Number of children in secondary schools

23.255

of whom 45% come from outside Ghent

Number of students in higher education

70.121

Faith in the power, creativity & autonomy of young people

GUY REDIG

PROFESSOR OF YOUTH
(WORK) POLICY - VUB

The first traces of a local youth policy in Flanders can be found in the mid-1970s. Medium-sized municipalities in particular started to hire a **youth consultant**. Faced with an old-fashioned administration, this person had to “deal” with the young citizens. Their main tasks were to manage the youth council, which at the time mainly consisted of pettish young people, and promote all kinds of youth initiatives (especially youth movements, youth clubs and youth workshops). The revolutionary spirit following the May 1968 events still lingered, but it remained peaceful in Ghent (and Antwerp) for another decade.

The city had a hard time in the 1980s. The welfare state fairy tale suddenly became a horror story. The financial and economic free fall severely damaged the vulnerable social fabric. It seemed like society was suddenly hit by an avalanche of structural problems. (Youth) unemployment reached unprecedented levels, poverty appeared to be a structural issue and illiteracy remained persistent despite decades of compulsory education. The first tensions with regard to “guest workers” and their families manifested themselves.

Less attention was paid to culture and leisure, which had played such an important role in the 1960s and 1970s. The first state reform (1970) had turned Flanders into a militant cultural community and included a wave of measures that focused on local policy as well. Barely one decade later, the adage of play, creativity and fun was drowned out by the struggle for welfare, job creation and integration of vulnerable groups. The conviction grew that youth movements had to demonstrate their usefulness in this agenda. At the same time, high youth unemployment led to the creation of a series of new forms of employment, which encouraged local authorities to recruit a lot of (young) people. Later on called VFIK and SIF, these systems gave a considerable boost to the **professionalisation of municipal youth departments**. Ghent seized these opportunities with both hands. In the then predominant socialist tradition, the city decided to create its own network of so-called “youth welfare centres”, intended as a safe and welcoming place for vulnerable target groups. Located in the city’s typical 19th-century periphery, these institutions aspired to support young people with a migration background and show them the right path under the guidance of professional city officials. This expansion phase became a milestone in the City of Ghent’s youth policy, but the desired results were not always obtained.

In the 1990s, Flemish youth work experienced a **revival** and became more relevant again. The identity crisis in youth work, in particular with regard to

youth movements and youth centres, caused a mild form of catharsis. This crisis unexpectedly triggered a **new dynamic**. The reasons for this were surprisingly simple: liberation from old, segregated systems, a higher degree of autonomy and the strong influence of a rapid succession of young volunteers. The new success formula put particular focus on the playful joy of being young together and stimulated authorities to draw up a new policy.

The 1995 **decree on local youth (work)** policy meant a lot to Ghent and resulted for instance in the creation of a youth policy plan and the implementation of serious participation and communication. The decision was made to work together with private initiatives; later on, this collaboration was centralised in VZW Jong. Accurate and dynamic subsidy and service systems were furthermore set up for youth work. The youth council and other forms of practical participation proactively kept in touch with the numerous and highly diverse people involved. The Youth department also remained active in the field by means of its own projects.

'Time and again, officials and successive executive councillors manage to amaze my students with their passionate expertise, strong involvement and always innovative, inspiring practices'

Ghent has been steadily and decisively developing a successful youth policy ever since. The successive executive councillors entered into a strong alliance with a passionate team of youth officials. There is a general conviction that a city's youth policy needs to be versatile and has to be translated into field practices. Remarkably, a number of successful **balances** have been achieved **between different policy options**.

For instance, optimum conditions have been created for associations, and policymakers have often taken the initiative themselves (holiday programmes, participation). The city also managed to ensure a balance between attention to youth work (supported by volunteers) and professional efforts to combat exclusion and deprivation. The balance between leisure activities, traditionally a spearhead of local youth policy, and the integral approach to children and young people also appeared to be a well-considered choice. This is demonstrated, for instance, by the 'play fabric', with public space being systematically checked against the living environment of young residents. The city also continues to invest in more and better political participation of children and young people, not only via structures (youth council), but also via numerous learning projects that encourage children and young people to enter the political arena.

Over two decades of persistent efforts have achieved a sustainable result. Ghent demonstrates that the model of local youth policy works very well, even in a large city. This success can be explained by an always **passionate triangle relationship**: the subtle yet beautiful relation between politics (1), civil service (2) and a versatile civil society with a constructive mindset. I have visited the Ghent Youth department with my VUB students for many years. Time and again, officials and successive executive councillors manage to amaze us with their passionate expertise, strong involvement and always innovative, inspiring practices.

At a time when the Flemish government has completely abandoned local youth (work) policy and its own youth service (youth work department) has become a shadow of its former self, Ghent demonstrates that supralocal inspiration is hardly necessary. The impact of the city's youth policy illustrates how local authorities can actually involve young citizens and enter into a dialogue with them, including in a European context. Ghent thus incorporates the most **crucial characteristics** of Flemish youth (work) policy: **optimism, playfulness and especially faith in the power, creativity and autonomy of young people**. Hats off and respect!

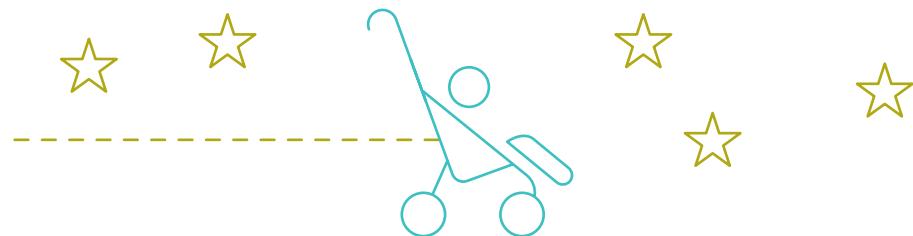
Guy Redig is Professor of Youth (Work) Policy at the Psychology and Educational Sciences faculty of Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

New life!

NUMBER OF SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES



3198 BIRTHS IN GHENT IN 2017



Various organisations, sometimes with support from the city, take action to make life a bit easier for new parents. Some actions have a direct and visible impact; others may be less visible, but still have a very specific effect, such as increased capacity of childcare centres. An overview is included in the action plan for a child and youth-friendly city. You can find this document at www.stad.gent.

Pit stop for parents

'If you have just had a baby, you may still be looking for balance and often stay at home cocooning. Thanks to the BabySpots, you can get out without worrying too much about a quiet place where you can take care of your baby'

— TINA, CHILD SECRETARY AND YOUNG MOTHER



As there are plenty of large and small events in Ghent, you can also make use of **mobile BabySpots**. This enables parents with young children to enjoy all activities. Organisations can borrow the mobile BabySpots free of charge from Kraamkaravaan.

For more information please visit www.kraamkaravaan.be/uitleendienst/babyspot

In 2017, Huis van het Kind and Kraamkaravaan decided to launch **BabySpots**. A BabySpot is a place where parents can take care of their newborn. Moms and dads are welcomed with a smile and can feed and change their baby in peace and quiet. Initially limited to 6 locations, the project currently offers 56 places where parents can go to.

Any organisation can easily create its own BabySpot. You require limited basic facilities such as a changing table, a breastfeeding pillow and possibly a means to warm baby food. A BabySpot sticker informs parents that they will receive a warm welcome at that location. Discover all locations at www.stad.gent/babyspot.



Borrowing pushchairs

On 25 March 2016, a mom from Gentbrugge launched the idea of allowing parents to borrow a pushchair in the city centre. The child secretary looked into the idea, and Buggypunt was born. The pushchair station enables you to borrow pushchairs free of charge. They are compact, manoeuvrable and specially made for shopping or sightseeing in a city. They have a large storage basket and the children sit at eye level with you. This means parents of young children can easily come to



the city centre by bike or public transport and do not have to worry about carrying their children in their arms once they are there.

'We have two young children and live in Gentbrugge. We like going to the city centre by bike, but this means we have to carry our children in our arms. That's not very convenient. Taking the tram with two pushchairs is not always easy either.'

— ANN-SOPHIE, INITIATOR OF BUGGPUNT

The borrowing station under the city hall is open on weekdays from 8am to 6pm and in the weekend from 10am to 6pm. You can also book a pushchair in advance. All practical information can be found at www.fietsambassade.gent.be/huren.



Registration of births in Ghent

Even a small adjustment can make life easier for new parents. It has recently become possible to register the birth of a child in any hospital in Ghent. This means parents no longer have to go to the Civil Affairs department for this purpose. In 2017, a total of 2558 births were registered in the different maternity hospitals in Ghent; this corresponds to approximately 80% of all babies born in Ghent.

'New fathers have a lot on their mind. Family visits, getting used to the baby, finding a new balance, sleep deprivation. It is therefore very convenient that you can immediately register the birth in the maternity hospital instead of having to go to the Civil Affairs department'

- BART, A YOUNG DAD FROM GHENT

After a successful trial period in AZ Sint-Lucas (November 2015), the system was rolled out in every maternity hospital in Ghent.

A clear overview of childcare facilities

'The Childcare Office makes it easier for parents to find a childcare centre and saves them a lot of telephone stress. At the same time, we can map the demand for childcare better. We then take these figures to the Flemish government to obtain the necessary funds to expand the number of places'

- DANNY VERDONCK, COORDINATOR OF THE GHENT CHILDCARE OFFICE

Until recently, parents had to look for childcare for their baby or toddlers up to 3 years old all by themselves.

If they wanted to enroll their child in a nursery of the City of Ghent (25% of the total number of places), they had to register with Tinkelbel. If they wanted to send their child to a different nursery (75% of the total number of places), they had to contact the nurseries in question one by one.

Fortunately, this is now a thing of the past thanks to the establishment of the **Ghent Childcare Office** in June 2017 at

the initiative of the City of Ghent. The website bundles all places available with 30 municipal childcare centres, 126 private childcare centres and 155 childminders. Simple filters help (future) parents find a suitable childcare provider for their child. Parents can apply with different childcare providers at one site. They can enter up to five different childcare centres or childminders. The organisers contact the parents when they have a spot available. Parents who do not receive a positive answer to their childcare request will be contacted by childcare centres where there is still room.

Even though there are a lot of childcare options in Ghent, finding a childcare provider nearby can be quite a challenge for parents living in certain neighbourhoods. The employees of the Childcare Office are happy to help these parents in person.

All information is available on the website www.kinderopvang.stad.gent.





The city is a village

SPACE TO PLAY AND GROW

For parents and grandparents with young (grand) children, the city offers a huge range of possibilities: children can play, discover, taste culture, etc. to their hearts' content. As you furthermore need an entire village to raise a child, the City of Ghent invests in initiatives such as child-friendly one-stop shops and sustainable schools, families and parents that have questions.

Child-friendly one-stop shops



Sooner or later, everyone has to go to one of the city's one-stop shops, whether to renew their identity card, to request a passport or to apply for a subsidy. The municipal employees try to help everybody as soon as possible. Unfortunately, it is possible that parents have to wait a bit. To make waiting time less boring for their children, the City of Ghent has installed play areas at several departments (Youth Department, Housing Department, Migration Counter, Migration Information Office and the Welfare Office of Sint-Amandsberg) and at the local service centres of Ledeburg, Wondelgem, Sint-Amands-

berg, Sint-Denijs-Westrem and Administrative Centre Zuid since 2016.

Children can read, glance through a picture book, colour or play with building blocks in these areas while they wait for their parents. The cheerful colours of these play areas also contribute to a positive and customer-friendly image of each one-stop shop. The reception staff have furthermore been trained in how to deal with children at the one-stop shop.

Particular attention during events

There are numerous large and small events in Ghent that pay particular attention to children and young people. One example of this is the '**WildeMannen WoesteWijven**' festival, the first edition of which took place in 2014. Children took over the entire city centre during this festival. It featured theatrical and musical performances, visual instal-

lations and artistic workshops along a route through the city centre. The festival was held a second time in 2016 and a third time in the autumn of 2018.

Since 2015, child and youth-friendly activities have received more attention during the **Ghent Festivities** as well. Within this scope, more organisers



set up specific activities for this target group and an increasing number of families visit the Ghent Festivities in the afternoon and in the evening. The **Ghent Winter Festivities** also include a range of child-friendly activities.

Smaller events also pay additional attention to young visitors. Just think of the New Year's drink, the entry of St Nicholas and the free family event on the Day of the Flemish Community. Apart from a range of activities for children, the City of Ghent also provides appropriate logistic support, such as modified toilet trailers, a breastfeeding space and a changing table. City services can also make use of a kids bar to make their event more accessible.

The City of Ghent has also distributed **reusable child safety ID** wristbands for many years. You can write the name of your child and a mobile phone number on these wristbands. This enables organisers to quickly contact the parents if a child is lost.

To help organisers make their event more child and youth-friendly, the City of Ghent has also drawn up a **checklist for child-friendly events**. The checklist contains practical and useful tips for any type of event. You can download the document from www.stad.gent or request a copy with the Youth Department (+32 (0)9 269 81 10 or jeugddienst@stad.gent).



Label for family-friendly hospitality businesses

In 2017, the Economy Department investigated the family-friendly character of hospitality businesses. Families were surveyed as to their desires, needs and expectations when visiting a hospitality business, hospitality owners were asked which initiatives they take to pursue a family-friendly image and talks were held with different stakeholders. The survey showed that families need a reliable tool to help them select a hospitality business that takes into account the desires, needs, expectations and age of the different family members. Hospitality businesses have to meet clear, transparent criteria in terms of access, appropriate facilities and menus in order to guarantee this. In 2018, the Economy Department consequently developed an online form that can be completed by a hospitality owner and results in a notification that the label has been granted (and that the business is **indicated on a map**) or that further improvements are required (with suggestions to be granted the label). Families will be able to identify hospitality businesses that have been granted the label on a digital map.

[stad.gent/puur-gent/eten-drinken/
gezinsvriendelijke-horeca](http://stad.gent/puur-gent/eten-drinken/gezinsvriendelijke-horeca)

Wider range of leisure activities during the holidays



Research into childcare and leisure activities has shown that parents look for holiday solutions that meet their needs and cater to the interests and talents of their children. They are particularly interested in specific solutions for preschoolers and teenagers, preferably at various locations, including the familiar school environment. You can download the results of the study from the City of Ghent's website. The city authorities and the sector will use these results to better cater to the needs of parents.

In addition, numerous initiatives have been taken over the past few years. Grabbelpas, a platform for leisure activities during school holidays, was replaced by **De Prefabriek**, a brand-new platform for playground activities, in 2014. This brand-new platform organises a varied range of playground activities for children, including preschoolers aged 3 and above, throughout the day. Attracting more than 9,000 participants, De Prefabriek has been a tremendous success. This is a remarkable increase compared to Grabbelpas.

The City of Ghent also supports a lot of platforms for playground activities. The permanent platforms are complemented by mobile platforms that cover the city's neighbourhoods. During the Easter and summer holidays, **Sportmobiel**, **Pretkamjonet** and **Sportkar** travel to a different location every day so that children in the different neighbourhoods can engage in sports and play free of charge.

Speelse Wijken is a mobile platform that transforms neighbourhoods with a limited range of leisure activities into really playful locations for two weeks during the summer holidays.

De Brede School is a network of organisations that work together on the broad development of children and young people at school and in their free time. In 2017 they organised summer camps for primary school children for the very first time. There were camps in seven schools. In the morning, the children played language games to improve their knowledge of the Dutch language, and in the afternoon, they got the opportu-

nity to become acquainted with sports, games and culture. Thanks to the collaboration with De Brede School, the children could remain in their familiar school environment, which makes the camps more accessible.

In cooperation with the City of Ghent, a number of school buildings were also made available to organise holiday camps.



- WHY CHILDREN IN GHENT ARE INVALUABLE BOTH TODAY AND IN THE FUTURE

5 QUESTIONS TO

Véronique Van Damme

'It has to be terrible to grow up with the idea that you do not really belong here. Organising after-school sports sessions at school enables you to boost the self-confidence of children.'

1

Why do you do what you do?

VÉRONIQUE: When I started this job, I knew that mediators existed but did not really know what they had to do. I really had to find out for myself in the beginning. They hadn't had a mediator for a long time at my school, and they did not really look forward to my coming. I have found my place in the meantime. My agenda is quite full, and I'm starting to notice that things are changing over here. I'm employed on a full-time basis, which gives me ample opportunity to implement fascinating ideas, such as a reading project or a homework assistance programme with the assistance of socio-educational care workers from University College Ghent.

I especially wanted a job that allows me to work with youngsters in a committed manner, but what is really fascinating about this job is that I work together with so many different people, the Public Social Welfare Centre, the Youth Department, community workers, the school itself, children, etc. In primary education, a mediator often has to work through the parents. If you involve the parents more fully, they will have a better understanding of what we are doing. You can often find me near the school gate making small talk; that makes it a bit easier if people need help later on. Contacting the

IDENTIKIT

Age: 30
Job: mediator at Sint-Gregoriuscollege (primary school)

teacher may still be too great a step for parents. That's why I sometimes accompany parents when they have a meeting with the teacher. I regularly make home visits too. It is often striking how their world at home differs from their world at school, and how children blossom as that gap narrows. If parents tell me something in confidence and ask me not to pass it on to the teacher, I take that into account. I think this is only fair, in particular if it does not have any impact on the lessons. If, for example, a child's father wears an ankle tag, the teacher does not really need to know this. I occasionally try to convince a parent that certain information nevertheless needs to be shared. For example, a mother got locked out of her house while going through a difficult divorce; she could no longer enter the house, while her son could not leave the house. If that boy is late for school afterwards, it is a good thing that he does not get scolded again. I'm a mom myself, and I'd sometimes rather take a child home with me. But that's not how it works. You have to let go of your judgment and try to offer

constructive solutions. I'm in any case convinced that every parent loves their child and makes the choices that are possible for them at that time, even if the upbringing sometimes deviates from what we expect.

2

What makes children and young people so important to the city?

VÉRONIQUE: People sometimes ask me whether it is really necessary to invest so much money in child support. After all, isn't it up to the parents to send their children to school? However, if we do not support the most vulnerable children and young people now, we will never break this vicious circle. We need to encourage them to at least complete secondary school. I attach great importance to the right to education. Undocumented children can also attend school with us; they are safe over there, and I value that. It is also possible for them to practise sports with us even if they are not insured. Sometimes all it takes is a little push.

With the support of De Brede School, we try to focus on activities in the neighbourhood and to make these activities more accessible. It is important for children to feel a sense of belonging, which implies not being stared at, being offered the opportunity to participate and knowing that everyone is welcome in the sports club.

The most vulnerable group suffers from very strong feelings of inferiority, and I think it has to be very difficult to grow up with the idea that you do not really belong here. Organising after-school sports sessions at school makes it possible to boost the self-confidence of children. Children manage to look right through differences and see each other as they are: that is not the boy who is late or has *moth-eaten* pants, it is their friend. They thus show us, the adults, how to live in a multicultural society.

3

What is the current situation in Ghent?

VÉRONIQUE: I'm under the impression that a lot more schools believe in broad involvement nowadays; a school is not an island, but a partner of the city. In any case, I think it is important that a school is more than just a place to learn. We also focus strongly on broad support with a local platform for playground activities, sports sessions, initiatives by local residents, etc. The projects I can subscribe to are increasing. Of course, the needs have increased as well.

School is also an important medium if people want to know what children feel strongly about. If, for example, community workers want to give a local square a makeover, they will visit the school to ask the children what they want. Conversely, we are also listened to when there are complaints of teens

loitering in the park. Posting a police officer near the park will not solve the problem; you also have to address the causes. Youth workers try to respond to that by setting up more activities in the neighbourhood. These activities have also enabled us to become acquainted with people who work in the neighbourhood on a professional basis: the social worker, the neighbourhood coordinator and the police officers. This helps us to cooperate better and find solutions.

4

Do you have any tips that may be invaluable to other people?

VÉRONIQUE: I like to start from the strengths of people. For instance, we organise multilingual reading sessions where the same book is read aloud by a Turkish and a Dutch-speaking mother; the children hear each page in Dutch and in Turkish and are impressed that these moms can do this. Parents in turn feel appreciated. It also benefits language development, as a child suddenly remarks: '*Pinguin* is the same in both languages!' We also organise tablet classes for parents. A strong mother, a teacher, asked me if she could participate, and I was a bit nervous in the beginning, but she knew a lot of great tips and her children were close friends with the children of the other parents, and eventually we found out that we all struggle with the same questions: how

long should children be allowed on a tablet, how to prevent children from bringing their smartphone to the dinner table, etc. I want to focus on these small things we have in common, as this is what society needs in my view.

5

What current and future challenges do you see?

VÉRONIQUE: There are lots of nice projects going on in Ghent, but not all of them are well-known. Good practices in other neighbourhoods should receive more attention as they can also serve as a source of inspiration. I hope that people will start to look differently at our school, which is currently regarded as a concentration school: 70% of our students are disadvantaged students, while the municipal school just around the corner only has 30%. We have classes where only two or three children speak Dutch at home, and you want to set high expectations for the children, but you have to take this into account in your activities. This requires a lot of effort, but the outside world doesn't see that: we remain the school where parents from privileged backgrounds do not want to send their children to. A mom told me she even had to answer to her friends for opting for us. I think that's a real pity. It remains a challenge to achieve a better balance between schools.

Supporting parents who provide childcare themselves

In the summer of 2016, three groups of parents took the initiative to provide childcare for a number of children during the school holidays on the basis of a rotation system. The idea is simple. Each parent looks after a group of children for one day, and in return they can get childcare for their children for four days. The three groups of parents were able to further develop their idea with the support of the City of Ghent. A fourth group of parents joined the initiative in 2017.

More specifically, the Childcare Office helps the parents find a suitable location, for example by making a school building available for free. The office also bears the insurance costs for the children and the parents. The city also provided financial support to vzw Cokido. This non-profit organisation helps the groups of parents get started and supports them.

Parents interested in setting up a group themselves can contact the Childcare Office by calling +32 (0)9 268 20 80 or by emailing dienst.kinderopvang@stad.gent.

The website www.cokido.org also offers lots of practical tips for parents.



Sports for everyone

The Sports department has organised a range of sports camps for kids with disabilities since 2016. These sports camps have been incorporated in its programme of activities. The department also focuses strongly on UiTPAS, a loyalty

and benefits programme aimed at promoting participation in leisure activities, which enables underprivileged children to participate in the sports camps at an 80% discount. The collaboration with De Brede School and other partner organisations has furthermore resulted in an increasing number of underprivileged children making use of the range of sports activities.

Efforts have also been made to increase teacher diversity, for example by means of the co-teaching project. This project enables talented young people who do not yet have the required certificates to gain experience as an assistant teacher during sports camps. The intention is to encourage them to obtain a degree in sports or sports training, after which they can become a teacher with the Sports department. This also increases diversity among in-house teachers.

The summer of 2016 saw the launch of Sportkriebels, a summer holidays programme that combines childcare and sports. A maximum of 181 children can participate in this programme.



Expansion of childcare services



The City of Ghent strives for sufficient affordable childcare in every neighbourhood. That's why the municipal authorities have created 1,300 additional childcare spaces in nine years' time. The city has also taken measures to reinforce the viability of autonomous childcare centres and has provided additional financial support to create 85 additional childcare spaces in non-municipal childcare centres where parents pay based on their income.

Apart from the increase in childcare capacity, 344 additional spaces will be created in preschool education and 433 additional places will be created in primary education. The focus will be on neighbourhoods where the need is highest or neighbourhoods that are easily accessible to parents.

Increasing the accessibility

What activities are organised by youth movements? What happens on a playground or during a camp? What hobbies can children do? It is not always easy for everyone to image what hobbies and leisure activities you can do during the school holidays and how this is organised in practice.

To make leisure activities more accessible, the Youth Department has developed an information package that sheds more light on leisure activities in Ghent. A number of videos have also been created to show what an activity or a day at the playground looks like.

'The pictures, videos and voice-overs in Bulgarian, Slovak and Turkish ensure that this information is useful for people who do not have Dutch as their mother tongue. Mediators, schools and various organisations can use this package to inform parents themselves'

- AYFER DÖNMEZ, YOUTH DEPARTMENT
EMPLOYEE

Finding your hobby



Children have plenty of interests, but how do you start looking for the right hobby? And where can you find all these clubs? The **hobby seeker**, an online search engine for leisure activities for children and young people, gives parents access to the right information about more than 845 activities. All youth, sports and cultural associations can be found using this tool.



Ghent museums throw their doors wide open



The Ghent museums also make great efforts to provide children and young people with valuable experiences. The range of activities includes treasure hunts and custom practical assignments. Several municipal museums organise creative camps and workshops during the school holidays.

They also pay attention to babies and toddlers. During Krokuskriebels, families with babies and toddlers can do a **buggy tour** at multiple locations,



while there are also specific activities for toddlers and preschoolers, who can crawl about, smell, feel, discover and experience to their hearts' content.

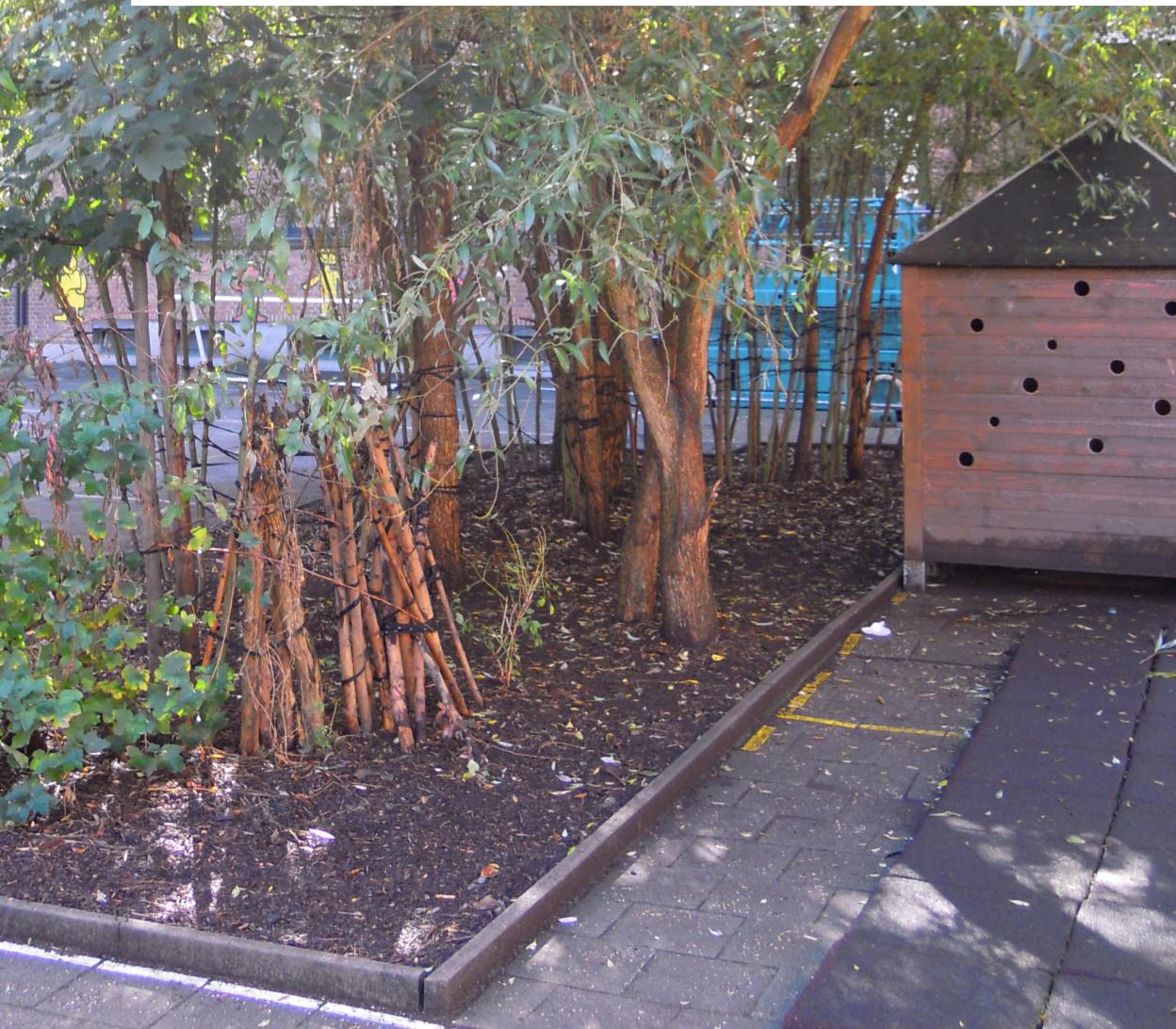
During the Christmas holidays, the Castle of the Counts is annually transformed into a fairytale **Winter Wonder Castle**. Children can enjoy a light spectacle, fairytale lighting creating a magical atmosphere, and cozy stories during the **Story Festival**.



Revolution in the playground

When people used to think of a playground, they imagined a boring concrete area with possibly a football goal or a bench. You can let go of that image in Ghent. In 2014, the local authorities launched

the concept of **green and adventurous playgrounds**. Their number has meanwhile increased significantly. By the end of 2018, over half of all playgrounds in Ghent was converted into green and adventurous playgrounds.



'We have noticed that children enjoy themselves better and the number of fights has decreased at the playground'

- BART DEVAERE, HEADMASTER OF PRIMARY SCHOOL 'DE WONDERFLUIT' IN SINT-AMANDSBERG

There are plenty of benefits, both for the children and for the school:

- More variation in play, which means the playground appeals to a larger group of children.
- The different experience areas ensure that calmer children also find a place to play.
- Play zones, hills to climb over and tunnels to crawl through allow children to move more when it is playtime.
- Natural elements such as plants, herb planters and a vegetable garden contribute to a more relaxed atmosphere at the playground and prevent bullying as a result of boredom.
- Children play outside on a daily basis, which is not that obvious in an urban environment where not everybody has a garden.
- The playground makes it possible to engage in nature education.
- The playground stimulates children and provides meaningful experiences.



Schools get appropriate substantive and financial support from the City of Ghent to launch their project and steer it into the right direction. Many schools engage the involvement of parents, who assist with the design or roll up their sleeves and put a spade in the ground to convert the playground into a green and adventurous spot

'We were involved in the design through the parent council and we also assisted in laying out the new playground'

- LAURENT, INVOLVED PARENT, SPORTSCHOOL GENTBRUGGE



Creating a sustainable bond between children and young people and the city

SVEN DE VISSCHER
SOCIAL WORK LECTURER,
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE GHENT

A child and youth-friendly city offers a maximum of development opportunities to all children and young people and invites them, as fellow citizens, to actively think about the city of tomorrow. That's how you can summarise in one sentence the most important ambition for any city who wants to label itself as a child and youth-friendly city.

This simple sentence obviously covers a whole series of challenges linked to fulfilling that ambition. As a matter of fact, the city and the urban space are significantly overburdened nowadays. Ghent also cannot escape the growing pressure on the housing market, the increasingly sharp conflicts about mobility, the diverse claims on the scarce public space by citizens, interest groups and economic actors, the overburdening of schools and social provisions, the persistent social inequality and cultural conflicts.

In such a context, it becomes quite tempting to weigh the interests of children and young people against the interests of other groups in the city. For instance, an urban welfare policy focuses on child poverty, and a child test serves to monitor the specific interests of children and young people in the decision-making process. However, Ghent also wants to be friendly towards the elderly, wheelchair users, entrepreneurs, LGBs, refugees, etc. This creates the risk of increasingly juxtaposing target groups, while we need connection in society now more than ever. The connecting factor between the interests of those groups can primarily be found in the development of a sustainable, liveable and attractive urban environment. Child-friendliness is therefore an integral part of sustainability: the awareness that our rights and needs today have to be weighed against the rights and needs of future generations. This requires an integral vision of the city's future.

Over the past few years, Ghent has developed many assets to support such an integral approach to a child and youth-friendly policy. Its DNA is embedded in the first playground policy plans of the late 1990s - based on the Dutch play space network model - and the general intersectoral Play Space Policy Planning Group. At that time, a deliberate choice was made to entrust the responsibility for a child-friendly living environment not only to the Youth department but also to key figures within the Parks & Gardens department, Education, Urban Planning, Mobility, etc.

It is the same integral planning approach that constituted the basis of the current action plan for a child and youth-friendly city and the political choice to turn child-friendliness into a strategic objective. Indeed, a child and youth-friendly city



cannot be created by the Youth department alone, but requires **shared responsibility** of all city departments and other child-oriented actors in the city, such as youth-work providers. Similarly, a child and youth-friendly city cannot be created by the local authorities alone, but requires active involvement in the **living environment of children and young people** in all their diversity. This for example translates into the efforts put in by the City of Ghent to reach out to as many children and young people as possible within the scope of the J1000 project.

'Child-friendliness is an integral part of sustainability: the awareness that our rights and needs today have to be weighed against the rights and needs of future generations'

A child-friendly city is never complete, but requires a continuous **learning process** shared between children, young people, policymakers, civil society and local residents. This shared learning process enables us to give an increasingly refined answer to the question what a child-friendly city really means. However, a number of **pitfalls** come with this process. If you treat children and young people as fellow citizens who think about a sustainable and liveable future of the city, you cannot just add up all wishes and make a (feasible) selection from them. What is needed is an urban planning culture that comes up with problem definitions, possible solutions and specific actions together with children, young people and citizens

of all ages. A planning culture that focuses strongly on contrasting and connecting perspectives, especially of those who are the least visible. This is not child's play, but a prudent undertaking that is at odds with the Flemish tendency towards a more commercial approach to the child-friendly city: attracting (wealthy) families to the city by catering to the (commercial) needs of children and parents as much as possible. I hope that Ghent continues to **stubbornly** pursue a sustainable and liveable city for and with children and young people.

Sven De Visscher is a Social Work Lecturer at the faculty of Education, Health & Social Work at University College Ghent.



More greenery in the city

Ghent boasts over 155 parks and play areas where local children can play to their hearts' content. Children are involved in play area (re)design processes to ensure that the playground meets their expectations. The City of Ghent furthermore takes into account the needs of the different age groups and provides spots for

each of them. For instance, there are playgrounds that focus on toddlers and preschoolers, while other play areas cater to older children.

Ghent is also investing in the creation of five so-called **green poles**. These are large park and nature areas where people can walk, cycle and relax.





One of these green poles is Gentbrugse Meersen. In this 240 hectare area, children can play, go on a barefoot safari and stroll between the cows.

Parkbos, a different green pole currently in full development, will boast a play forest with ditches and bridges to walk over and under. A path leading to an orchard and a large play field with picnic benches will run right through the woodland. In addition, various wooden play elements will be installed in the

woodland. De Campagne, currently especially known as a petting zoo and a pocket park, will also be extended with a play forest in the future.

More information on the different parks and play areas can be found at stad.gent/buitengenieten.

For more info on the green poles, please go the website stad.gent and enter 'green in the city' in the search box.

GHENT PARKS IN FIGURES

THE CITY OF GHENT WANTS THE FOLLOWING FOR EACH RESIDENT:

A GREEN POLE

(i.e. an extensive natural area) at a maximum of five kilometres from their home

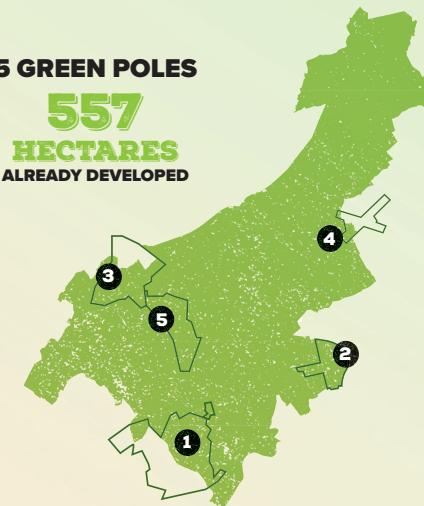
A NEIGHBOURHOOD PARK

at a maximum of 400 metres from their home

- 1 PARKBOS
- 2 GENTBRUGSE MEERSEN
- 3 VINDERHOUTSE BOSSEN
- 4 OUD VLIEGVELD
- 5 BOURGOYEN MALEM BLAARMEERSEN SNEPPEMEERSEN

5 GREEN POLES

557 HECTARES
ALREADY DEVELOPED



63 NEIGHBOURHOOD PARKS
(over one hectare)

428 HECTARES

65 SMALL PARKS
(0.5 to 1 hectare)
57 HECTARES

326 PARKLETS
(under 0.5 hectare)
52 HECTARES

PARKS APPROXIMATELY ONE HECTARE IN SIZE:
neighbourhood park De Porre (Gentbrugge), Ferdinand Lousbergspark (Macharius-Heirnis) and Coyendanspark (at St. Bavo's Abbey).

PARKS APPROXIMATELY HALF A HECTARE IN SIZE:
Acaciapark (Brugse Poort), Banierpark (Dampoort) and Spellekenspark (Sint-Amandsberg).

HECTARES THE LARGEST GREEN POLE, IN FULL GROWTH

Castles, lanes, pastures, woodland, kingfishers ... you can find it all in Parkbos, located between Ringvaart and De Pinte. The Grand Noble portal in Kortrijksesteenweg is the ideal starting point for a walk. The brand-new [Parkbos bridges](#) provide easy access to cyclists. They connect Ghent to the old railway.

www.stad.gent (enter 'parkbos' in the search box)

You do want to know in which parks you can organise a game of pétanque, where you can find table tennis tables or where your children can play in the sandpit? A handy overview is available at www.stad.gent/buitengenieten.

All greenery in Ghent: www.stad.gent/parken +32 (0)9 323 66 00 (Parks & Gardens department)

Sustainable schools



To raise climate awareness among children and young people, Ghent is developing **Climate Schools**. This is a programme that includes guidance, education and funding possibilities. It also opened the door for interested students to join the Kids and Youth Climate Council.

Ghent invests in sustainable and energy-efficient school buildings. Municipal schools take measures that contribute to energy efficiency and climate adaptation. Schools in Ghent that fall under subsidised free education or under community education qualify for energy coaching,

assistance and advice. Any school that sets up a sustainability programme will simultaneously set up an educational and awareness-raising programme for pupils and parents.

The city also pays attention to schools in Ghent within the scope of its sustainable food strategy '**Gent en garde**'. Meals in municipal schools have become more sustainable, and students have been made more aware of the importance of sustainable food. All schools in Ghent can request assistance and advice with regard to laying out and maintaining a vegetable garden at school.

Cemeteries that pay additional attention to children



Cemeteries primarily remain places where people say goodbye to their loved ones. However, they are also peaceful and traffic-free zones in the city. By changing their design, you can ensure that children do not experience them as sinister. A number of small interventions, such as planting colourful and fragrant plants, providing sitting and reflection areas and making the place traffic-free, have ensured that children feel more welcome at Westerbegraafplaats.



From car park to play park

Land in the city is scarce, so it's important to use what you have in a smart and creative manner. The old car park in Citadelpark was for example converted into a play area with picnic tables, a basketball pitch, a sandpit, a table tennis table and a panna cage. Maaseikplein, a stretch of car park that lost its function after the expansion of the pedestrian area, was recently redesigned with fruit trees, picnic benches and a shipping container playhouse.

Ghent also had ten unique shipping **container playhouses** designed, mobile structures containing play elements. They occupy one parking space and are installed at locations where public space has become available as a result of the recently introduced circulation plan. In the summer of 2018, shipping



container playhouses also appeared in other parts of the city. Children are thus encouraged to play at different locations in Ghent. Each shipping container playhouse was designed differently. One container is perfect for climbing and crawling while another is ideal for hopping and jumping around.

You can also use the available space more efficiently by sharing. This is for

example the case with Coupurepark and Schoolpark in Sint-Amandsberg. During the day, both parks are used by the school; in the evening and in the weekend, they are made available to the local community.

Some youth associations also share facilities with the neighbourhood. For example, the scouts share their new accommodation in Baudelopark with

an art school (Stedelijk Kunstinstituut Gent). The school can use the accommodation on Mondays and Tuesdays, and the scouts can use the school's playground and some of the school's rooms during the weekend.



Streets tailored to the needs of children and young people



Play streets have existed in Ghent for many years. Every year, approximately 100 streets are temporarily transformed into play streets during the summer holidays. The success formula has meanwhile been extended. It is now also possible to apply for a play street during the Easter holidays and in the month of September. The play streets can also remain open one more hour, and it is possible to borrow play equipment from the Youth department.

The City of Ghent furthermore experiments with **school streets** and youth work streets. These streets are temporarily made traffic-free before and after the termination of the activities so that children and parents can go home swiftly and safely.

A first experiment with **living streets** was conducted in 2013. These are streets that are temporarily transformed into car-free or low-traffic streets so as to provide more living space. All residents have a say in the temporary redesignation of their street. A living street also increases contact between residents, thus reinforcing social cohesion in the neighbourhood. A total of 51 living streets have been established so far.



- WHY CHILDREN IN GHENT ARE INVALUABLE BOTH TODAY AND IN THE FUTURE

5 QUESTIONS TO

Griet De Wachter & Hafi Benettoumi

'We are tempted to say: youth is the future. However, they are also one of the city's most important groups in the present'

1

Why do you do what you do?

GRIET: I hold a law degree, and former classmates who run a law firm sometimes ask me: 'What the heck are you doing in that chair?' You should know I have always wanted to work with children and young people, and once you have embraced a job like this, it is really hard to let go: youth work can really make a difference in a person's life. It has also given me an entirely new outlook on Ghent. In a beautiful way, because children and young people have not received so much attention in Ghent ever before. On the downside, poverty remains unrelenting and things you no longer think possible are happening just around the corner. This motivates me even more to do this job. As coordinator I try to steer a team of young people who are all on the same page: we want to make young people stronger - and in particular the most vulnerable ones - in an urban context. For instance, we attempt to assist young people who remain under the radar in finding a job in an accessible way. We also organise training courses for newcomers and even teach them to ride a bicycle.

IDENTIKIT

Age: both 38
Job: Griet De Wachter is coordinator at Jes Gent and Hafi Benettoumi is HR officer at vzw Jong

HAFI: vzw Jong really starts from free time. Young people are free to come to us and spend the entire evening chatting, but if they want to practise sports, we will help them look into the possibilities. This can be in a club or closer to home, on neighbourhood squares or at the hotspots near Het Zuid. If they have other questions, for example with regard to work or well-being, we respond to this by organising things ourselves or by referring young people to organisations such as Jes. I'm also strongly convinced that you can make a difference in this manner. As I had been interested in youth work as from an early age, I decided to study social work. When there was a vacancy to assist young people in their search for a job, I did not hesitate for a second. Currently employed as HR officer, I ensure that vulnerable young people are given opportunities and I also support employees in their job.

2

What makes children and young people so important to the city?

HAFI: I always find it strange when people ask me why we should invest in children and young people. Don't we do so automatically? An entire system comes into action even before children are born: gynecologists, the Child and Family agency, etc. Children furthermore don't ask to be born, so we owe it to them to keep investing in them and offer them safety, freedom, security and learning opportunities. A child brought up in poverty is entitled to education, but what does that mean if it doesn't know where it will sleep or if it is too hungry to concentrate?

GRIET: We are tempted to say: youth is the future. However, they are also one of the city's most important groups in the present, and developments take place so quickly that only youth workers are able to respond to them. For instance, a current craze among young people is wearing a jacket indoors. However, if you inquire further, it appears that many only have one sweater. Keeping on their jackets prevents anyone from noticing that they wear the same clothes every day. At such moments I'm happy that my team has the reflex to discuss this. You can easily create problems by taking a middle-class perspective and telling them to take off their jackets.

HAFI: In general, people tend to talk too much about and too little with children and young people. If they're afraid of going to school by bike because there are roadworks in the street, I think this is equally important as adults who say they're afraid of going to a square because there are too many young people loitering over there..

3

What is the current situation in Ghent?

GRIET: I think the City of Ghent's pursuit of a child and youth-friendly city is a brave move as you know that people call you to account within this scope; it keeps you sharp as a city, whether it concerns mobility, education or childcare. They also take our work seriously, and substantial efforts are made to reserve spaces for vulnerable groups, for instance within the scope of camp registrations. At the same time, the city still demonstrates a general lack of flexibility in some situations. A child and youth-friendly one-stop shop will fail to meet its objectives if it is only open during regular office hours.

HAFI: I see very nice projects emerging. The square where I used to play consisted of concrete tiles and one tree; nowadays it is a green oasis with benches and a bicycle path. Only a few blocks away, parents still have to choose between turning on the heating

or turning on enough lights to allow the children to do their homework. This is still hard for me to accept in a child and youth-friendly city. Investments start from a good vision, from a willingness to improve the lives of as many children and young people as possible, but sometimes we still think too quickly that people should find their way to the facilities themselves.

GRIET: Importantly, if you ask children and young people for their opinion, they expect you to act on their ideas or they will feel cheated. We received support for a really great project where children were sent into the neighbourhood to take pictures of things they like and things they don't like. One of the things they told us is that they wanted to beautify the garbage cans in the area. Well... (sighs) The efforts we

have put into pimping a single garbage can: all to no avail. It seems like a detail, but we have noticed it many times: it takes ages to accomplish anything and people fear even the slightest bit of anarchy.

4

Do you have any tips that may be invaluable to other people?

HAFI: You have to keep on catering to the needs of young people and align your services with their reality in all possible ways. A stupid example: young people are sometimes afraid of using a space because it is too beautiful; in a manner of speaking, they may be afraid of making stains on white chairs.

GRIET: At the same time, I think it is not okay if you hold on rigorously to a culture of recycling and offer young people only worn-out furniture. It may sound materialistic, but they are also entitled to decent things. When we organise an activity, I like to give them real cola and a real Leo. They already get second and third-rate products anywhere else, and for a few additional euros you give them the feeling that they are worth it. Another youth work aspect I care deeply about is proximity, a warm welcome with a cup of coffee in a homely atmosphere. Everything you do has to show that they are welcome here. This is what society needs in my view.



5

What current and future challenges do you see?

GRIET: Even more attention should be paid to young people who occupy themselves with all kinds of things but are not a member of an organisation and do not reach out to us. I believe that this group of young people will increase steadily in the future as the digital revolution has made it possible to set up a project without leaving your home. We will also have to keep looking for a strategy on how to deal with refugees as a city and communicate this strategy clearly as we have noticed in our activities that the flow of refugees is not decreasing. With some effort, most of these young people manage to find a school relatively quickly, but they equally need to have access to a sufficiently wide range of activities at the weekend. We furthermore have to keep on investing in making them more aware of this range of activities.

HAFI: In Ghent, we have a tradition of social action, taking care of each other and defiance. This helps to get things moving for vulnerable groups.

GRIET: However, a bit more defiance would be great...

HAFI: Indeed! I'm sometimes jealous of the defiance of people living in Aalst. Just look at their carnival: they are not afraid of naming things. At the same

time, I like the atmosphere here: we are all inhabitants of Ghent. You don't have to put it in slogans or paint an overly rosy picture, but a lot is possible if that's the undertone with the people.



Introduction of 30 km/h zone and circulation plan



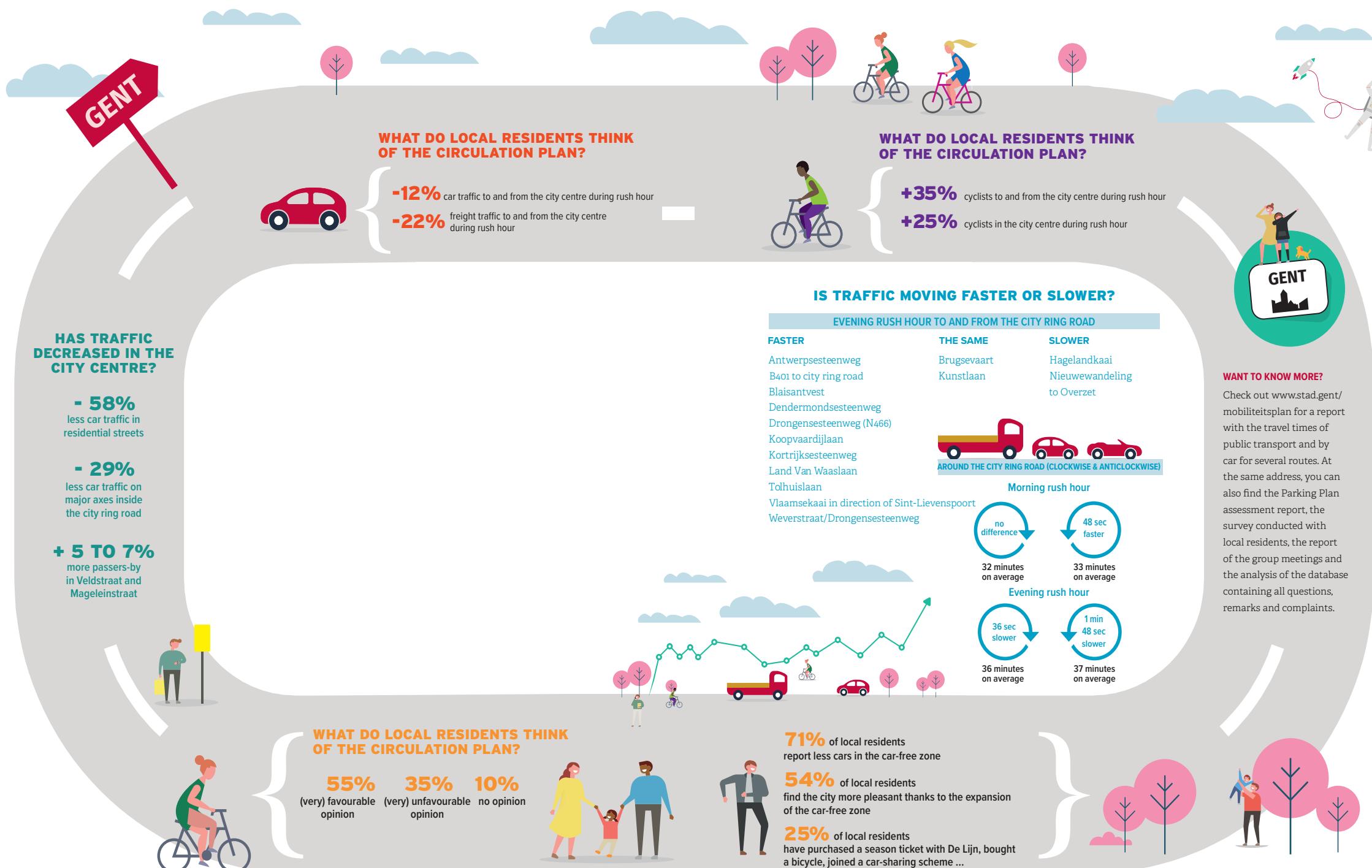
'Since the introduction of the circulation plan, cycling in the city centre has become much more pleasant. There is less motorised traffic, which makes it safer to cycle in the city with children.'

- EDWIN VAN DER BURGH, DAD OF TUUR (4 YEARS)

At the end of 2011, some 1,200 children took to the streets in Brugse Poort to demand more traffic safety in their neighbourhood. A lot of proposals with regard to traffic safety were also made during Thusis in 't Stadhuis, a citizen participation project for children. The circulation plan and the introduction of the 30 km/h zone fall within that scope.

3 April 2017 saw the commencement of the circulation plan, intended to increase the liveability and traffic safety in Ghent. One of the measures was the introduction of a 30 km/h

zone inside the city ring road and an expansion of the car-free zone. Since then, the number of traffic victims has decreased while the number of cyclists has increased by 25% (cyclists in the city centre during rush hour). More and more people make use of public transport (+28% in the evening rush hour), and car use has dropped by 12% (car traffic to and from the city centre during rush hour). All these measures contribute to the city's liveability and ensure that children can move around the city more safely.



Support for parents



Teachers and mediators get more questions related to well-being in their capacity as confidants at school. Where do I have to apply for child benefits? How do I make an appointment with a doctor? Can somebody help me find a rental property? Answering those questions takes specific knowledge and time.

The Public Social Welfare Centre (PSCW) consequently launched the '**Kinderen Eerst**' (Children First) project. Within this scope, a PSWC employee is available at school to answer questions

from parents related to well-being. This reduces the burden on teachers and mediators, enabling them to focus on their core tasks, and makes it easier for parents to seek assistance.

The concept was first tested out at primary school De Toverberg in 2015. Four other schools joined the project in 2016 (VIP-school, De Toren van Babel, VISO Gent and primary school Sint-Salvator) and an additional employee was recruited in school year 2017-2018, making it possible to expand the project to 14 primary schools and 8 secondary schools.

The aid workers who contribute to Kinderen Eerst primarily see a more efficient provision of services emerging. Less double work, less gaps in relief efforts and an ability to respond more quickly to changing needs: all this contributes to more focused relief efforts. The schools in turn have reported a 'mushroom effect'. As a family-based approach is used, spores spread to other families, making it easier for them to seek assistance. People are most enthusiastic about the collaboration itself. Consulting with different partners and exchanging information results in faster and more sustainable solutions.

Children's rights for all children and young people

EVA VANDEVIVERE

CHILD POVERTY OFFICER AT
PSWC GHENTUNIVERSITY
COLLEGE GHENT

At the end of 2014, the City of Ghent received **recognition as a child and youth-friendly city**, which is something to be proud of. Giving a voice to children and making the young generation feel welcome enables a city to remain young and dynamic. It also demonstrates that the City of Ghent sees children and young people as full citizens and has a strong belief in the capabilities of this generation. UNICEF defines a child-friendly city as a city committed to realising **the rights of children** and where the voices, needs, priorities and rights of children and young people are an integral part of public policies, programmes and decisions. The City of Ghent and the PSWC work together to guarantee these rights for all children, with the PSWC in Ghent acting as coordinator of the (child) poverty policy.

However, it is not easy to guarantee children's rights for all children in the city. Ghent is faced with major **child-poverty issues**. Approximately 9,000 children in Ghent live in financial poverty. The results are long-term and noticeable in various fields: in the right to basic care and assistance, leisure, education, family and participation. That's why one of the spearheads of the action plan for a child and youth-friendly city is explicitly aimed at children and young people in poverty: efforts are directed towards fighting poverty and providing development opportunities.

Within this spearhead, we want to make a difference for the individual child and their family at a local level. We have developed an integral and intersectoral **growth action plan** and work closely together with numerous partners in this regard. Efforts have been made to determine **joint actions** and **priorities**. We want to reduce poverty in families by enabling as many families as possible to pay only the minimum childcare fee and by adopting a proactive **rights-based approach**. In addition, we want to combat the negative effects of child poverty by paying attention to leisure, psychological well-being and well-being at school in our plan. We furthermore address the underlying dynamics and mechanisms of poverty.

'Kinderen eerst!' is an example of such a close collaboration across policy areas and is intended to detect families in poverty early and proactively. A PSWC employee is present at school and answers any questions parents may have with regard to well-being. This reaching-out approach makes it possible to detect previously unknown families and young people who require support from several services. The project serves as a bridge between the school, where the parent feels at ease and voices their needs, and the regular services. The basic principles are: accessibility, close collaboration between various services and organisations, and a

commitment to grant rights in an active manner and strengthen knowledge among all collaborating partners.

Both within the child and youth-friendly city and within the child poverty policy we want to take into account the voices of children and young people as much as possible. **'Thuis in 't Stadhuis'**, the City of Ghent's citizen participation project, inspired 4,297 children to come to the city hall and present no less than 1,200 proposals to make Ghent a better city. Within the Ghent PSWC, we furthermore conduct an annual survey among children who grow up in a vulnerable situation. The needs and desires related to the different children's rights are mapped, taken into account in the poverty policy and addressed throughout the city.

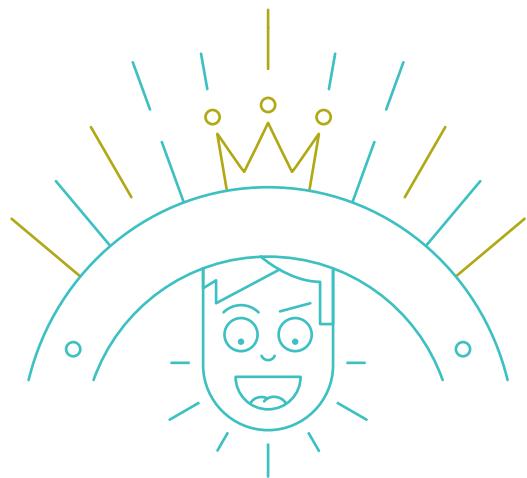
'Child and youth-friendly city is not just a label; it offers an extensive framework for countless collaborations'

Since the recognition of Ghent as a child and youth-friendly city, we have seen a huge **increase in child and youth-friendly initiatives**. Services find common ground within this common theme. It is not just a label; it offers an extensive framework for countless collaborations, such as 'Huis van het Kind'. 'OverKop-huis', a safe place where young people can simply meet, find a listening ear and make use of professional therapeutic support, furthermore opened its doors recently. We can only applaud these dynamics. However, it remains a challenge to ensure that initiatives for vulnerable children and young people are sufficiently accessible as well. Additional attention needs to be paid to this precarious group so that we as a city can guarantee that the rights of all children living in Ghent are protected.

Eva Vandevivere works for the Ghent PSWC's psychological division as child poverty officer.

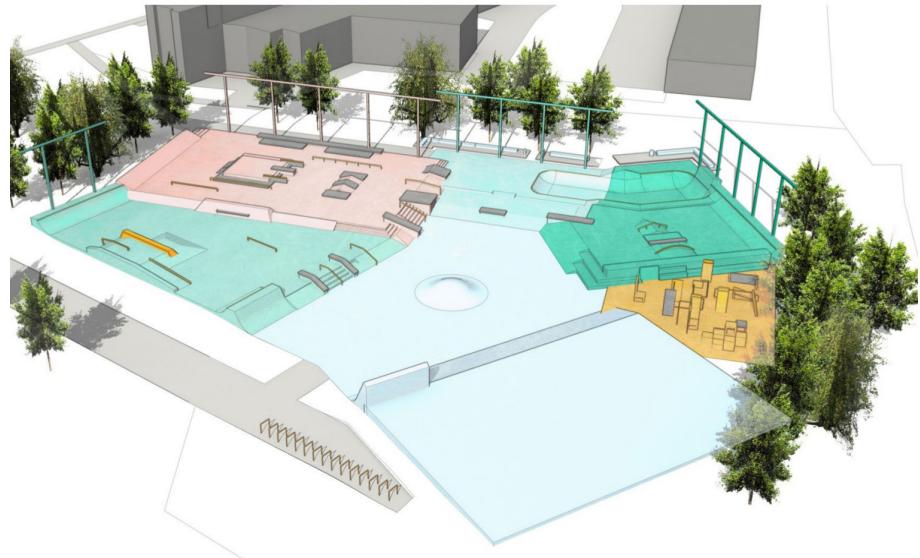
Wise heads on young shoulders

THE CITY AS A LABORATORY
FOR TEENAGERS AND YOUNGSTERS



Young people want spaces to go out and party, but that's not all: they also want space to develop themselves, to practise sports and to express their creativity. The city can thus become a real laboratory to them. Where can they go? And who will help them if they struggle with questions? Various projects cater to their needs and wishes.

Skatepark with ambition



The Ghent skaters finally saw their dream come true in 2019. A large skate park was developed at Blaarmeersen. And not just any skate park: the ambition was to build the best-equipped skate park in Belgium over a total surface area of 3,000 square metres. The skate park will consist of six different areas, each with its own unique obstacles. There will also be a zone for the youngest skaters. Ghent skaters were able to speak their mind without holding back and assist in the

design of the skate park by indicating what makes a good skate park in terms of features and possibilities. They were also invited to give their opinion on the preliminary design. Construction started in early 2019.



Sports in the neighbourhood

Everyone in Ghent should have the opportunity to practice sports or exercise. In the case of children and young people, it is particularly important they can do so in their own environment. The scale of sports infrastructure at a neighbourhood level can be quite small; just think of the small football pitches or the outdoor fitness park in the Rabot neighbourhood, which people use on a daily basis.



In addition, community sports halls were constructed in the Rabot and Oude Dokken neighbourhoods. The Rabot community sports hall opened its doors in the spring of 2019. Community sports workers are working with young residents of the neighbourhood so that they are optimally involved in the operation of the hall.



Expansion of mediators to secondary education

The City of Ghent has made use of mediators for primary schools since 1997. A trial project to launch mediators in secondary education started in February 2015. They play a vital role in increasing parental involvement and constitute the link between parents, students and the school team. This beneficial collaboration increases the chances of success and has a positive impact on a student's school career. In a first stage, the mediators will facilitate the transition between primary and secondary school in the first two years of secondary education.

There are currently 44 mediators in primary schools and 4 mediators in secondary schools.



Preventing students from dropping out of school

Too many young people leave school early without any degree. These early school leavers enter society and the labour market in a very vulnerable starting position, with negative consequences. It's not easy to come up with solutions for this phenomenon as it almost always concerns complicated individual cases. Onderwijscentrum Gent responded to this challenge by launching the 'Vroegtijdig Schoolverlaten' (Early school leaving) plan and 'Operatie Geslaagd' (Obtaining a degree) charter. The plan contains 9 ambitious goals and 30 specific actions to reduce early school leaving.

Forty secondary schools in Ghent signed the 'Operatie Geslaagd' charter, which lists six specific commitments to reduce early school leaving. Each school is for example expected to draw up a custom action plan to prevent students from dropping out of school and to appoint a coordinator who focuses on these problems. Onderwijscentrum Gent collects and analyses the figures, working together with several pilot schools to develop instruments to map early school leaving.

The 'Vroegtijdig Schoolverlaten' plan can be downloaded from the website www.onderwijscentrum.gent.



72

Young people helping young people

School spotters are young people aged between 18 and 26 who do not have a secondary degree. They make contact with school-going young people who play truant or loiter in public places. They offer them a listening ear and set off in search of solutions together if they have any questions or face any problems. School spotters can talk to students in a convincing manner and prevent them from making mistakes they may have made themselves. They get a first enriching work experience and follow a training programme that results in a degree one day a week. There are seven school spotters in Ghent.

'The school spotter project has enabled me to study Socio-Cultural Work and to find a great job. To do so, I had to pass an entry exam for people without a secondary degree. When I finish my school spotter programme, I will have not only a secondary degree but also a higher degree. In the future, I would like to use my own experiences to help people who find themselves in a difficult situation. This would not have been possible without my job as a school spotter'

- ANONYMOUS TESTIMONY OF A SCHOOL SPOTTER IN GHENT



- WHY CHILDREN IN GHENT ARE INVALUABLE BOTH TODAY AND IN THE FUTURE -

5 QUESTIONS TO

Chems-Eddine El Backani & Mehmet San

'Working together on a specific project in the city: an amazing experience'

1

Why do you do what you do?

CHEMS-EDDINE: We wanted to do something with our class for newcomers in Ghent. We had seen in the news that there are a lot of young refugees from Syria as well as from other countries. We wanted to make them feel welcome here, and we used a map to show them the places they can go to if they need something: to learn the language, to obtain a degree or to relax and meet other young people.

MEHMET: We installed a mobile information office near Het Zuid that featured an interactive map which showed you where you can play football, engage in cultural activities, chill out, etc. To make that map, we received practical lessons and Dutch lessons at the same time, which was really cool. We furthermore worked together with LUCA School of Arts, where they made a sculpture for us, as well as with students who follow a different course of study at the school. The collaboration was amazing.

CHEMS-EDDINE: The fun thing is that you do not have to sit in class all the time. You are using your hands to work on a specific project. And you learn to work together, you resolve problems. Which problems? (laughs) Electrical problems, but it's too complicated to explain. It

IDENTIKIT

Age: both 17

Position: cooling and heating techniques students in their fifth year of secondary school at Hoger Technisch Instituut Sint-Antonius. Together with their class, they won the 'Jong & Wijs Prijs' award for their 'Welkom in Gent' project. Heleen Rijckaert is the Dutch teacher who supervised the project.

was pretty difficult to put everything together and to make sure it would work, but it felt good to actually do something useful. In the beginning, we still suffered from a lack of motivation. This was because we had failed utterly in setting up a project the year before.

HEELEN: (laughing) I had already forgotten about that. We really had to win the students over in the beginning. However, we received a lot of support from the city. We wanted to make a map that was really useful, and the Youth department helped us considerably in that regard. They also made it possible to distribute the map on paper afterwards. What struck me most was how young people were challenged to discover their talents and to do





things they did not usually do, such as soldering, even though there was some resistance from time to time.

CHEMS-EDDINE: There was some resistance, in particular in the beginning, but we gradually realised that we could really achieve something, and that was a big motivation factor. When the project was presented at Het Zuid, I even addressed the audience, which was a real novelty for me.

'It helps when teachers motivate you when something does not work and remind you of what went well.'

2

What makes children and young people so important to the city?

MEHMET: They are the future, and they also liven up the streets, as they leave their house more frequently than adults as far as I know. If you took them away, the streets would be empty.

CHEMS-EDDINE: That's why it's so important for a city to have places where young people can relax. Parks, for example, are very important to us. They enable you to connect with nature, relax, have a chat, play some football, have something to eat. Sports clubs always have to be there as well...

3

What is the current situation in Ghent?

MEHMET: Actually I do not really miss anything in Ghent; we have plenty of options over here. There are also a lot of young people from outside the city who come here to bowl or to swim as they cannot do these activities where they live. One of the teachers at school started a boxing club, and many of us like to go there, as this club is a place where you can meet other people. Some boxers have even become real role models to us, people we can look up to.

CHEMS-EDDINE: When we were working on our project, we really felt how closely involved the City of Ghent was. They really helped us a lot, and they attended meetings frequently. This creates the impression that the City of Ghent is willing to answer any questions you may have. It was really important to us that the executive councillor for youth visited the school and attended the opening. 'It helps when teachers motivate you when something does not work and remind you of what went well.'

MEHMET: After the project had been completed, we were suddenly told that we had been nominated for the award 'Jong & Wijs Prijs'. And then we won! That was fantastic; not only for the school, but obviously also for us. We thought it was an honour.

HEELEN: We have invested the € 750 cash prize into a new joint project with the third and fourth grades.

4

Do you have any tips that may be invaluable to other people?

MEHMET: Above all, you have to be really motivated for such a project as it takes a lot of a class and you have to be able to complete it. At the same time, it's fantastic to be able to do something like this. It has also changed the class atmosphere; it really has strengthened the bond between us.

CHEMS-EDDINE: It helps when teachers motivate you when something does not work and remind you of what went well. We all worked a lot after school hours, including on Wednesday afternoon, as we enjoyed it so much. Some students worked on the electrical components of the installation until ten o'clock in the evening.

HEELEN: I think it was important to them that they were given a certain amount of responsibility and were allowed to find their role within the group. We also encouraged them to push back their limits without overburdening them.

5

What current and future challenges do you see?

HEELEN: We wanted to offer young people an innovative form of education

through the project, and it would be a good thing if the City of Ghent continues to support this kind of projects. The young people arrived here in the morning and often did not know yet what the day would have in store for them. It was not simply going to school. They worked on the electrical components, wrote texts, consulted with each other and other classes, and drew up a press file. What they did, learning in a real context, was actually a very good experience.

MEHMET: I don't think a lot needs to change in Ghent. The city can stay as it is. I really like living here, and if there's another such project, they can always call me. I might even start a youth movement somewhere in the future so that I can encourage young people to get out more. They spend most of their time indoors playing video games and on their phones, while I think it is also important to be active in a city. But for the rest... I've grown up here, I wouldn't like to leave Ghent. Only the low-emission zone bothers me a bit.

CHEMS-EDDINE: Me too (*laughs*). I like living here, but I may not stay in the city centre because of the low-emission zone.



Young people about Ghent



What do young people feel strongly about? How would they shape or change the city if it was up to them? The Youth department surveyed nearly 500 students via **Mayor@yourtown**. They were asked specific questions on what their ideal meeting place looks like on the inside and how they would decorate an outdoor space. We also asked them about the perfect holiday job and inquired what they knew about looking for a job. There were also questions with regard to mobility, traffic safety and their well-being at school. Last but not least, they were invited to develop ideas to turn Ghent into a warmer and even more child and youth-friendly city that pays attention to the well-being of every citizen.

This survey is part of a broader study, **Expeditie 2025**, in which the Youth department has asked children, young people, students, families and youth workers about topics that are important to them. The Youth department has bundled the results and insights and will present them to the future city council so that they can put them to good use. This ensures that the voices of children, young people and students are sufficiently heard.

The complete report on Mayor@yourtown and Expeditie 25 can be downloaded from www.jongenwijs.gent/expeditie-2025.

Submitting petitions

The City of Ghent attaches great importance to citizen participation, including for children and young people. Just think of Thuis in't Stadhuis, the youth council, Expeditie 2025 and the youth section. It is now also possible to **petition the local authorities**. All people aged 10 and above can submit a petition either individually or collectively. A petition is used to ask the authorities to do something or to refrain from doing something. It is an instrument to make sure you are heard and to present a proposal to the local authorities.

The Youth department helps and assists all young people who want to submit a petition. Children may even get the opportunity to explain their proposal in more detail to the municipal executive or the city council.



Voting rights as from the age of 16

80

A first for Flanders: young people in Ghent were able to cast their vote during the 2018 municipal elections as from the age of 16. The results were not officially taken into account for the municipal elections as this is not allowed from a legal point of view. It is nevertheless an opportunity for young people to be heard and to make clear what troubles them. The Ghent authorities have entered into a commitment to take into account the needs and preferences of young people.

They receive information about the elections, the programme of every political party and the right way to vote via their schools and youth associations. All young people furthermore receive a personal invitation letter which they can use to cast their vote in a safe and anonymous manner.



Team Krook

A central element in the design of the new library was that it had to provide sufficient space for children and young people. That's why there is a separate section for young people, an audience that traditionally has less interest in

libraries. But what should you include in the collection? And what should a library for young people look like? What expectations do young people actually have about libraries?





De Krook relinquished control and asked young ambassadors (aged 12 to 18) to help shape the library for young people. Apart from books, comics and graphic novels, it offers opportunities to play video games, watch a movie together, experiment, listen to music, meet with friends and participate in workshops. The new library for young people is a huge success. Many students have also found their way to the new library.

The number of borrowed items has increased by approximately 10% overall, but the number of items borrowed by children and young people has increased by no less than 40%. That's hopeful. A lot of research went into the new library: we wanted to find out young people's expectations about libraries and have taken these expectations into account. This helps ensure that they like being here. And keep coming' - KRIST BIEBAUW, MANAGER AT BIBLIOTHEEK GENT



New designation of Minus One

Originally conceived as an underground party hall, Minus One was given a makeover in 2016 and received additional subsidies, enabling youth workers to support young people with creative ideas at the location. Nowadays a creative lab and a cultural centre for young people, Minus One combines diversity, creativity, entrepreneurship and from time to time a wild party.

On Tuesdays, Minus One opens its doors to young people who want to present an idea. On Thursdays, young people meet and exchange ideas during **PLUSMINUS**, an exploratory platform for creative minds. It is an experiment that revolves around shared use of space and different ways of cooperation and support, and guarantees a personal approach to any idea. On other days, Minus One opens its doors to support the organisation of various activities and celebrations.

Interested in more?
Go to www.minus-one.be.

New designation of Minus One

'Ghent is packed with young, creative organisations looking for a location to do their thing. Plek offers them the space they need. They can use the building as they see fit for four weeks. There is a freely accessible presentation every Friday evening'

— TIMON VAN DE VOORDE, ORGANISER AT YOUTH CENTRE PLEK



If you think of a youth centre as a musty building with lukewarm drinks and a sorry counter, you are wrong. Those party-loving youth centres still exist, which is a good thing, but numerous new concepts have meanwhile emerged. The City of Ghent actively

supports them and helps young people who want to give their youth centre a personal touch.

Youth centre Asgaard for example opened its doors at the end of 2017. The young people of youth centre

Asgaard love headbanging and metal but failed to find what they were looking for in Ghent. That's why they want to focus on this subgenre in their own youth centre.

Plek is a youth centre in the heart of the city that makes room available.

A starting band, promising young artists, a movie collective or other associations can make use of the infrastructure. A different youth collective is given free rein to do its thing every month. This means that not a single month is the same and there is always something else to experience.

Another novelty is **youth centre Wolters**. There is a small park in Wolterslaan, but when the weather was bad, the local youngsters did not really have anywhere else to go. Ali, Achraf and Derek wanted to do something about that themselves by setting up a local youth centre. They presented their idea to the Youth department, and their youth centre opened its doors in 2017.



'Ghent is packed with young, creative organisations looking for a location to do their thing. Plek offers them the space they need. They can use the building as they see fit for four weeks. There is a freely accessible presentation every Friday evening'

— TIMON VAN DE VOORDE,
ORGANISER AT YOUTH CENTRE PLEK

Ghent boasts a total of thirteen youth centres. More info is available at stad.gent/jongeren/jeugdhuizen.

Young people who have a suggestion can contact the Youth department at jeugddienst@stad.gent or +32 (0)9 269 81 10.



Temporary designation

Ghent focuses strongly on temporary designation of spaces and buildings. Places awaiting a new designation are used to offer local organisations and young people temporary accommodations where they can do their thing. For instance, this enabled **DOK** to develop into a creative working space in the area where the new Oude Dokken neighbourhood will emerge.

NEST moved into the old city library at Het Zuid in June 2017. These buildings are currently being converted into offices for the city services, but at the time the old library was a hotspot that accommodated over 70 initiators. Each floor was given a unique interpretation on the basis of collaboration between plenty of young Ghent residents and organisations. You could have a drink and go to a concert. Young entrepreneurs could present their products to the public at large, and there were experts who provided coaching and advice on

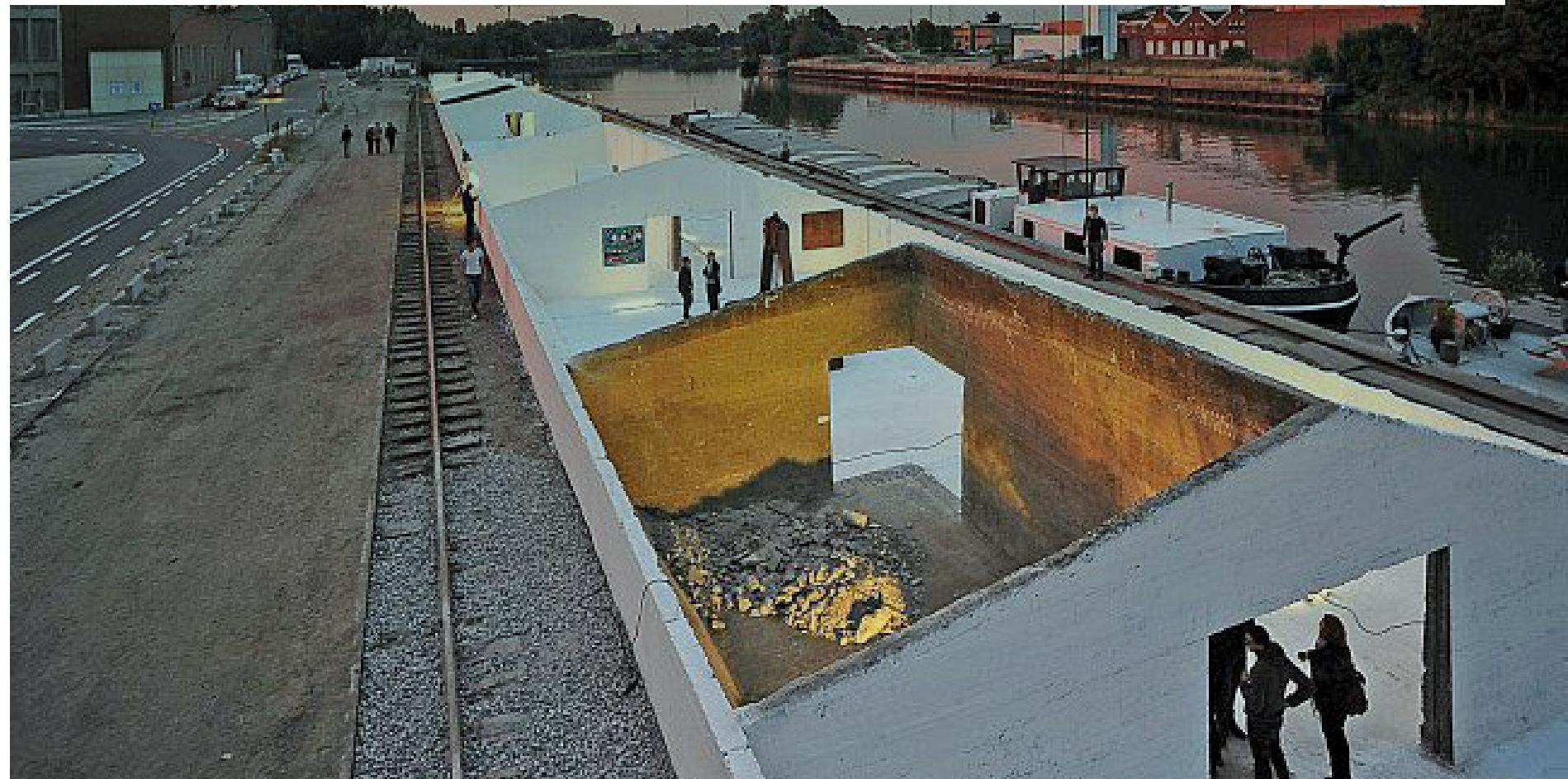


a wide range of topics. The City of Ghent made sure that a youth worker reached out to the young people. Additionally, the site featured a music studio, a rehearsal floor, a location for pop-up restaurants and meeting rooms. On the fifth floor you even had a silence room, where the Flemish Autism Association wanted to give everyone the opportunity to enjoy a moment of rest.

The old gravel bins were transformed into an original meeting place that is freely accessible to all. Numerous activities and events take place at the location, including theatre performances, exhibitions, sports games, picnics, flea markets and concerts. The immediate vicinity is also home to 019. This is an exhibition, concert and working space run by young artists.

Thanks to the temporary designation concept, the **Kompass Klub** was able to move into an old industrial warehouse and develop into the favourite nightlife venue for young partygoers.

Go to www.stad.gent/trefwoord/tijdelijke-invulling for an overview of all projects.

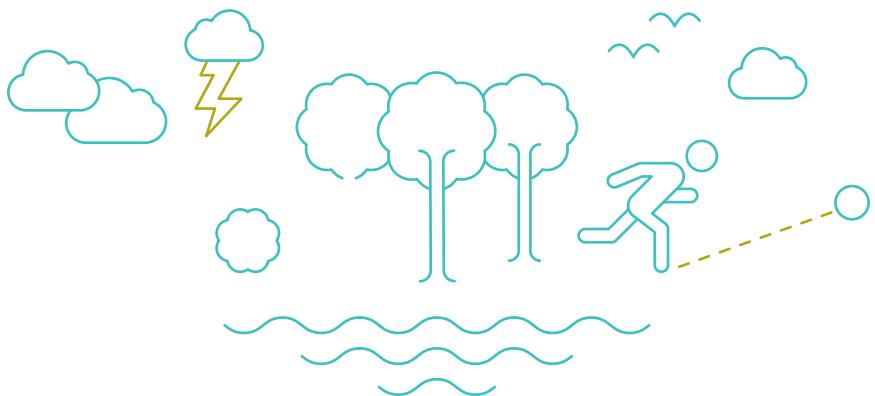


All aboard

ADDITIONAL ATTENTION TO VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE



Like other cities, Ghent is also confronted with vulnerable young people, and we do not leave them to their own devices. To better align youth welfare work to the needs of socially vulnerable children and young people, the Youth department has conducted interviews with over 20 experts and youth workers. The local authorities and the partners in the field will use this information to further increase the impact of youth welfare work in Ghent.



- WHY CHILDREN IN GHENT ARE INVALUABLE BOTH TODAY AND IN THE FUTURE

5 QUESTIONS TO

Mohammed Benhaddou

Role models and key figures in neighbourhoods are a city's principal capital.

1

Why do you do what you do?

MOHAMED: I grew up in the Brugse Poort neighbourhood, and I am aware of the difficulty of having multiple identities, often feeling misunderstood and unwelcome. I witnessed the same struggle among the younger generations. At times, I saw kids loitering for hours while they should have been at school. They sometimes became involved in criminality, addicted to drugs or susceptible to radicalisation. I saw a great deal of frustration and a huge need for recognition, but they hid these feelings by turning their back on society. In a neighbourhood like this, people face problems such as social deprivation, lack of affordable housing and inadequate access to education. Children are often – unconsciously – victims of this situation and if these problems are not addressed, they risk becoming part of the problem themselves later in life. With vzw Averroes, I want to help them change their outlook on life. One day a week, I provide counselling as a volunteer, but we also focus on sports, well-being and culture. We provide educational support as well as drug and radicalisation prevention interventions, but always with a view to strengthening young people's identity. Otherwise, we would merely be treating the symptoms. I also attach great importance to adopting a holistic approach: we

IDENTIKIT

Age: 39

Job: chairman of vzw Averroes

cannot invest in young people without paying attention to their environment and the people around them. If we put up posters raising awareness about 'identity development in young people', we may unintentionally give them the impression that they are the problem. This needs to be balanced at least by engaging with their parents, educators and elders. They also need to be given space to show their uncertainty, so that we create a context in which youngsters can find key figures.

2

What makes children and young people so important to the city?

MOHAMED: In the tenth century, philosopher Al-Farabi wrote in *The Virtuous City* that that a good city brings out the best in people.

If there is one group that is susceptible to this, it's young people: they do not yet feel caught between their ideals and

reality. The question is not just what we can do for young people, but also what they already have to offer to us. Young people send out so many signals, they constantly appeal to our sense of justice, yet we do not take them seriously enough. We are too much inclined to provide youngsters with answers. But then we are stuck in the certainties of adults. It is better to say: 'I'm not sure, maybe we could look for an answer together?' We therefore have to align the range of services in a city with what they actually need and should not expect them to adjust themselves to what we have to offer. However, a city should provide the structures that enable them to surpass themselves. If they spend about eight hours a day sleeping and another eight hours at school, what should they do with the remaining eight hours? They should use that time to develop their creativity, preferably in an informal manner, so that they do not get the feeling they must perform.

3

What is the current situation in Ghent?

MOHAMED: The City of Ghent has invested in green play areas over the last few years. As such this is wonderful, since nature never judges anyone. At the same time, I think: you can create wonderful playgrounds, but if someone is at odds with themselves and feels unwelcome, this initiative will have no effect or

even be counterproductive. Sometimes youngsters tell us: 'Who says I feel like playing?' So the first question we need to ask ourselves is: how can we give youngsters the feeling they are welcome in the city, and give them the mental space to find joy in playing again. To do that, we need to break down the barriers between youth work, housing, employment, education, etc. This is a shared and serious responsibility: young people play a leverage role in making a better future possible. I have also noticed that we treat young people more professionally nowadays. We come from a model that was quite chaotic. When I was still a youth worker, I sometimes slept in the youth centre and kept a light on in the hallway. Youngsters who passed by at 2 a.m. and needed to have a chat were welcome. That was an extreme situation and I could not keep it up. But nowadays, I all too often hear youngsters say that their youth centre is closed. Maybe the pendulum has now swung towards an overly bureaucratic model, and we should look for a compromise. What I appreciate about the situation in Ghent is that youth work is on the agenda and that there is openness to listening to questions. I think the City of Ghent now very quickly takes up initiatives that are meaningful to young people. But it remains ambiguous for youngsters. They are very critical and therefore ask: why does this organisation receive so much money, what is their target group, what do they do for us, why are they closed over the weekend?

4

Do you have any tips that may be invaluable to other people?

MOHAMED: You sometimes have to find the right connection. If we notice that local youngsters are fascinated by boxing and have professional boxers as role models, we will take advantage of this fact. By teaching them how to box yet also by thinking about what we want to achieve: our objective should not be to train good fighters, but rather to give young people more self-confidence and teach them the rules of the game. And for some youngsters boxing is not ideal because they get carried away: this is also something we should take into account. What matters is that you find something that appeals to them and increases their well-being, whether it is dancing, CrossFit training or football. I would like to develop this further in the future. I'm talking about yoga, body psychotherapy, eastern methods that train the body but also have a direct effect on the mind.

5

What current and future challenges do you see?

MOHAMED: The city is diverse, and it remains challenging to deal with this diversity. I'm afraid that researchers

are often lacking practical experience and do not really test whether their theories work in reality. To address radicalisation, for instance, you can develop theoretical models, but if you do not test them in practice, you will miss your mark. As soon as you try to control the dynamic in a neighbourhood, people will turn their backs on you. I am convinced that civil society organisations, role models and key figures in neighbourhoods are a city's real wealth. There are plenty of people who do a lot for youngsters in an informal manner, between the lines, and we have to make sure they don't give up. This means that local authorities should acknowledge the important role they play. For example, if a meeting about neighbourhood policy is organised on Monday morning and cannot be rescheduled to the evening, this is a missed opportunity: the volunteers have a regular job to do during the daytime. We rely on volunteers, who sometimes dedicate themselves to youngsters until deep into the night. It's great that people take up this commitment; they do so out of concern for a large group of youngsters who continue to be overlooked. In fact, my ultimate dream would be to see that organisations such as ours are no longer needed in the future.

Additional support

The City already supports numerous **organisations dedicated to supporting vulnerable young people**: vzw Jong, Habbekrats, Jong Gent in Actie, etc. Over the years, these organisations have relied on additional support to better address the youth's needs. For instance, JES has received a structural subsidy to assist newcomers and refugees who do not speak Dutch in their search for a nice hobby, a student job or a position as a youth leader.

The Flemish Government has deployed additional resources within the scope of the current **refugee problem**. The City of Ghent has invested part of these resources (€ 48,000) in youth welfare work so as to respond to the increased inflow of recognised refugees, persons with subsidiary protection status and intra-European migrants as well as increasing child poverty.

The local authorities have also invested in **mobile youth workers**, who are not stationed at a fixed location but actively look for children and youths in a neighbourhood's streets and squares.

The operating resources of vzw Habbekrats, which is dedicated to supporting vulnerable youngsters in Ghent, have also been increased by € 30,000 a year.



Unconventional youth work

Jong Gent in Actie is an unconventional youth-work initiative by three Ghent poverty-relief organisations for youths between 14 and 26 years of age. They are provided with a place where they feel at home and where they can tell their story and ask their questions. The association also organises several fun activities. It assists young people who are looking for appropriate help and raises the issues of poverty and social exclusion with policymakers.

Jong Gent in Actie has been recognised as a youth association and has received structural support from the local authorities and PSWC since 2015.



Extra investment in IEM-jongeren



In December 2015, the **IEM-jongeren Project** started in Ghent with the aim of providing integrated guidance to youngsters with an intra-European migration background. The project ensures intensive and preventive collaboration between youth workers and assistance providers on the one hand and the police and judicial authorities on the other hand.

The City of Ghent has made an extra investment in counselling. Several days a week, the counsellors of vzw Jong maintain intensive contact with 103 young people and their families. A lot of these youths have withdrawn from society. Thanks to intensive counselling, they discover their interests (such as football, music or camping) as well as

their skills (such as woodworking or welding). The counsellors also inform them about the activities organised by vzw Jong and introduce them to vzw aPart so as to activate them in the labour market.

Thanks to intensive monitoring and counselling, the majority of youngsters known by the police for having committed criminal offences or caused nuisance do not reoffend afterwards.



**EMPLOYMENT DEPARTMENT,
CITY OF GHENT**

The challenges of the first steps in the labour market



Youth unemployment is especially high in large cities with a higher concentration of social deprivation. Although Ghent is not comparable to Brussels, where about half of all young people are unemployed, it does not fare particularly well with an **unemployment rate of 24%** (2017). **Youngsters without a degree** face difficulties finding a job, as the number of high-skilled jobs is growing in Ghent. However, some people with a bachelor's or master's degree cannot find suitable work either, e.g. because their diploma is not sought after in the labour market.

Through **projects and partnerships**, we try to provide assistance to groups who have a hard time finding employment. For many years, the focus has been on young people who are **not in employment, education or training (NEET)** and have not made any progress in their career. These are vulnerable youngsters who often have had negative experiences and get very few opportunities in life. They drop out, are tired of the system, are difficult to reach and have few prospects.

Experience has shown that, by adopting the right approach, we can help this group find a better connection to the labour market. You need to seek them out on their own turf and provide them with **personalised guidance**, at their own pace. Establishing connection and trust is a precondition for achieving any results.

Voluntary participation is another crucial factor for success. The counselling is aimed at finding employment, but attention is paid to the person as such and the broader well-being of the youngster. After all, employment is closely connected with all these factors, certainly in case of a vulnerable target group. In the context of counselling, we need to be satisfied with small steps forward. Success remains variable and progress can be slow with ups and downs. **A continuous effort** is therefore required, which will only bear fruit in the long term.

We try to focus on cooperation between **youth work, the welfare services and educators** in order to provide these young people with adequate support. A few months ago, **the Take Off organisation**, which has been operational since 2014, was therefore expanded to a wider partnership framework of organisations aimed at this target group in the Ghent area, namely youth organisations vzw Jong and JES, De Stap and Compaan. They provide street-based counselling and networking services to young people who are NEET. A total of about 200 youths were assisted in this manner until the end of 2018. **The Werkinleving project** is aimed at low-skilled young people who have less difficulty finding their way to the regular services such as VDAB (Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training). Youngsters are supported in their first steps in the labour market through orientation (who am I, what skills do I have, what do I want?), application training and work placements.

Co-Searching is intended for those who require less help, but still have some difficulty finding a suitable job. It enables people to contact each other so as to exchange advice on the search for a job. Jobseekers often have developed a great deal of know-how over the years which they can share. Thanks to the sessions, they can reflect on what works and what doesn't, and they feel less alone in their search. Two years ago, Co-Searching started as a trial project supported by the City of Ghent. It is now firmly established and is subsidised by VDAB.

'The needs are great and we can only address youth unemployment through a personalised approach'

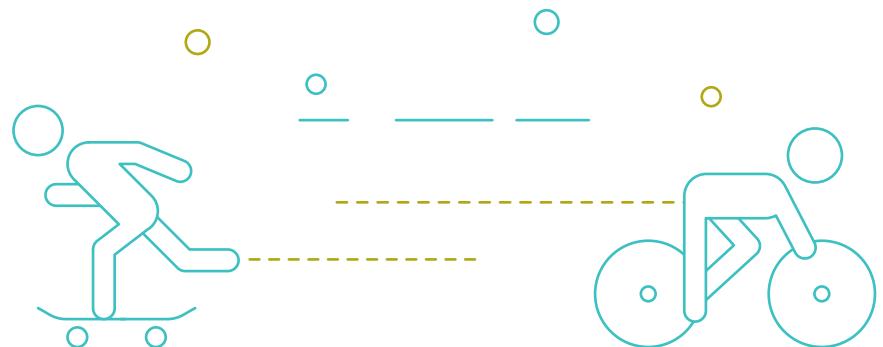
What is new is **the deployment of mentoring volunteers**. The search for work can be facilitated by duos of (older) mentors and (young) jobseekers, for instance young people with a migration background. This type of volunteer initiatives creates a new dynamic and additional capacity. In addition, a lot is done to prepare young people who are still at school for their entry into the labour market. And there is also the regular service provided by VDAB...

We are pleased with this wide range of initiatives as the needs are great and we can only address youth unemployment through a personalised approach. The diversity of young people requires a **diverse range of support services**. Nevertheless, an increasing number of youngsters still slip through the net or are faced with a long and difficult search for employment. Yet these projects offer a lot of youths hope for a better future. It is not always the hard skills or know-how that stand in the way of finding a job, but often the enabling conditions are not in place (childcare, mobility, etc.) or motivation is lacking. Tackling these issues can make a big difference. Efforts by policymakers (local financing in combination with Flemish and European funding) will also continue to be required in the coming years to maintain a diverse range of services and provide space for innovative projects, so that every young person finds their place in society.

Employment Department, City of Ghent

Breaking fresh ground

NEW FORMS OF YOUTH WORK



The way in which young people associate is changing. That's why the City of Ghent is focusing on new forms of youth work and continues to provide additional support to existing youth-work initiatives. After all, the needs are great in an urban context.

Other working methods

Alles Kan is an individual project subsidy for young people between 14 and 30 years of age who have a wild idea. Projects that meet the conditions can receive up to € 3000 in financial support. The budget for Alles Kan has more than doubled during this term.

The subsidy for **experimental youth work** was introduced in 2018. Through this subsidy, the City of Ghent aims to support young people who organise several easily accessible youth activities. Youngsters who have a good idea for an initiative for and by young people can receive up to € 600. When their idea materialises further, they can submit an application for recognition as a youth-work initiative and thus receive additional support and subsidies. This way, the City of Ghent supports new forms of youth work adopting a bottom-up approach.

If you have a good idea, take a look on the website stad.gent/jeugdwerk.

New needs



In early 2018, the Youth department organised round-table discussions with youth-work experts so as to modernise the services provided by the department and adapt them to the broader needs and new forms of youth work.

The Youth department has noticed that the needs of youth work are changing, especially in an urban context, and that some aspects of the current youth-work offer no longer correspond to the traditional description which is still used for the distribution of subsidies.



Support for Ghent youth work

It goes without saying that the current youth-work offer can also rely on sufficient support. The basic amount received by youth associations has been increased during this term, youth movements obtain higher subsidies if they invest in fireproof and high-quality youth centres and the budget for the training of young people and youth workers has been raised.

In total, € 2.3 million of **investment subsidies** have been granted to about 40 youth associations, which have used these funds to renovate their building, to have a new building constructed or to purchase a new building. As a result, huge steps forward have been taken to make youth centres fireproof.



With the support of professionals Full throttle

Youth movements working in an urban context are often faced with different challenges compared to those in rural areas. That's why the City of Ghent has invested in **professional support** for the various youth movements (Scouts en Gidsen Vlaanderen, Chiro, FOS Open Scouting and KSA). Our professionals provide assistance to youth movements in several fields, including accessibility. The Ghent playgrounds and youth centres can count on this professional support as well.



The City has also invested in **new youth centers** itself. During this term, no less than € 6.5 million has been invested in the City of Ghent's and Sogent's youth facilities, for example in the construction of the state-of-the-art multifunctional hall De Zulle in Wondelgem. The completion of this hall concludes the construction of five multifunctional party halls spread across the whole Ghent area. The building also accommodates FOS De Tortels and Jeugdhuis Klub 32.

During this term, the Youth department has also focused strongly on the **shared use of youth centres** and the creation of new youth facilities by

repurposing temporarily vacant sites. Within this scope, several youth centres have been given a new life (e.g. Lousbergsgebouw, Fluweel, Kiekenstraat ...) and the temporary repurposing of the Oude Dokken site (Nieuwland, 019, BIY) and the Brandweerpost site in Gentbrugge has facilitated experiments and new initiatives.



Ghent youth work is at full throttle. There are 146 recognised youth-work initiatives, including 58 youth movements. To assist them in their search for leaders, the City of Ghent launched a remarkable recruitment campaign under the name **#ikgeefleidingingent**.

This hashtag was used in various media channels and aims to make young people enthusiastic about leadership in one of Ghent's many youth movements. At the same time, it gives youngsters who are already active as leaders the opportunity to share their commitment. Jonas Geirnaert, Bert Verbeke and Mich Walschaerts used to be active in a Ghent youth movement and supported this action by recording a video.

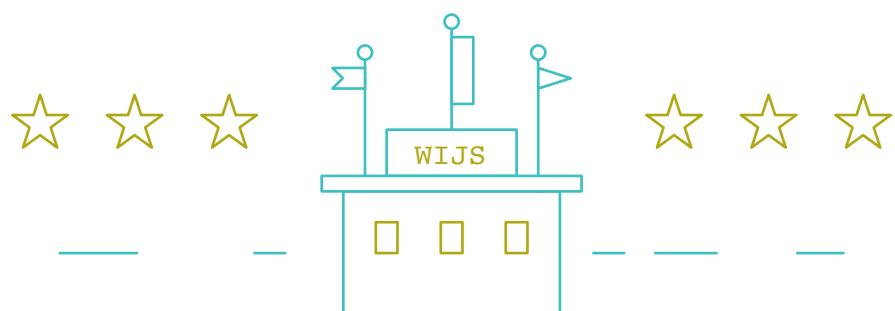
You can find these videos on the YouTube channel of the Ghent Youth department.

Getting a room

A LIVELY AND LIVEABLE STUDENT CITY



With 74,000 students, Ghent is one of the most important student cities in Belgium. This large student population contributes to the city's dynamic character. Many companies are active in Ghent thanks to the presence of sufficient numbers of high-skilled staff, and the academic world has given rise to countless spin-offs and research centres. The city's cultural life is boosted as well. However, being a student creates some challenges as well.



Quality label for student accommodations



A lot of students rent lodgings in Ghent. In order to monitor quality, Ghent has started to screen all student accommodations proactively, checking the housing quality and safety. Lodgings that meet the criteria receive a certificate of conformity and a quality label. A green label indicates that the accommodation fully complies with the rules. A blue quality label indicates that there is room for improvement. If the landlord fails to make the necessary improvements, the City of Ghent may

take steps to declare the building unfit for habitation.

Since the summer of 2018, the quality labels have been published on the Kot@Gent website www.kot.gent.be

A good neighbour

Research has shown that students and local residents have little contact with each other. Under the motto 'A good neighbour is better than a distant friend', the City of Ghent came up with the initiative '**Game of Ghenteneers**'.

It invites students and local residents to join efforts to deal successfully with 2 challenges. This way, they can get to know one another better, strike up a conversation or help each other with little things.





Perhaps students can borrow a ladder from their neighbours or the student next door is the perfect babysitter. All local residents and students receive a window poster that says: 'A Ghenteneer lives here'. This window poster enables both local residents and students to make it known that they want to compete for the title.



Student survey

In 2017, the local authorities launched a student survey concerning 9 topics. Over 2,600 students completed the questionnaire, a sufficient number for a representative sample. The students answered questions about mobility, accommodation, their places of work, their participation in sports and culture, their feeling of safety and well-being, and how they could make Ghent a better place to live in.

A summary and the complete survey report are available at www.stad.gent/studenten.



For young entrepreneurs



Ghent has a great many young entrepreneurs. The City of Ghent has developed the **Gentrepreneur** project so as to make life a bit easier for them. This project provides youngsters and students with workshops and information sessions regarding entrepreneurship and enterprise, free expert advice, a network of enterprising young people and coaches who help them with their business and their career choices.

You can find all relevant information on the website www.gentrepreneur.gent.

- WHY CHILDREN IN GHENT ARE INVALUABLE BOTH TODAY AND IN THE FUTURE -

5 QUESTIONS TO

Seppe De Pauw

'There is no such thing as the perfect youth-friendly city. It must constantly change, because there should always be room for new initiatives'

1

Why do you do what you do?

SEPPE: I have always liked taking charge: I may not constantly be the loudest voice in the room, but if all the other members of a group agree, I am the one who still has some questions. Two years ago, I was involved in the debate about the final attainment levels at the Flemish Student Council. On that occasion, I had to convince young people in my region to voice their opinion about good education. That was a hugely positive experience. Afterwards, I contributed to a farewell event for the old library: we came up with a laser game as well as an accompanying story and riddles to make youngsters realise that you can do more in a library than just borrow books. Once you've been involved in one project, taking part in other projects comes naturally. You get to know other youngsters who make a commitment and, as a result, you are more inclined to take the step to something new. Through the Flemish Student Council, I came into contact with someone from Brussels who had studied in Bolivia for a year and who became a close friend. She in turn had met someone there who now studies here. The three of us created BeBo, a new project concerning spoken word and dance which we will develop together with young people.

IDENTIKIT

Age: 15

Position: ambassador for Ghent - Child & Youth-friendly City and cofounder of PROJECT BeBo (www.projectbebo.be)

I do hip-hop dancing and to me, dance is a special artform because it is so physical: it transcends language barriers and makes it possible to connect people. As we recruit youngsters from all branches of study and operate both in Belgium and Bolivia, we are automatically diverse, but we don't want to be just a 'diversity project': we are mainly concerned with the artistic process, with youths in Bolivia and Belgium creating similar performances. We will therefore incorporate images of one another in our performances.

2

What makes children and young people so important to the city?

SEPPE: I think children and young people can offer their own dynamic: they create a kind of freshness. Youngsters tend



to think outside the box and go off the beaten track, which has a liberating effect. If they can develop their talents, they will be given the chance to attain wonderful artistic, sports or other achievements. For this reason, I don't think there can ever be a final point for a child and youth-friendly city: it must constantly change, because there should always be room for new initiatives. There is no such thing as the perfect youth-friendly city.

What I do find important is that all these initiatives and clubs are easily accessible for young people. This is not always the case if the place where you can live your passion is situated on the other side of town and public transport is inadequate, for instance. Mobility is

extremely important for youngsters, since their parents cannot take them everywhere all of the time. Furthermore, they should be encouraged to be self-reliant.

3

What is the current situation in Ghent?

SEPPE: As youth ambassador in Ghent, my primary commitment is to inspire others. Through this ambassadorship, I have also come into contact with others who are dedicated to children and young people, and this has made me realise how wide the range of services is.

What I think is lacking is an overview of all the options and of possibilities that need to be developed further. My dream is to have a theatre where youngsters can get creative. We really need this kind of accessible initiatives that don't require you to participate on a weekly basis but enable you to develop your own project.

'Together we can demonstrate that young people, if they have the time and guidance, can certainly contribute to society. I want to communicate our achievements in a high-quality manner and not just megaphone them.'

What I like about the youth services in Ghent is that it's easy to meet up without having to go to a bar, since most youngsters have a limited budget. In summer it is wonderful to hang around at Graslei and we are tolerated there. I miss having such a perfect meeting place in winter. The alternative is buying a drink at a supermarket and then meeting with friends at a bus shelter: that's a bit sad, isn't it?

4

Do you have any tips that may be invaluable to other people?

SEPPE: I have noticed that a regular traditional poster in the street is sometimes the best way to reach young people. Youngsters are on social media a lot, but we noticed that a Facebook ad had hardly any result. Although it was viewed five thousand times, only ten people clicked the link to the website. It makes more sense to just send an email to schools, as that's where young people are. By addressing lots of schools we found a good mix: it was much easier than we had thought, and it turned out that we had most difficulty reaching students from General Secondary Education schools. It may sound a bit bold, but I think that in technical and vocational schools there is often more room for initiatives outside the traditional pattern.

5

What current and future challenges do you see?

SEPPE: I've just heard that I can go to Costa Rica for two years via United



World Colleges. I will go to a school that attaches great importance to young people's commitment, so I'll certainly be able to organise something there, but in a different context and with other people. At the same time, we want to embed BeBo, maybe in a non-profit organisation, although this entails a lot of red tape.

Sometimes there are still lots of obstacles for youngsters who develop such a project. We are currently supported by the NGO Broederlijk Delen, but the admin took us three months. When we wanted to approach the Culture department for additional support, it was very difficult for us to go through the procedure with the three of us. The administration is still not always aligned to youngsters, and that's the case in other places too. 'Shouldn't you wait until you're of age?' we were told at the bank, when we wanted to open an account as a de facto association.

We are proceeding with PROJECT BeBo anyway. Once we get started with the young people, we will set a date for the first performances. I'm looking forward to that. I'm very busy right now as I obviously go to school as well, but I know the satisfaction will be great once I see the result. Together we can demonstrate that young people, if they have the time and guidance, can certainly contribute to society. I want to communicate our achievements in a high-quality manner and not just megaphone them.



Colophon

First edition: October 2018

This book is an initiative by the City of Ghent,
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F-twee (p 47, 61 & 62)
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In 2013, Ghent expressed its ambition to become the most child- and youth-friendly city in Flanders. This ambitious goal has been pursued by the local authorities and many partners in Ghent.

A lot has been accomplished over the years. Through a mix of interviews, reflections and remarkable projects we provide you with a unique insight into this Ghent story and the numerous practical achievements.