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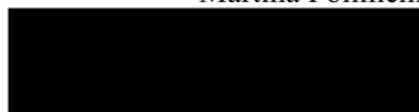
XXXIII CICLO

**INCLUSIVE CITIES FOR MIGRANT
AND PEOPLE WITH MIGRATION BACKGROUND:
SOCIAL INNOVATIVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES
IN PUBLIC SPACES OF SOCIAL HOUSING ESTATE**

THE FLEMISH CASES OF MECHELEN AND AALST, BELGIUM

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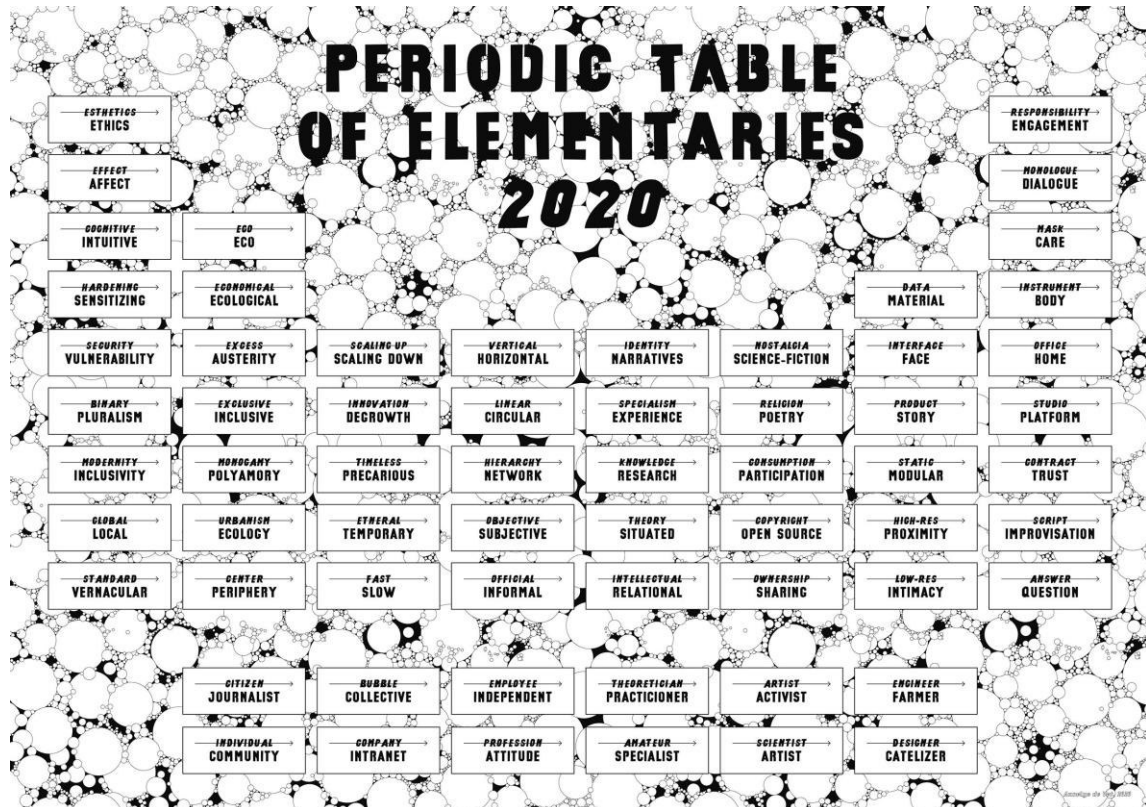


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THE FLEMISH CASES OF MECHELEN AND AALST, BELGIUM

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*“Cities should be designed with the view of inhabitants
who live there”*

(J. Jacobs, 1992)

*“A volte per migliorare la vita di un quartiere può bastare
una nuova biblioteca, un giardino curato, un percorso pedonale
tra una scuola e una palestra. Non interventi dall’alto,
da “archistar”, ma soluzioni che migliorano la vita quotidiana
e favoriscono l’incontro tra le persone”.*

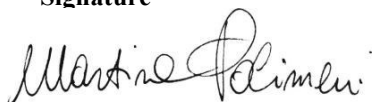
(M. Cucinella, sul quartiere di Librino, Catania)

STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature

Date: 09 June, 2021

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martine Pelmen', written in a cursive style.

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SUMMARY

The main topic of my research is to study public space and its role in the processes of social inclusion of migrants and people with migration background, through the lens of social innovation.

This research follows the approach of Moulaert et al. (2005), who argued that social innovation (SI) has "three core dimensions: a) the satisfaction of human needs (content dimension); b) changes in social relations, especially with regard to governance (process dimension); and c) an increase in the socio-political capability and access to resources (empowerment dimension)".

Applying the above definition to the subject under investigation, the emerging question will be: which practices and processes that happen in urban public spaces can be defined social innovative, means that they have as ultimate aim the satisfaction of human needs, bring positive changes in social relations, and help people involved to increase their socio-political capability and access to resources?

A space to be defined as "public" must be accessible to anyone, this is the feature mentioned in every definition that literature refers to. It must also be able to allow access to the existing services, for example in an urban park each user must be able to use the functions present inside, depending on personal needs or preferences.

In the public space, the satisfaction of human needs takes place in different ways, both through activities that are generally defined as "daily", and through activities considered "leisure and pleasure", and not only.

Since the satisfaction of human needs also passes through the affirmation of the self and making oneself visible in space, the ability of individuals to appropriate a certain space becomes significant to the extent that it corresponds to the possibility of being seen, making one's voice heard; it becomes satisfying the inner need to be recognized as a human being, the manifestation of the right to have access to resources, goods and services that can guarantee a better quality of life. Thus described, public space is no longer just a physical place but is characterized as a dimension of expression and affirmation of the "self". It follows that space is defined by an individual experience

related to the "other", where "other" means human and inhuman (the surrounding environment).

If space is the result of this experience, what happens in public space is the encounter of different "selves" who experience a certain place in relation to other "selves"; reporting Young's words: "in public spaces one always risks encountering those who are different, those who identify with different groups and have different opinions or different forms of life". Depending on the conditions in which it occurs, this encounter can bring positive effects, mitigating physical and cultural differences and making way for a sense of communion, or it can be negative, amplifying these differences and leading to internal and external tensions of the individual.

The analysis of relational dynamics in public space will help to show how the latter plays a fundamental role in multiethnic communities, stimulating positive changes in human behaviour, increasing physical and mental well-being and quality of life (livability), fostering culture mixing and social inclusion.

The main objective is to demonstrate that public space not only helps in urban transformation processes but also is able to respond to the needs of a modern diverse society (different ages, gender, sex, ethnicity, social status, level of education), promoting culture diversity and solidarity, through services and facilities. In this way, public spaces become the arena of innovative practices and activities aimed to social inclusion and respect for cultural differences, as well as a place for the development of a sense of belonging and a tool to educate people to sustainable development principles.

To give greater relevance to the issues listed above, the analysis will focus on migrants and their relationship with urban public space, especially public spaces in neighbourhood emerging from social housing estate.

Several studies, among which I mention those conducted by 2 important international newspapers - The Guardian and Le Monde - show that migrants often, despite living and working in a specific city, knowing streets, squares, places and interacting with the urban environment in different ways, they continue to feel like "guests", a number in a list rather than part of society.

This feeling is generated by multiple factors, one of which is the difficulty in participating in the decision-making process. In fact,

several studies conducted in this field show that only a small part of the newcomers manages to be involved in decisions concerning the politic and economic sphere or simply to make their voices heard; and even when it happens, it is often mediated through local associations or communities. The latter take charge of the requests of these "minorities" and report them to the city administrations, asking for concrete actions or proposing solutions themselves, in some cases innovative.

It should be remembered that any action, plan or program should consider the needs of the host community, which must have a leading role in the decision-making process, to avoid the onset of tensions.

In this work we want to put in the spotlight the so-called newcomers, those who leave their land to go to another State searching for job and better living conditions. Whether we are talking about refugees, migrants arriving from third countries or economic migrants, what these people have in common is the search for psychophysical well-being, economic tranquillity and professional recognition, exactly what every human being wishes to achieve in his own life. Who arrives in a foreign country, most of the time doesn't speak the language, doesn't know the city, has neither a job (except for economic migrants) nor a home and doesn't have a network of social relations. Although free, these people are like "prisoner" of a political, economic and socio-cultural context in which they don't know how to move.

Understanding this perspective, it becomes clear how integration and social inclusion are urgent issues awaiting answers that, to be effective, must be the result of teamwork between politics, social services, cultural mediators, NGOs. All the involved institutional bodies and stakeholders should approach the problem with a broad, multidisciplinary and interconnected vision, able to respond to the needs of migrants, without incurring economic or social costs for welcoming States.

At European level, one of the strategies set is the Europe 2020 (part of the bigger Agenda 2030) in which, among other goals, propose actions to fight social exclusion and to achieve inclusive growth. In July 2011, the Commission proposed a "European agenda for the integration of third-country nationals", focusing on actions to increase economic, social, cultural and political participation by migrants and

emphasizing local action. Although the intentions are good, all these policies are linked only to socio-economic issues. The ability to negotiate between all the actors involved is a key element for the success of any social inclusion strategy.

RIASSUNTO

Il tema principale della mia ricerca è lo studio dello spazio pubblico e del suo ruolo nei processi di inclusione sociale dei migranti e delle persone con background migratorio, attraverso la lente dell'innovazione sociale.

Nella mia ricerca ho seguito l'approccio di Moulaert et al. (2005), che ha sostenuto che l'innovazione sociale (SI) ha "tre dimensioni fondamentali: a) la soddisfazione dei bisogni umani (dimensione del contenuto); b) i cambiamenti nelle relazioni sociali, in particolare per quanto riguarda la governance (dimensione del processo); e c) un aumento della capacità sociopolitica e dell'accesso alle risorse (dimensione dell'empowerment)".

Applicando la definizione di cui sopra al soggetto in esame, la domanda principale sarà: quali pratiche e processi che avvengono negli spazi pubblici urbani possono essere definiti social innovativi, significa che hanno come fine ultimo la soddisfazione dei bisogni umani, portare cambiamenti positivi nel sociale relazioni e aiutare le persone coinvolte ad aumentare la loro capacità sociopolitica e l'accesso alle risorse?

Uno spazio per definirsi "pubblico" deve essere accessibile a chiunque, questa è la caratteristica citata in ogni definizione cui la letteratura fa riferimento. Deve inoltre poter consentire l'accesso ai servizi esistenti, ad esempio in un parco urbano ogni utente deve poter usufruire delle funzioni presenti al suo interno, a seconda delle esigenze o preferenze personali.

Nello spazio pubblico, la soddisfazione dei bisogni umani avviene in modi diversi, sia attraverso attività generalmente definite "quotidiane", sia attraverso attività considerate "svago e piacere", e non solo.

Poiché la soddisfazione dei bisogni umani passa anche attraverso l'affermazione di sé e il rendersi visibili nello spazio, la capacità degli individui di appropriarsi di un certo spazio diventa significativa nella misura in cui corrisponde alla possibilità di essere visti, di far sentire la propria voce; diventa soddisfazione del sacrosanto bisogno di essere riconosciuto come essere umano, manifestazione del diritto ad avere accesso a risorse, beni e servizi che possono garantire una migliore qualità della vita. Così descritto, lo spazio pubblico non è più solo un luogo fisico ma si caratterizza come dimensione di espressione e

affermazione del "sé". Ne consegue che lo spazio è definito da un'esperienza individuale relativa all'"altro", dove "altro" significa umano e disumano (l'ambiente circostante).

Se lo spazio è il risultato di questa esperienza, quello che avviene nello spazio pubblico è l'incontro di diversi "sé" che vivono un certo luogo in relazione ad altri "sé"; riportando le parole di Young: “negli spazi pubblici si rischia sempre di incontrare chi è diverso, chi si identifica in gruppi diversi e ha opinioni diverse o forme di vita diverse”. A seconda delle condizioni in cui avviene, questo incontro può portare effetti positivi, attenuando le differenze fisiche e culturali e lasciando spazio al senso di comunione, oppure può essere negativo, amplificando queste differenze e portando a tensioni interne ed esterne dell'individuo.

L'analisi delle dinamiche relazionali nello spazio pubblico aiuterà a mostrare come quest'ultimo svolga un ruolo fondamentale nelle comunità multietniche, stimolando cambiamenti positivi nei comportamenti umani, aumentando il benessere fisico e mentale e la qualità della vita (vivibilità), favorendo la mescolanza culturale e sociale inclusione.

L'obiettivo principale è dimostrare che lo spazio pubblico non solo aiuta nei processi di trasformazione urbana, ma è anche in grado di rispondere ai bisogni di una società moderna e diversificata (diverse età, genere, sesso, etnia, stato sociale, livello di istruzione), promuovendo la cultura diversità e solidarietà, attraverso servizi e strutture. Gli spazi pubblici diventano così l'arena di pratiche e attività innovative volte all'inclusione sociale e al rispetto delle differenze culturali, nonché luogo per lo sviluppo del senso di appartenenza e strumento per educare le persone ai principi dello sviluppo sostenibile. Per dare maggiore rilevanza ai temi sopra elencati, l'analisi si concentrerà sui migranti e sul loro rapporto con lo spazio pubblico urbano, in particolare gli spazi pubblici di quartiere emergenti da edilizia popolare.

Diversi studi, tra cui cito quelli condotti da 2 importanti testate internazionali - The Guardian e Le Monde - mostrano che i migranti spesso, pur vivendo e lavorando in una determinata città, conoscono strade, piazze, luoghi e interagiscono con l'ambiente urbano in modi diversi, continuano a sentirsi "ospiti", un numero in una lista piuttosto che parte della società.

Questa sensazione è generata da molteplici fattori, uno dei quali è la difficoltà a partecipare al processo decisionale. Infatti, diversi studi condotti in questo campo mostrano che solo una piccola parte dei nuovi arrivati riesce a essere coinvolta in decisioni che riguardano la sfera politica ed economica o semplicemente a far sentire la propria voce; e anche quando accade, è spesso mediato da associazioni o comunità locali. Questi ultimi si fanno carico delle istanze di queste “minoranze” e le segnalano alle amministrazioni cittadine, chiedendo azioni concrete o proponendo esse stesse soluzioni, in alcuni casi innovative.

Va ricordato che qualsiasi azione, piano o programma deve tenere conto delle esigenze della comunità ospitante, che deve avere un ruolo di primo piano nel processo decisionale, per evitare l'insorgere di tensioni.

In questo lavoro vogliamo mettere in luce i cosiddetti newcomers, coloro che lasciano la propria terra per andare in un altro Stato in cerca di lavoro e migliori condizioni di vita. Che si tratti di rifugiati, migranti in arrivo da paesi terzi o migranti economici, ciò che accomuna queste persone è la ricerca del benessere psicofisico, della tranquillità economica e del riconoscimento professionale, esattamente ciò che ogni essere umano desidera realizzare nella propria vita. Chi arriva in un paese straniero, il più delle volte non parla la lingua, non conosce la città, non ha né un lavoro (tranne i migranti economici) né una casa e non ha una rete di relazioni sociali. Pur essendo libere, queste persone sono come “prigioniere” di un contesto politico, economico e socioculturale in cui non sanno muoversi.

Comprendendo questa prospettiva, diventa chiaro come l'integrazione e l'inclusione sociale siano questioni urgenti in attesa di risposte che, per essere efficaci, devono essere il risultato di un lavoro di squadra tra politica, servizi sociali, mediatori culturali, ONG. Tutti gli organismi istituzionali e gli stakeholders coinvolti dovrebbero affrontare il problema con una visione ampia, multidisciplinare e interconnessa, in grado di rispondere ai bisogni dei migranti, senza incorrere in costi economici o sociali per gli Stati di accoglienza.

A livello europeo, una delle strategie impostate è Europa 2020 (parte della più ampia Agenda 2030) in cui, tra gli altri obiettivi, proporre azioni per combattere l'esclusione sociale e raggiungere una crescita

inclusiva. Nel luglio 2011 la Commissione ha proposto un'"agenda europea per l'integrazione dei cittadini di paesi terzi", concentrandosi su azioni volte ad aumentare la partecipazione economica, sociale, culturale e politica dei migranti e ponendo l'accento sull'azione locale. Sebbene le intenzioni siano buone, tutte queste politiche sono legate solo a questioni socioeconomiche. La capacità di negoziare tra tutti gli attori coinvolti è un elemento chiave per il successo di qualsiasi strategia di inclusione sociale.

KEYWORDS

Inclusive cities; urban policies; innovative policies; Agenda2030; public space; marginal spaces; social innovation; social inclusion; deprived neighbourhood; multi-ethnic neighbourhood; migrants; local communities; sense of belonging; meaning; uses; social innovative practices; social housing estate; local administration; Belgium; Mechelen; Aalst; Flanders;

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The European Union has shown and still shows great difficulties in organizing adequate reception systems, considering that because of the Dublin Regulation most of the responsibility for managing migrants are left in the hands of the landing countries, namely Italy, Greece and Malta.

The Dublin Regulation (formally EU Regulation No. 604/2013) entered into force on January 1, 2014, is a European law that "establishes the criteria and mechanisms for determining the member state responsible for examining an application for international protection presented in one of the member states from a third-country national or a stateless person".

This means that migrants who come to Europe cannot decide in which state to apply for asylum, but it is the first Member State where entry is recorded, or fingerprints are stored to be responsible for the refugee's asylum request.

In these circumstances, it's clear the pressure exerted on border States, often not equipped to provide adequate care, protection and support, but also to take asylum requests, to communicate efficiently with the Ministry of the Internal Affairs and to prepare transfers to States who have the task to welcome migrants. The most visible consequences are manifested in the overcrowding of Extraordinary Reception Centres (CASs) and the extension of the time spent by asylum seekers in these facilities.

It is precisely because of the long wait and the precarious living conditions in the hotspots that many escape attempts to reach the frontier of another state independently are reported. The question that arises at this point is how it can be expected that a State, on its own, organize rescue, assistance and identification of all the individuals who come from time to time, efficiently, safely and quickly and monitor them 24 hours a day to prevent them from escaping?

It should also be considered that the ports with the greatest flows of arrivals are in territories that are already suffering from economic disadvantages and social tensions.

**Background: an overview
of the political and social
context in Europe**

In this framework, despite many studies and speeches on the subject and various attempts to create strategical solutions, the policies implemented so far have not led to any improvement. To address the problem, a review of the agreements and regulations currently in use should be necessary, as well as a call to take responsibility for all Member States.

The first step is, therefore, to define a series of actions to efficiently regularize the entrances, to streamline the asylum request process and to relocate migrants and refugees in places where they can receive appropriate medical and psychological support.

In the last couple of years, Europe finally came back to discuss again the problem of migration flows, looking to all the actions and plans developed so far. What it must be understood, in order to correct the direction, is why these strategies are not bringing the expected results, on the contrary, they are reinforcing tension and hostility, even among different States of the Union. Not so long ago the President Vonderlien presented a plan to approach in an innovative way the issue of migrants and refugees. This innovative way, among other aspects, focuses on social innovation as a theoretical pillar to develop a common method for creating new policies, all together.

Considering the importance that social innovation is acquiring in the public debate, already solid in the scientific debate, this work aims to use this theoretical approach to study the role of public space in the process of social inclusion of migrants and people with migration background.

This research follows the approach of Moulaert et al. (2005), who argued that social innovation (SI) has "three core dimensions: a) the satisfaction of human needs (content dimension); b) changes in social relations, especially with regard to governance (process dimension); and c) an increase in the socio-political capability and access to resources (empowerment dimension)".

Applying the above definition to the subject under investigation, the main question will be: which practices and processes that happen in urban public spaces can be defined social innovative, means that they have as final aim the satisfaction of human needs, bring positive

**Presentation of the topic:
research problematic and
research question(s)**

changes in social relations, and help people involved to increase their socio-political capability and access to resources?

The analysis of social dynamics in public space will help us to show how the latter plays a fundamental role in multiethnic communities in mitigating social tension, prejudices and racist incidents and fostering culture mixing and social inclusion. As it has been already demonstrated by other studies, public spaces are indeed able to stimulate positive changes in human behaviour, increasing physical and mental well-being and improving quality of life (livability).

One of the key points of the research is to demonstrate that public space not only helps in urban transformation processes but also is able to respond to the needs of a modern diverse society (different ages, gender, sex, ethnicity, social status, level of education), promoting culture diversity and solidarity, through services and facilities. In this way, public spaces become the arena of innovative practices and activities aimed to social inclusion and respect for cultural differences, as well as a place for the development of a sense of belonging and a tool to educate people to sustainable development principles.

To achieve the purpose of the research, the analyses will focus on migrants and their relationship with urban public space, putting in the spotlight the importance those spaces have in social housing neighbourhoods.

Several studies, among which I mention those conducted by 2 important international newspapers - The Guardian and Le Monde - show that migrants often, despite living and working in a specific city, knowing streets, squares, places and interacting with the urban environment in different ways, they continue to feel like "guests", a number in a list rather than part of society.

This feeling is generated by multiple factors, one of which is the difficulty in participating in the decision-making process. In fact, different investigations conducted in this field show that only a small part of the newcomers manages to be involved in decisions concerning the politic and economic sphere or simply to make their voices heard; and even when it happens, it is often mediated through local associations or communities. The latter take charge of the requests of these "minorities" and report them to the city administrations, asking for concrete actions or proposing solutions themselves, in some cases innovative.

This brief excursus on refugees was necessary to better understand the reality of current events and to explain later some of the social dynamics analyzed; but it is not the focus of my research, which takes into consideration the newcomers, those who leave their land to go to another State, searching for job and better living conditions. Indeed, no matter if we call them refugees, migrants arriving from third countries or economic migrants, what these people have in common is the research for psychological and physical well-being, economic stability and professional recognition, all things that every other human being wishes as well to achieve in his own life.

As the needs of newcomers do not run out in the moment following their arrival, the second step to take is enabling these people to become an integral part of society, active members of the community. And it's precisely in this passage that the greatest difficulties arise.

Migrants arriving in a foreign country, most of the time don't speak the language, don't know the city, neither have a job (except for economic migrants) nor a home and don't have a network of social relations. Although free, they are like prisoners of a political, economic and socio-cultural context in which it is hard to understand the right way to move.

From what has been said so far, it emerges how integration and social inclusion are urgent issues awaiting answers that, to be effective, must be the result of teamwork between politics, social services, cultural mediators, NGOs. All the involved institutional bodies and stakeholders should approach the problem with a broad, multidisciplinary and interconnected vision, able to respond to the needs of migrants, without incurring economic or social costs for welcoming States.

At European level, one of the strategies set is the Europe 2020 (part of the bigger Agenda 2030) in which, among other goals, propose actions to fight social exclusion and to achieve inclusive growth. In July 2011, the Commission proposed a “European Agenda for the integration of Third-Country Nationals”, focusing on actions to increase economic, social, cultural and political participation by migrants and emphasizing local action. Although the intentions are good, all these

Relevance of the topic in the political and social debate: policies and strategies in EU and in Belgium

policies are linked only to socio-economic issues. It is important to remember that any action, plan or program must consider the needs of the host community, which should have a leading role in the decision-making process, to avoid the onset of tensions. The ability to negotiate between all the actors involved is a key element for the success of any social inclusion strategy.

Citing the words spoken at the *Global Conference on Cities and Migration*, in Mechelen, by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Development Cooperation of Belgium, Alexander De Croo, “While national and international discussions on migration and refugees often get too quickly polarized, local communities take a different approach. They know best what the needs are of their citizens – migrants and non-migrants – and are champions in finding creative solutions that make sense.”

In Belgium in the last 15 years the number of migrants and refugees increased steadily and one of the reasons can be found in its variety of spoken languages. In fact, in addition to Dutch, there are two other languages widely spoken, French and English. This characteristic makes the country one of the European realities most affected by migratory flows.

According to STATBEL¹, national population growth is currently favored by two demographic factors:

- a positive trend of births compared to the number of deaths (+6,820 persons were born in 2019), which accounts for 11.0 % of the total population growth.
- the recording of greater migratory flows inbound than outbound (+55,031 persons in 2019).

Statistics show that over the past 20 years the population trend has continued to grow, also thanks to immigrants from both Europe and the rest of the world: in 2019, 89% of the population growth was due to international migration flows. The population of Belgium in 2020 was 11,589,623, a 0.44% increase from 2019, while the current population of Belgium is 11,632,326, a 0.37% increase from 2020.

Relevance of the topic in the Belgian reality: current growth and structure of Belgian population

¹ For more information, see STATBEL website: <https://statbel.fgov.be/en/themes/population/structure-population#news>

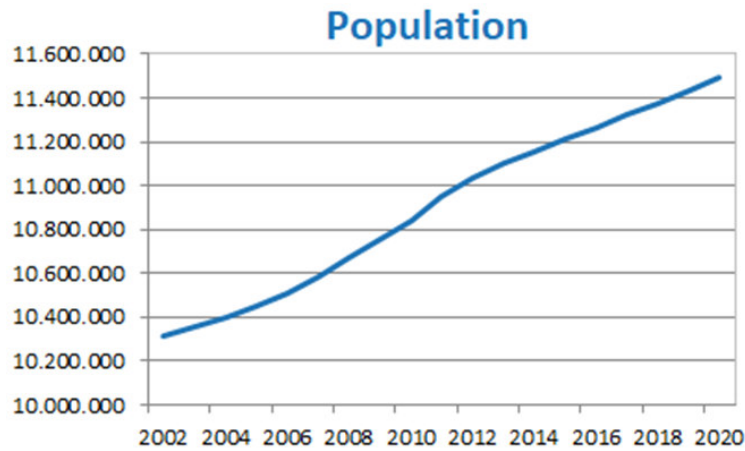


Fig.1 Increase in population of Belgium, from 2002 till 2020

This growth, however, according to the projections of the UN World Population Prospects², from this year seems to be undergoing a slight slowdown which will tend to become increasingly significant by 2035.

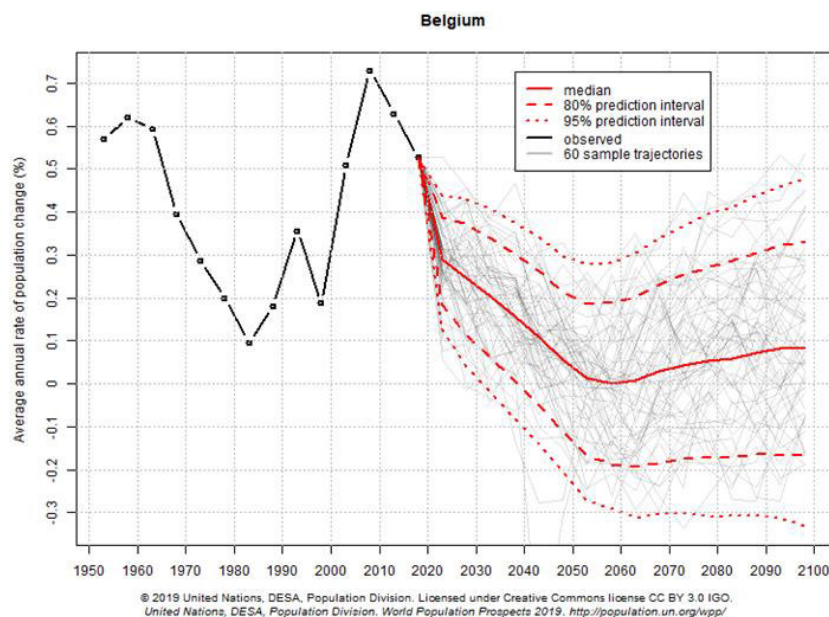
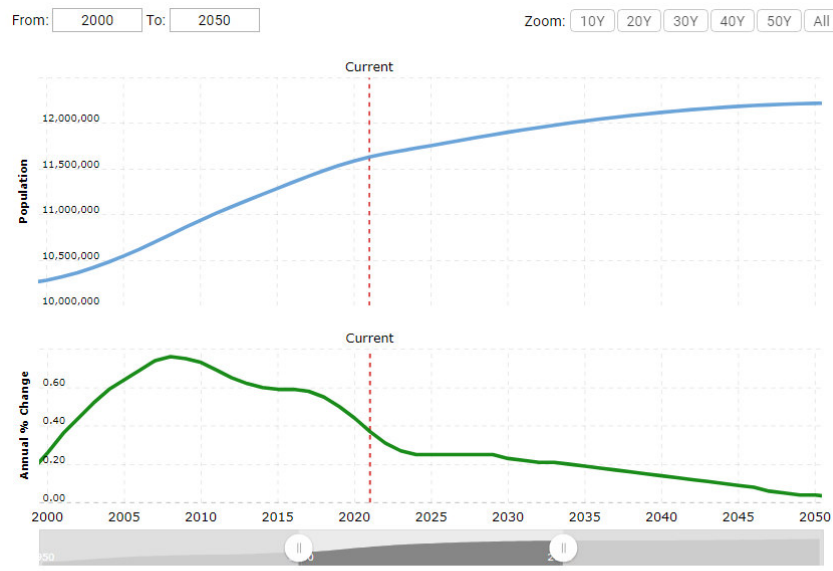


Fig.2: trends of the average annual rate population from 1950 and projection till 2100.

² For more information and other graph, please visit the institutional website: <https://population.un.org/wpp/>

Looking at the annual growth index, the previous statement sounds even more realistic. In fact, if currently the percentage of this index stands at 0.37%, in 2035 it will drop drastically to 0.20%, with a reduction of almost a half.



Data Source: [United Nations - World Population Prospects](#)

Fig.3: Annual growth index from 2000 till 2050

In 2019, over one million foreigners were living in the country and among them, the higher percentage of people settled in the Brussels-Capital Region (35%) and slightly higher in the Walloon Region (10%) than in the Flemish Region (9%). The total share for Belgium was 12% of the population. Comparing this data with another study conducted in 2010 by the Institute of International Studies, Wrocław, it appears clear how fast things have changed from there:

“Currently, the foreign population in Belgium has reached more than 8% of the total population; this proportion does not include naturalised migrants or those living in the country illegally. The composition of migrants in Belgium is diverse and they are not evenly distributed in its territory. Brussels, as the Capital Region, has the highest representation of foreigners, at slightly less than 30% of the population. Italians are the most numerous of the foreigners legally residing in Belgium, with around 200,000 people. Moroccans are the second largest group, with around 121,000 people – largely concentrated in Brussels. French people, a population that is rarely considered in studies on

immigration, stand in third position, with over 107,000, followed by Dutch persons at over 85,000. Turkish immigrants are in fifth place, with over 69,000 people. Spanish people number over 45,000, while Germans count over 34,000, British persons stand at around 26,000, and Americans and Congolese (ex-Zairians) amount to nearly 12,000 each (Martiniello and Rea, 2003).”³

The affirmation on the distribution of migrants is still valid, which in fact continues not to be homogeneous but varies from province to province, not only as regards the total number of foreigners, but also as regards the presence of some ethnic groups rather than others.

Although Belgium appears to be an open country, ready to welcome newcomers, careful to propose social inclusion policies for the well-being of all its inhabitants, looking deeper into the different areas of action of these policies, it is understood that only certain categories can effectively access certain financial, health and social support services in general. This is also connected to the migration wave of 2008 and the subsequent European reforms on the regulation of migratory flows (2015). In fact, these reforms have made significant changes to the asylum and visa application process, introducing further restrictions and requirements for acceptance. There is a large slice of the population made up of migrants who have resided in Belgium for more than 10 years who are still waiting for their asylum application to be accepted; There is also no shortage of testimonies from entire families who, despite being naturalized in Belgian territory, with work and children, were expelled from the nation within a few weeks, because their asylum applications were rejected.

However, current data shows that the net rate for Belgium is slowly falling: the net migration rate in 2021 is 2.912 per 1000 population, a 12.81% decline from 2020. The net migration rate in 2020 was 3.340 per 1000 population, a 11.36% decline from 2019.

³ This text is extract from the CLIP report on Antwerp. CLIP is the acronyms for European network of cities for local integration policies for migrants. The network comprises a steering committee, a group of expert European research centres and a number of European cities. In the following two years, the cities of Vienna and Amsterdam joined the CLIP Steering Committee. The network is also supported by the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), and has formed a partnership with the European Network Against Racism (ENAR). For more information, visit the website <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/populationandsociety/clip.htm>



Fig.3: Immigration index: Total number of long-term immigrants arriving into the reporting country during the reference year. Source EUROSTAT⁴

The data also show that the biggest group of foreigners legally living in Belgium comes from the EU Member States or other developed countries.

The five most representative nationalities in Belgium are:

- a) Belgians (who come back to Belgium after a stay abroad)
- b) Romanians
- c) French
- d) Dutch
- e) Italians

A recent survey has shown that for more than 60% of Belgians there are too many immigrants lived in the country; however, they still see the migration of EU citizens to Belgium as a positive fact.

Another relevant aspect to highlight about Belgium is its urban development, mostly characterized by small and medium-sized cities. This singularity allows a reflection on how a human-scale urban context influences expectations and desires of its inhabitants, which in

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00176/default/table?lang=en>

response drives urban growth and social development, through their activities and uses of urban space.

For example, conducting observations and analyzes on a multiethnic neighborhood is the most effective way to know and describe what are the existing dynamics of social inclusion, whether they start from the local communities (bottom up) or if they are the result of integration policies (top down), and which of can be called social inclusive.

The topic of this research consists of four main areas of investigation: the concept of social inclusion and the relationship with social exclusion; the theoretical approach of social innovation; the neighbourhood as an ideal urban dimension to develop a sense of belonging, shared values, solidarity and promote multi-ethnic coexistence; the role of public space in social housing districts. It is also evident from a quick reading that the 4 dimensions are closely connected and that they are all extremely current. The 2030 agenda is an example of how much the political class is aiming to bring together in a single "container" all the issues related to these 4 disciplinary strands. There are many studies conducted on the important role of public space in the processes of social inclusion.

Relevance of the topic in the academic debate

As many studies have been carried out on the theme of cohabitation in multi-ethnic dominated neighbourhoods, among which the works of Peters (2011), Vaiou (2012), Nowika e Vertovek (2014) among others, are cited.

On the issue of migration flows and the social inclusion of migrants, there is a shared commitment of all Member States, as well as continuous research in the scientific field to experiment with innovative solutions.

There are still many open questions and many still incomplete answers, however.

Such a complex topic requires an interdisciplinary approach, to give a concrete contribution to the existing literature and to show how migration, social inclusion and public space are deeply intertwined.

Today the tools for creating social inclusion do not seem to be sufficiently known and exploited. One of these tools is the theoretical approach of social innovation, which takes form in creative and experimental social practices; the aim is to generate shared social values that can feed human capital, solidarity and social cohesion over time.

For these not to remain words, we need a context in which to gain experience, a multidisciplinary team of experts to work in synergy

with local communities. Through this collaboration it will be possible to understand more deeply what the difficulties are of living together, what are the challenges to be tackled and the obstacles to be overcome in order to encourage encounter and overcome social, cultural and ethnic diversities. The context mentioned above, therefore, could be that of social districts, already characterized by a series of known problems, where, since the policies adopted so far have not led to that mitigation of social distance, it is necessary to intervene in a innovative way. Looking at these neighbourhoods from another point of view, it is possible to grasp their profound value and richness, due to that cultural diversity that makes them unique. This heritage must not be flattened but valued. Social innovation has the power to see this value and bring it out by channelling it into regenerative energy, for the benefit of places and individuals.

From the observation and analysis of the case studies, it emerged that in neighbourhoods resulting from social housing projects, the public space takes on a new connotation, different from that previously theorized. From meaningless spaces, they have been transformed into lively spaces of relationship, capable of triggering virtuous processes of social inclusion. An international study started in 2019, and still in progress, promoted by Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA) and conducted by the University of Copenhagen, NMBU, ETH Zürich, and University of Naples Federico II, has selected some projects of Social Housing all around Europe as “a prime locus of integration between people of different cultural origins and social backgrounds”⁵. These spaces considered insignificant until now are instead the key element to propose new investigations on their own role, on the uses and meanings they assume in such deprived contexts. Therefore, in the light of what has been reported, it is believed that this work can be relevant and can give a further scientific contribution in the understanding of social phenomena in continuous evolution.

According to the purpose of this research, the methodology will follow these steps:

- 1) Analysis of literature, newspaper, articles, but also institutional policies and agendas to explain what are the main theoretical strands that define the approach used in this work and to build a consistent conceptual framework on social inclusion and

Introduction of the methodological approach: methods and tools

⁵ For more information, please visit <https://www.pushhousing.eu/>

exclusion, social innovation, public space and marginal public spaces, the neighbourhood as bridge between migrants and residents.

2) Collecting data from socio-spatial analysis of the selected neighbourhoods: existence/lack of significant public spaces connected with the city center; existence/lack of free services and facilities; analysis of the urban fabric and residential typology; dominance of the foreign component in the total resident population.

3) Fieldwork, observation, pictures reports, analysis of the local context from the inside:

- Who use these marginal public spaces (young people, elders, women with their children,)?

- Do people interact actively or passively with these spaces? Are they used in everyday life and for leisure activities or are they just empty spaces without meaning?

- What marginal public spaces have to offer to the local community? What kind of functional configuration do they have? (Skate park, football, cycling path, open-air arena, playground, picnic area, dogs area, community gardens)?

- Are they comfortable and aesthetically valuable spaces (i.e. clean, safe, enough light in the evening, condition of the paths, presence of bench, accessibility)?

4) Survey and interview with migrants in local communities and with key-actor from NGO and other institutional bodies involved;

5) Final elaboration of all the information acquired and discussion on the research findings.

Lo scopo di questa ricerca è quello di tentare di definire il valore dello spazio pubblico nei processi di inclusione sociale dei migranti e di persone con background migratorio, capire come questo valore può essere espresso al massimo, specialmente in quartieri deprivati come quelli del social housing estate.

As result of the observations and analyses of social dynamics in the two cities, we expected to find out first of all if the so-called “mixed communities” (migrants and native living together) are developing innovative practices or looking for new creative way for improving

Expected result and possible future applications

their quality of life; second, if public space is involved in these processes as main setting of interaction.

In fact, as we will see later, it is precisely in these places that public space becomes the only service available to everyone. For this reason it is essential to understand who the users are, what their needs are, how they use public space and how they would like to use it. Starting from this, as a transversal result, it is hoped to stimulate further research in this field, to understand if public space can really be defined as a heterogeneous and democratic place. A space for everyone and for everyone, where social innovation is the creative engine for defining new roles, uses and meanings. These research ideas are directed to the academic world, but also to all those who working with local communities and multiethnic groups, such as policy makers, planners, sociologist, anthropologist, artists and to whom is interested in make social inclusion and culture diversity happen.

CHAPTER I

**Social innovative practices in public spaces:
enabling social inclusion in multiethnic neighbourhoods**

CHAPTER I

Social innovative practices in public spaces: enabling social inclusion in multiethnic neighbourhoods

Theoretical chapter: Literary review and conceptual framework

Social Innovation (SI), Social Inclusion e Social Exclusion are closely related to each other. This link becomes even stronger if they are analyzed in the relationship with the public space.

Therefore, explaining the three concepts by limiting them to theoretical boundaries would be useless, since their deep meaning lies in the fact that one influences the other and together they act as a magnifying glass to observe the transformation of human behavior.

As previously stated, according to Moulaert et al. (2005) SI can be described as a methodological approach based on "three core dimensions: a) the satisfaction of human needs (content dimension); b) changes in social relations, especially with regard to governance (process dimension); and c) an increase in the socio-political capability and access to resources (empowerment dimension)".

What has just been said, in other words, translates into the ability to interpret the categories of users, understand their differences and be able to propose innovative solutions that meet everyone's needs: children, the elderly, the disabled, but also tourists, students, everyone must be able to find their place and experience well-being.

By transforming the theoretical approach of the SI into a practice applicable in multi-ethnic contexts, it is possible to give shape to a powerful tool to counter marginalization and segregation. In fact, through social innovation actions it is possible to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants also in the peripheral urban areas and to facilitate social relations, triggering processes of social solidarity.

Thanks to social innovation actions triggered by associations of residents who live in deprived and decentralized realities, those degraded and indefinite spaces, described by Madanipour as *Marginal Spaces*, begin to acquire shape and meaning. The inhabitants, placing themselves as bearers of common interests, come together in

1.1 Framing the meaning of social innovation, social inclusion and social exclusion: references from the literature

associations so that their rights are guaranteed and their voices heard. Social innovation aims to enable people and communities to fully participate in society.

Putting residents in a position to make their voices heard, in addition to being one of the three cornerstones of the SI (i.e. empowerment), is part of the question that Harvey defines as the *right to the city*, widely discussed in his famous paper “*Rebel Cities: from the right to the city to the urban revolution*”:

“The actually existing right to the city, as it is now constituted, is far too narrowly confined, in most cases in the hands of a small political and economic elite who are in a position to shape the city more and more after their own particular needs and hearts’ desire.”
(Harvey, 2012)

Harvey's heartfelt words, albeit a few years ago, are still relevant today. Those involved in politics should always keep in mind that they have a social responsibility, that is, to pursue the common good; the approach suggested here is based on innovative policies that adopt a multidisciplinary action strategy, capable of creating ever more open, cohesive and inclusive communities.

An example can be to enhance participatory planning in the policy making process, making it become, citing Vicari and Moulaert (2009) "an opportunity for inclusive involvement of human and social resources to regenerate the physical resources of the city" and I add, specifically, of public space. In recent years, there was an increase in attention for social inclusion, which brought to a wide range of uses and definitions. One of this summarize social inclusion as the way in which people access to institutions and resources and take part in the decision-making process. Even if accepted, this interpretation does not completely satisfy the researchers on the subject, as it is considered still too simple and not able to fully describe its complexity.

For this, to better frame the concept of social inclusion, other scientists started looking at the meaning social exclusion and, consequently, touching the issue of poverty.

Different studies tried to describe poverty, establishing a set of parameters looking at income, house and goods owned, mean to reveal where to put the cross line between poverty and wealth.

In this approach, poverty is a static concept that describe a certain condition of individuals in a specific time, that is, the time of the survey/ investigation/report. As we know, poverty is such a complex issue that cannot be defined only by data.

Becoming poor is a process (Paugam, 1996), it must be based on a deep evaluation of human condition in economic and social dynamics has to consider deprivation and disadvantages, that all together bring to social exclusion. Regarding this, Townsend affirmed:

individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living condition and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged, or approved, in the societies to which they belong. (Townsend, 1979)

Other scholars believe that following this path leads to a polarization of the two concepts, losing sight of what happens “in between”. If this criticism can be partly founded, it is also true that even a dualistic reading, if wisely summarized, can reveal significant outcomes.

Having said this, to clarify the concept of social inclusion it is considered necessary to report some definitions of social exclusion as reported in the literature.

For the Commission of the European Communities:

“social inclusion is a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living that is considered normal in the society in which they live. It ensures that they have greater participation in decision making which affects their lives and access to their fundamental rights” (2003)

Silver (1994, 2007), assert that social exclusion as a concept emerged in France because of the attention they use to have to society and social cohesion. Social exclusion is related not only to a lack of material wealth but also to symbolic exclusion, social deprivation and incomplete participation in the main social institutions. She defines this process “the rupturing of the social bond”.

It seems clear enough that social exclusion doesn’t refer only to a condition of poverty, but it’s also true that a people with small income

have limited access to resources, have less choices when it comes to in which neighbourhood rent or buy a house, or simply lack of social contacts.

Abrahamson (1997) pointed out that “there are people who simply lack enough money to make ends meet because of their position in the social structure, while others are shut out of mainstream society on the grounds of ethnicity, social orientation, etc.”.

Another interesting analysis in the discourses on social exclusion was made in 2007 from the Department for Work and Pensions, stating that members of modern society are potentially at risk of exclusion both in individual and group contexts and depending on the stage of life they can be divided into 4 clusters: children and young people, people on working age, people in later life and communities.

For Oxoby (2009) social inclusion is “a situation in which individuals are integrated into the economic, social and political framework of society”. For this reason, he asserts that this matter is taking more space day by day on the table of policy-makers as essential matter for successful strategies aimed at fighting poverty and increasing well-being.

Social inclusion, indeed, results from positive action taken to change the circumstances and habits that lead, or have led, to social exclusion.

Avramov (2002), give her explanation of both concepts:

“Exclusion as a social process is the denial of access to opportunity and social rights to particular individuals or groups of individuals. Social inclusion as positive praxis, on the other hand, is the process of opportunity enhancement for building or re-establishing social bonds by facilitating the access of all citizens to social activity, income, public institutions, social protection and programs and service for assistance and care.”

Some countries are strongly investing in policies and actions aimed at offering the best “facilities pack” to contain the culture shock, providing language courses, education, housing service, health support and help to access to labour market, giving the possibility to follow training courses for free to improve or gain new skill.

Certainly, significant objectives have been achieved through these programs, but always in the sphere of integration, while the question of social inclusion is still far from being resolved. Perhaps we should

look at these programs with a more critical eye and understand if and in what cases they tend to a cultural flattening of the individual, leading him more towards assimilation than inclusion.

This literature review helped to understand in which sectors are mentioned social inclusion and exclusion, which are the policies implemented so far and whether these are delivering effective results. Anyway, what is sure is that both the terms, inclusion and exclusion, when they apply to “social”, need multidimensional and interdisciplinary approaches, able to read inequality, disparities, injustice, power abuse, but also opportunities and resources.

"You will never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete." These words, spoken by Richard Buckminster Fuller (1895-1983) inventor, architect, designer, philosopher, writer, television host and professor at Southern Illinois University, are ideal for introducing the following paragraph.

Talking about inclusive cities requires a close look at current urban policies and their implementation in different urban contexts.

In general, what defines an “inclusive” city is its ability to provide opportunities for all, guaranteeing access to basic services, housing, transport, work, education and health, in line with the objectives set by the 2030 Agenda.

The 2030 Agenda has as its ultimate purpose the promotion and achievement of sustainable development through the harmonization of three macro areas: economic growth, environmental protection and social inclusion.

The innovative nature of this vision lies in having overcome the idea that sustainability is a matter linked only to the environmental aspect and therefore having introduced an integrated and multi-scale approach to the dimensions of sustainable development.

This vision took concrete form in the 17 global goals, divided in turn into 169 "targets", among which, here we mention the eleventh:

Goal 11 – Sustainable cities and communities: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

1.2 Inclusive cities based on inclusive society: examples of “best practices” on innovative policies

Among the targets included in it, for example, there is the right to housing for all and adequate and convenient basic services, access to safe and ecological transport systems, road safety, attention to the needs of those who live in vulnerable situations. The safeguarding of the cultural and natural heritage, the reduction of the environmental impact, with particular attention to air quality and urban waste management are also included.

The intention that emerges is to promote resilient cities, capable of regenerating and readjusting each time to not only environmental, but also economic, social and technological changes.

The Covid-19 crisis has given a strong shock to a system that seemed stable and efficient, and which instead has shown that it still has large points of weakness.

Just rethink, for example, what happened to our cities during the lockdown: deserted streets, closed commercial activities, stationary transport and activities allowed (with infinite restrictions) only in open public spaces.

Nevertheless, the global share of land allocated to streets and open spaces averaged only about 16%, according to 2019 data from 610 cities in 95 countries. Of this combined share, streets accounted for about three times as much urban land as open public spaces, such as parks and riverfronts.

In view of this, the urgent need to invest in open public spaces is evident, guaranteeing equal access opportunities for all.

Urban planning studies have found that the level of access in small towns is significantly higher than in large cities, resulting in increased productivity and improved health.

All the actions and policies listed so far are evidence of the fact that the topic of social inclusion is current and a priority point in the agendas of the public administration. It was also highlighted that in order to be fully understood, a multidisciplinary approach is needed, since the concept of inclusive city brings together many aspects. One of these is cultural diversity. The value of the latter has not yet been fully understood. More campaigns on cultural diversity and social mixing should be carried out; in fact, only by educating to confrontation, sharing and solidarity can society be defined inclusive.

During the annual European Research and Innovation Days (first edition, 24-26 September 2019) was highlighted that what we need to

build innovative policies that can be effective is to set clear goals that can be reached quickly and with a minimum investment of resources, which are able to support themselves and eventually to readjust to the arrival of new circumstances.

As this is the age of fast change, where what is discussed today is already obsolete, we need to be able to respond with equal speed, having our gaze already directed towards tomorrow. Ready enough, fast enough, well enough. What has just been said leads us to affirm that impact is an important part of innovation.

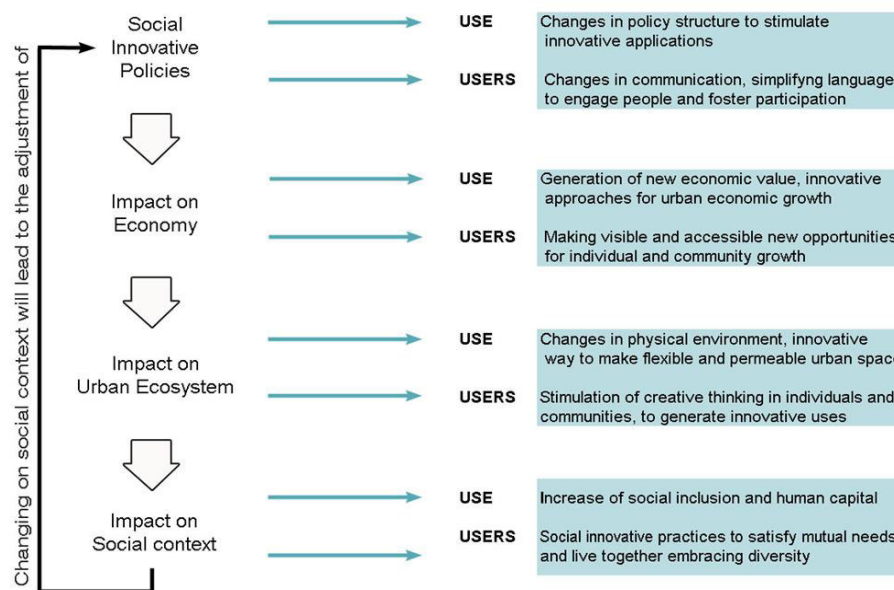


Fig.1 Diagram of the relationship between the impacts generated by an innovative social policy at the economic, social level and in the urban context; Personal elaboration of the author.

Social innovative policies must be able to generate impacts on the economy, on the urban ecosystem and on the social context, aiming at satisfying the needs of the population of that specific space and time, through the involvement of all stakeholders, and stimulating the creative thinking. If these policies are effective, the changes generated will lead to their regulation, following a virtuous circle in which "learning by doing" and "civic participation / involvement" are key factors.

In the previous paragraph, some innovative policies aimed at creating more inclusive cities were reported.

1.2.1 Inclusive society: an attempt of definition

If the importance of these good practices is undeniable, it is also important to remember that to build inclusive cities there is a need for inclusive societies. To be included into a society means to have same rights, same opportunities and same quality of life. If one of these aspects is missing, then it will start a slow process of marginalization that will end with social exclusion.

In the literature examined, the definition ranges widely from sociology to economics, passing through anthropology, geography and political science; each of these disciplines deals with a different nuance of the concept, but none seem to be able to return a univocal definition. Therefore, wanting to try to describe the characteristics of an inclusive society, it is mandatory to bring up the 2030 Agenda again, which as we have seen, among the three macro areas of sustainable development, also counts social inclusion.

Below, the goals useful to support the construction of the definition of inclusive society are mentioned:

Goal 1 - No poverty: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Poverty, in this context, is not to be understood only as the absence of wealth, but rather as the condition of general deprivation in which a very large part of the world population lives. That condition of impossibility of accessing a part of resources, be they cultural, social, economic. On the website of the UN sustainable development goals, on the 1st goal is written "Economic growth must be inclusive to provide sustainable jobs and promote equality".

Therefore, the intention to broaden the concept of poverty is clear, including the possibility of access to fair working conditions that restore value to the individual, to have a decent quality of life and equal opportunities for professional growth; moreover, this approach lays the foundations for interweaving social relationships that are not discriminatory, but which on the contrary can offer a stimulating, creative, fervent social and cultural context, where one can have exchanges between people with different cultures and backgrounds.

The result will be the achievement of cultural richness as opposed to poverty and social marginalization. The challenge therefore is to

understand which primary bodies and services are currently accessible to all and how to make them so. Only by finding answers to these questions can a truly inclusive society be built.

The social distancing to which we have been forced by Covid-19 has not helped the fight against social exclusion and the propaganda for a more inclusive society, but the new call for the "decade of action" seems to promise a renewed commitment by all member states to the 2030 agenda.

Goal 3 - Good health and well-being: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

This goal is one of the most ambitious to pursue, especially due to the enormous differences in health conditions existing between acceding countries.

Ensuring a good and healthy quality of life for all at all ages is an indispensable condition for defining an inclusive society and for ensuring respect for fundamental human rights.

An inclusive society must be able to recognize its vulnerabilities and work towards resolving them in a way that guarantees all its members equal rights and the same level of protection.

Protection not intended only as protection from criminal acts, but more generally as environmental, social and health security. Having access to medical assistance and health care may seem obvious conditions, while in many countries it's a privilege of a few.

Before the outbreak of the pandemic, already several years ago, actions had been taken in the direction of maternity protection, neonatal and pediatric vaccination prophylaxis, prophylaxis for tuberculosis, malaria, Ebola, treatments of chronic or viral diseases, prevention from the abuse of drugs or alcohol, (target from 3.1 to 3.5). Actions that bode well to be on the right path. Unfortunately, looking at the most recent events and analyzing how the pandemic was managed in the various countries around the world, there is still a lot of work to be done.

While China managed to build hospitals in 10 days, Mediterranean countries found themselves with saturated ICUs and a shortage of health personnel, Northern European countries closed everything for almost a year, hoping to eliminate every possible risk (was it necessary?) and developing countries were struggling with peak

infections, lack of protective equipment and precarious hygienic conditions.

Such a large gap requires not only a "good policy" of recovery and the provision of financial support funds, but also a management team that is able to develop a capillary plan of interventions, articulated with short and long deadlines, which follows a strategy that can be adapted over time depending on the occurrence of new problems or unexpected conditions (such as the pandemic). In a nutshell, to ensure health and well-being for all members of society it is important to anticipate, to understand that it is no longer possible to think about repeating a lock down in the event of a new pandemic; it is rather urgent to find different solutions, creative, technological and within everyone's reach.

Goal 4 – Quality education: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Good communication is the basis of any social relationship; To be solid, an inclusive society must ensure that all its members are able to understand each other without misunderstandings, which can then lead to episodes of racial violence. Unfortunately, however, the linguistic difference is still a real limit, sometimes insurmountable, which prevents access even to basic information.

Ethnic minorities often find themselves interacting exclusively between groups to avoid being subjected to linguistic pressure. This is because, despite many countries, especially in Central and Northern Europe, offering free language and social integration courses (as we will see later, in the description of the political and social context of Belgium), the fear of being discriminated due to difficulties in communication or due to the level of school education, inhibits interaction with people from different ethnic backgrounds.

Better results are found in preschool or elementary schools, thanks to the natural predisposition of children to be welcoming and inclusive, combined with the ability to quickly learn.

Also in this field, the pandemic has created many difficulties, as is known, to which attempts have been made to respond with the use of information technology. Despite the efforts made, this technology is not yet accessible to everyone, so many children have suffered the complete interruption of their schooling programs.

Continuing with the intention of describing what defines an inclusive society and what are the characteristic elements, goals 5, 8 and 10 seem to be more relevant than others, as all three are part of the *"reduction of inequalities"* section:

Goal 5 - Gender equality: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, essential to promote social development and economic growth. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.

Goal 8 - Decent work and economic growth: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

Sustainable economic growth requires societies committed to create the conditions that allow everyone to have quality jobs.

The global crisis was already a serious threat to the occupational safety and health of workers and may increase the risk of child labor.

Nowadays, the current COVID-19 crisis has profoundly affected labor markets and workplaces, requiring their adaptation to emerging risk prevention measures. Those who failed to implement these transformations had to close their business, even in the face of lack of income. The direct consequence has been the loss of many jobs, on the one hand, but the creation of new opportunities, on the other.

In fact, the request for new professional figures has given the opportunity to activate courses for the acquisition of specific skills to be spent in those sectors in shortage of trained personnel.

Many companies, on the other hand, have focused a production sector on personal protective accessories and other devices such as gels and disinfectant wipes; other companies have transformed part of their working methods, passing for example from face-to-face to smart working.

Beyond individual initiatives, urgent policy measures are needed a)to support businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, b)to boost labor demand and preserve existing jobs, especially for the most vulnerable people, c)to achieve full and productive employment and decent work conditions for all women and men.

Goal 10 – Reduce inequalities: Reduce inequality within and among countries. To reduce inequalities, policies should be universal in principle, paying attention to the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized populations.

During the pandemic, in urban context social resilience was also manifested once again through the flourishing of innovative practices, as community buying groups, fundraisers to support economically more people and amateur psychological support groups, where ordinary people virtually gathered to exchange thoughts, concerns and hopes.

This testifies that social innovation does not have to be structured only in multi-year strategic action plans but can also take the form of creative practices of social solidarity, in which a collective need leads to the implementation of simple and direct solutions.

In conclusion, the debate on inclusive society, as we have seen, is contemporary, both because it is one of the 3 main topics of sustainable development, and because it is necessary to recalibrate a society that seems to be doing everything to self-destruct.

It is essential not only to rediscover a dimension of sustainability that concerns the individual in its various aspects, balancing work and free time, but also to reconstruct shared social values that contrast hatred and violence and stimulate love for one's neighbor and peace between communities.

The 2030 Agenda wanted to set goals in this direction, but unfortunately many countries, especially those in the developing world, are still far from achieving them.

Certainly, the health crisis from Covid-19 has not helped and is still not facilitating the recovery, as it has pushed a change of priorities and at the same time a reduction in timing. We have gone from planning long-term policies to trying to heal emergencies with unrehearsed actions.

Consequently, if the pre-pandemic problems on sustainable development and social inclusion were complicated by a global inequality in the distribution and access to resources, now, the damage caused by the covid must be added.

The major effects of the pandemic are already visible: further slowdowns and inefficiencies in the health sector; drastic economic

stoppages in every sector, tourism, cultural, commercial, manufacturing, etc, with enormous damage especially to small and medium-sized enterprises; consequent loss of millions of jobs and an exponential increase in the number of unemployed and the percentage of people below the poverty line.

“Everything we do during and after this crisis [COVID-19] must be with a strong focus on building more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies and societies that are more resilient in the face of pandemics, climate change, and the many other global challenges we face.” (António Guterres, Secretary-General, United Nations)

In this scenario, the role of those who work in policy-making and decision-making processes is to understand the impact on society of a certain strategy, in order to anticipate possible negative effects generated by it and redirect effectiveness through transversal interventions, in a logic of learning by doing.

Like all strategies that are based on a dynamic approach, social inclusion processes also develop in stages: in a first phase, the goal is to stimulate confrontation with the new and enhance culture diversity; in the second phase, the aim is to build that feeling of mutual trust which acts as a binder in the communities and helps to fight prejudices. The third phase will lead to a transformation of individual thinking, towards a collective mentality that is open and welcoming.

A good social inclusion policy must be able to look at cultural diversity not only as an opportunity to stimulate modern society to openness and curiosity, but also to accustom modern society to change and flexibility; moreover, its economic potential should not be underestimated, as regards the tourism and business sector.

Often the social “labelling” system used by the National Statistics Agencies leads us to interpret the population according to antithetical groups, man-woman, young-old, worker-unemployed, native-foreigner. This also conditions our personal understanding, as we unconsciously perceive the described system as the only means of interpreting reality.

1.3 Social inclusion to support culture diversity and to counteract segregation of multiethnic community

While it is still suitable for general data collection, it is no longer as useful when applied to new social patterns. In fact, looking at today's society, it is clear that there is no longer an exclusive membership to one or another group, but society has become so complex that traditional statistical indices must be transformed or replaced.

It is impossible to ignore that our societies are increasingly mixed and that the concept of *nationality* is no longer a sufficient parameter to provide an accurate description. Indeed, according to some studies, it is the extreme attachment to this concept of nationality that increases the distance between human beings and that fuels episodes of marginalization and racism. Today, to refer to the population of a certain country it would be more correct to use the term territoriality, meaning residing in a certain territory for a certain time, living the reality of a country not temporarily, but as part of one's daily life, therefore feeling at "home".

Developing the concept of territoriality would help to give strength to the definition of inclusive society, as it would stimulate us to look beyond the nationality of origin; the community therefore appears as a "unit", at a certain time and in a certain place, where everyone collaborates to ensure that the best possible conditions of life are achieved.

An inclusive society also means building bridges to unite rather than walls to divide, it means relaunching the value of solidarity and community, in which every person is unique and important and deserves respect, regardless of their nationality of origin.

1.4 How social innovative policies and practices are intertwined with public spaces

Social inclusion must start in the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood has to be perceived as the safe place between the house and the city, the projection of the city on a human scale, where the whole complexity of urban, social, cultural and economic dynamics can be faced and understood little by little. The neighbourhood should represent the place where everyone, regardless of their condition, old or young, poor or rich, man or woman, can feel confident to walk around. People should not only know each other, but also be able to recognize themselves as members of a diverse community, with different ethnic origins and different beliefs.

The neighborhood, as urban unit to set up observations and analysis, is the most effective scale to describe what are the existing dynamics of social inclusion, whether they start from the local communities (bottom up) or if they result from integration policies (top down). In this concept lives the value of “community”.

Looking at the structure of modern society in relation to the urban environment, the community can be described as an existing nucleus within a given spatiality, for example a neighborhood.

Not necessarily friends, but familiar faces, who with their individualities are part of a network of daily dynamics. Each member, respecting the other, its culture and its diversity, carries out tasks and interests, which can intersect with those of others and unite to achieve a common purpose. To be a community, however, it is not enough to live close to each other and exchange cordial greetings and smiles, or to find “convenient” strategies for achieving common interests. The community, especially when it comes to a multi-ethnic community, has very delicate balances and in order to exist it must be based on voluntary collaboration and participation in collective activities. Individual members must want to go beyond the barriers of diversity, they must want to create solid and shared values and bonds, they must be able to act in a forward-looking way, bringing in new members, for example people who have just moved to the neighborhood, guaranteeing renewal generational of the community and the

1.4.1 Ethnic coexisting: the central role of multiethnic neighbourhoods (and its public spaces) to achieve social inclusion

contribution of new creative energy. However, it should be noted that none of the members is obliged to remain "faithful" to the community forever.

The community, in fact, if it has the characteristic of being spatial, is also timeless, that is, it lasts as long as interaction between individuals exist, as long as members have desire, strength and resources to continue being a community.

Several research show that neighbourhood characteristics can have positive or negative effects on people's behaviour.

Psychological studies have shown that happy people who are satisfied with their quality of life are also healthier, more creative, more tolerant and have an open mind.

To put it simply, those who suffer less feel less anger towards others. On the contrary, living in a disadvantaged neighborhood means experiencing poverty, deprivation, inequality, segregation; all circumstances that push the inhabitants to develop a certain level of anger. The outcome of this anger can lead to the development of bad habits and behavioral disorders: depression, alcoholic disorder, smoking abuse, etc; moreover, it can also affect the ability to establish interpersonal relationships and with the surrounding environment, with consequent asocial behavior.

Feeling good in the place of living helps to "get out" of the comfort zone of the neighborhood and open up to the city, to face the difficulties of life with greater courage and determination. The same difficulties can be insurmountable if the context in which one lives generates malaise, anxiety and weakness.

The way our cities continue to grow is leading us more and more towards the urban model of the Megalopolis. That is, a city in which the number of inhabitants exceeds 10 million (New York, Cairo, San Paolo, Tokyo are just a few examples) and in which the perception of the urban perimeter as a finite physical place is not an applicable concept.

According to the UN report, The World's Cities in 2018, the cities that can be defined as megacities from 33 will become 43 by 2030, and will host 8.7% of the world population; but the growth projection is

1.5.2 Livability/right to the city: quality of space and relations, equal opportunities

not the most worrying figure. In fact, if we look at the conditions of degradation in which many urban areas of these megalopolises are found, it is natural to define them as "bipolar" cities, characterized by extremely rich urban districts and accessible only to a limited part of the population, and extremely poor peripheral districts, in which often there is even a lack of access to basic infrastructural services (electricity, drinking water, sewage, roads).

Furthermore, several studies highlight another serious problem that many cities are facing today, which is the insufficient supply of decent housing at an affordable price, especially for families with low or zero income. As early as 2014, the report published by the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) read as follows:

“Decent, affordable housing is fundamental to the health and well-being of people and to the smooth functioning of economies. Yet around the world, in developing and advanced economies alike, cities are struggling to meet that need. If current trends in urbanization and income growth persist, by 2025 the number of urban households that live in substandard housing—or are so financially stretched by housing costs that they forego other essentials, such as healthcare—could grow to 440 million, from 330 million. This could mean that the global affordable housing gap would affect one in three urban dwellers, about 1.6 billion people.”

Most of the time those who suffer the consequences are precisely the inhabitants of the disadvantaged neighborhoods, whom even if formally part of the city are effectively cut off from the services and comforts that the urban reality should offer.

To better define these “disadvantaged neighborhoods” we can refer to the literature, to the concept of Marginal Spaces, proposed by Madanipour (2004). In his numerous analyzes and descriptions of urban contexts, he pays special attention to the most disjointed, difficult, degraded areas of the city, wondering how they can be rehabilitated. Marginal public spaces can definitely be the place for the production of a new model, transforming the role of social housing neighbourhood from places of marginalization to proactive places, able to reinvent themselves according to the upcoming needs, where the main characteristics of the space are temporariness, heterogeneity flexibility. What Madanipour observes is primarily the heterogeneity and uniqueness of many of these suburbs, as they take the form that

the residents give them through repeating the actions of their daily life. And he goes on to argue that it is precisely in this uniqueness that the key to their relaunch must be sought.

Extroverted spaces, which enable local minorities to dialogue with each other and with the city, offering the same opportunities to all.

Public spaces built by communities and for communities, which become part of them as a part of home.

These spaces are therefore the place of meeting and socialization, the place of exchange and knowledge, where relationships of trust and community are built, where one learns to coexist all together by negotiating cultural and social diversities, they are the places where it represents a new model of a city, proactive, temporary, reversible, heterogeneous in which social commitment and commercial vocation, domestic and public places, free time and work are mixed.

To function, however, these spaces must have certain characteristics. First of all, the quality of the project, where by quality we mean the synthesis between aesthetic and perceptive aspects. At this point it seems necessary to open a parenthesis and try to summarize the characteristics that give quality to a project.

A well-designed space must have a certain aesthetic value, it must be pleasant to stop by but also cross it with the eyes, it should be inspired and inspire by beauty.

Another fundamental parameter to keep in mind when designing a space is the perceptual aspect, often underestimated in many green projects. In fact, perceptual quality does not only mean designing a space in which noise and atmospheric pollution is contained and heat islands cut down. Perceptual comfort is also linked to visual comfort and the general sensation of physical and mental well-being.

It has been shown that in certain parks, even on a small scale, where lighting is poor or where blind areas are created along the route, users experience a state of latent tension and fear, even though there is no real danger. Likewise, places where there is not a sufficient level of thermal comfort tend to be avoided, for example if they are too exposed to wind or too sunny; as well as spaces where visual well-being is lost due to incorrect colour choices or unsuitable materials (eg reflective surfaces) that cause glare or optical disturbances.

The function that a particular space plays is also part of the physical and mental well-being: recreational, contemplative, playful, equipped for sport, relaxation or activities with pets.

Many research studying public space in an urban environment show that places where the type of function is not clear or that do not offer any service tend to be abandoned, becoming meaningless urban voids. Or they are reinterpreted and torn from degradation, through processes of appropriation by local communities.

What has been said so far, leads us to conclude the speech with a final reflection: the public administrations, responsible for the development plans and aware of the existing investments in social housing estate, should ensure that they do not favour the interests of construction companies; rather they should be guarantors of giving back to the community a quality project, wherever it is carried out.

A wise urban administration should think about the best way to give voice to citizens and their needs and not let capitalism guide the choices, deciding lifestyles and designing the shape of our cities according to the logic of maximum profit.

We live in a clearly globalized era, in which multi-ethnic communities are regularly a solid component of the social structure and the coexistence of Eastern and Western cultures is found in religious and spiritual practices, in food, in medicine, in the interior and external design.

Speaking today of *cultural identity* as an element of belonging to this or that group is anachronistic, as the concepts of "culture mixing" and "culture diversity" have fully entered our everyday language.

In the following paragraph we will see that this mix is also reflected in our cities, in the use of spaces, in the urban form, in social and economic dynamics. Starting from the observation and reading of certain multi-ethnic dominated neighbourhoods, we will try to reflect on when it is correct to speak of ghetto and when of cultural diversity.

The story of the urban realities presented here is the result of the author's direct experience, who reserves the right to report personal observations without claiming to define urban typologies.

1.5 The *cultural shape*: the multiethnic footprint on our cities

Anyone who lives or has lived in the "Capital" (Rome) even for a short period, will have clashed with the reality of the Indian day & night shops, known in Roman dialect as "Bangla". This word, in fact, identifies those commercial activities managed for the most part by members of the Bangladeshi community, where it is possible to find necessities, tobacco, frozen products, canned or dry products, alcoholic beverages. The real innovation is given by their opening hours, extended up to 2 or 3 at night, which has made them particularly popular among nightlife lovers. In reality, their presence in the neighbourhood has a further advantage, much more relevant, namely that of guaranteeing a continuous "night movement", and therefore creating a possible deterrent for petty crime.

However, this specificity makes them more exposed to robberies and racial violence, also due to lack of security services. While not entering the subject here, it is fair to point out that the problem is not to be underestimated.

In certain urban contexts these small entrepreneurial activities have triggered the reactivation of a neighbourhood vitality, bringing young people back to frequent the area in which they live, rather than moving to the more known and distant meeting places.

We can therefore say that on the one hand they have unknowingly activated a process of urban, economic and social regeneration, on the other hand they have pushed the inhabitants to deal with "diversity", with the foreigners, to get to know their culture, traditions and cuisine, to the point of considering it an integral part of the community.

The presence of young people stimulates the interest of another category of investors, with a greater availability of capital than *Banglas*. The new entrepreneurs, recognizing the potential of the process underway, ride the trend by investing a part of capital, aware of grabbing their share of the market. Thus, began to arise bistros, concept stores, literary cafes, veganshops, and everything that can attract the outsider public that moves the local economy.

The next step will be the advancement of the real estate market. These neighbourhoods, which are often also in strategic positions, can be reborn as residential complexes for young couples, workers, students, who love small spaces that require little "maintenance", frugal, bohemian, perfect for temporarily hosting pieces of life.

The example described can therefore be part of a virtuous case of cultural mixing and culture shape, but the effects are not always positive.

Turning our gaze to the Brazilian reality, in fact, the situation changes considerably. There is Brazil, and then there is São Paulo, where ethnic minorities take over the native population, alienating themselves in the urban context.

São Paulo, with a total of over 12 million legally registered inhabitants (with at least another two million “illegal” residents) is one of the largest and most diverse megalopolises in the world. Arriving in São Paulo, the immediate perception is to feel overwhelmed, everything is huge: the airport, the streets, the sidewalks, the buildings, the parks. Neighbourhoods that could easily be towns in their own and that in some cases become so.

This is the case of the Japanese and Chinese districts, both marked by two large "doors" in style, which clearly highlight not only the cultural dominance, but also the existence of precise rules, to which those who enter must comply. Crossing these portals, which have become tourist attractions of international fame, just like a real stargate you are projected into the oriental world: nothing speaks more of samba, of *feijao preto com arroz*, of *cafezinho*, of *milho*.

These urban areas are not very welcoming towards travellers, on the contrary, there is almost a certain snobbery, or rather annoyance. The tourist is often seen as an intruder, someone who comes to peek, to appropriate a piece of their culture, to re-propose it in an altered way in another place. It should be remembered that oriental populations by nature are very conservative and, in some cases, have a "hostile" attitude towards Western cultures.

The city, in this case, is defeated, because, despite the heterogeneity, the colours and the scents, there is no cultural engagement between the communities; they all live together but at the same time separate and this separation must remain clear. The same situation can also be found in other large cities, such as the emblematic China Town district of New York. Nonetheless, both realities described above continue to attract the attention of those visiting these cities.

The situation is different for Antwerp, where the Chinese community, strongly present, has struggled over the years to carve out a niche and to obtain social recognition. In fact, it has only recently fully obtained

its place within the Belgian community, which has finally "surrendered" to cultural mixing. Currently, in Belgium, the Chinese community is so integrated that it even organizes various events for the dissemination and knowledge of its culture, from the Chinese New Year, the best known, to exhibitions on oriental culture, thematic short film festivals and street food events.

The exchange between the two cultures generates something unexpected, rich, abundant, which reflects an open-minded, hospitable city, where the rules of lifestyle vary according to their own cultures, where everyone can feel at their place; public space is no longer composed only of parks, gardens and squares, but becomes one with the environment, a place where communities feel free to express themselves.

What has been described recalls the theory of disorder design enunciated by Sennet and re-proposed by Pablo Sendra (2016), who strengthens its foundation in his writings by describing examples of practical application.

If the whole space can be modified by the individual and by the community, if streets, rows of trees alternating with street lamps, are no longer just elements of a spatial composition but metaphorically become the scenography of our relationships, innovation in the designer's task is to stimulate users' creativity: the use of a type of flooring can arouse a certain reaction rather than another when passing by, the choice of a bench with an unconventional shape and texture can lead to a visual and tactile relationship with that object . In summary, leaving room for disorder, chaos, spontaneity, witnessing the personal interpretation of the man who lives the city and relates to objects in space. If we apply what has been said in a multicultural context, the possibility of a panorama of unexpected and creative uses opens up. Indeed, the interpretations will be partly influenced by the cultural background of the different ethnic groups.

The urban public space is reborn, the street becomes a direct extension of it, as well as the facades of the buildings, an expression for works of street art, which once again speak of cultural richness in diversity.

CHAPTER II
Methodological chapter:
Data collection, methods and research tools

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Methodological chapter: Data collection, methods and research tools

As already stated in the previous chapter and in the introduction, the theme of public space as a place to convey social inclusion actions is very much alive in the scientific panorama, and explored under various aspects, from that of physical and mental well-being (which is deepened then in the theme of mental health and the inclusion of people with psychiatric problems), to that of the elderly and young adolescents, to finally arrive, not least, at the object of this study, that is the social inclusion of migrants and people with a migratory background.

The starting point of this work is the recognition of the fundamental role that public space has in the processes of social inclusion of multi-ethnic communities. Given this as a basis, the investigation aims to understand how urban policies of social inclusion: 1) encourage the relationship between public space and the community and 2) support the bottom-up actions of groups of citizens or small local associations, with the aim of promoting relationship between natives and migrants to live peacefully together; 3) they can be (such policies) more incisive and sustainable if they use public space as a setting for their implementation. In other words, ensuring that urban policies and bottom-up actions are in a virtuous relationship with the public space, in which the improvement of one draws strength and benefits the other.

To do this, Social Innovation (SI) will be used as the theoretical basis for the conceptual structure.

A first analysis will focus on the study and understanding of existing policies, verifying whether they can be effectively defined as innovative or not and why they can lead to different results, despite being applied in the same socio-cultural contexts.

A second step will focus on the analysis of citizenship participation, which innovative actions are implemented to stimulate participation, aiming at understanding why in certain contexts it is more active than

2.1 Introduction: approaching to the research

others and to what extent the reference urban context has responsibility in favouring or limiting such participation.

The third step will aim at identifying and analyzing suburban neighbourhoods with multi-ethnic dominance, generally emerging from social housing projects. It will start from the observation of social dynamics within the public space, to the identification of the possible needs of the individual categories, to finish with the explanation of how SI can come to the aid of local communities to respond to different needs, putting in place motion innovative actions in support of the most fragile members.

The initial idea is to describe the state of art of those Madanipourian *marginal spaces*, understand the meaning they currently have, and then focus on what new meanings they could have. For example, thinking about how social innovation actions could transform them into pivotal places, capable of bringing centrality to the periphery.

We will look at the aesthetic qualities, the presence/absence of services and which are available for free, imagining public space as a "refuge", a place in which to no longer be "victims", under attack, but in which to recognize oneself and the others, despite diversity. SI aimed at negotiating diversity and creating shared values.

Until last year, many scholars described public space as one of the main places to promote actions to combat racism and social exclusion, a container of activities for everyone. Today, due to the spread of the pandemic, it has acquired even more relevance; now, in addition, we are wondering how to make public space not only free from social discrimination but also from "social contamination". Once again, in the history of human evolution, it is necessary to resort to new adaptation strategies.

The spread of covid-19 has forced us to transform our relationship with the public space, as individuals and as a community. The innovative challenge was, and still is, to find new possible "spaces" in which to consequently propose new possible uses through innovative practices.

In line with what has been said so far, this work aims to be an attempt to look at, understand and describe these new possible uses, born from cultural contamination, from personal creativity, from the reaction to an unexpected situation, in short, from innovative practices. Just as it is true that normally spaces and functions must be defined and clearly

identified, it is equally true that in the "disorder", the unplanned and the unexpected, the most interesting and innovative dynamics and uses develop (Sennett).

This work is the result of a mixed methodology, which involves the use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches for the collection and analysis of data (literature reviews, interviews, surveys, case studies). In the following paragraphs a brief explanation of each step and method will be outlined, with the data extracted from each of them.

2.2 Mixed-methods approach

The methodological scheme

Essence: the real question, the hypothesis that we want to prove to be real, existing: Is it demonstrable that public space helps the processes of social inclusion in neighborhoods with multi-ethnic communities?

ONTOLOGICAL QUESTION

Knowledge: If the hypothesized assumption exists, it is possible to know it. Examples, known data can help to give substance to the hypothesis: examples of actions that took place in public space (librino, people's park, regeneration of degraded or abandoned public spaces, through community activities, bottom-up initiatives or with public-private partnerships, social entrepreneurship,)

EPISTEMIOLOGICAL QUESTION

Method: How can the hypothesized reality be known?

- Direct observation, but not critical, without discriminating factors.
- Direct involvement of interested parties (on-site interviews with users, actions with the community, proposals for participation in information events ...)
- A posteriori observation, after deductive process, to prove hypotheses advanced in the first observation. In this passage the aim is to highlight salient features, uniqueness, unexpected actions, uses, actors.
- Action research experimentation.

METHODOLOGICAL QUESTION → HOW? Investigation tools and techniques.

Results obtained and other possible results:

- Quantitative part: depending on factors x, y, z ... (or rather, size and type of space examined, type of neighbourhood, dominant ethnic group, type of city (medium-large, small), area (center, suburbs, node/centrality).
- Qualitative part: understanding of the subjects involved, through individual interviews. This step serves to avoid falling into standardization processes, enhancing the singularity of the cases encountered, which vary according to the interests and needs of individual users.
- Presentation of the results: Part in TABLES (quantitative) part in a narrative perspective, extracts from interviews or texts (qualitative).

Methodological approach: Collecting data

To develop this work, the preliminary operation was a collection of information from the various institutional sites, both informative and statistical databases. This first step was used to know the evolution of the population over time, what were the trends of migratory flows in the last 20 years and to understand if particular phenomena had occurred that could have affected the current situation. In other words, an investigative / exploratory phase. In addition to the consultation of the database, the bibliographic research of ethnographic studies conducted in recent years has had ample space, in order to obtain an overview of the current population. Subsequently, the comparison and processing of the various static, bibliographic and historical data led to a better definition of the general framework on the Belgian population and on the Flemish region in particular.

Once these steps were completed, we proceeded with the selection of the two case studies. As anticipated at the beginning, the two case studies chosen are the result of a series of considerations made before and after the field tris.

In a first hypothesis it was thought to study a single case study, which was the Borgerhout district of Antwerp, famous for its multi-ethnic mix and for the liveliness of the communities that inhabit it. The neighborhood is in fact an interesting laboratory in which many

2.3 The choice of case studies:

from idea to identification

"bottom-up experiments" are already underway. Moreover, Antwerp, in addition to being an extremely important city from a national and international economic point of view, is the seat of one of the most important centers of migration studies in the country, the CEMIS - Center for Migration and Intercultural Studies.⁶

And it is in the end precisely for all these peculiarities that it was thought it was appropriate to opt for a different reality, since using a case study with peculiar characteristics to explain a wide-ranging phenomenon could have been limiting and limited, that is, the results obtained could have been representative only for that specific reality. A second hypothesis could therefore have been to compare this reality to that of Mechelen, as Mechelen, given its reputation as the most inclusive city in Europe and with its urban diversity (compared to Antwerp), could have been an interesting case study, looking at the "metropolis" with one eye and the medium-sized city with the other. Mechelen, however, is always part of the province of Antwerp and therefore undergoes its influence. The risk, in this case, would have been that of having two case studies with realities so connected as to certainly jeopardize the critical reading of one of the two, despite the difference in the urban context.

The embryonic idea of the research was to find case studies that had social differences, so as to be able to compare them and understand why some things worked on one side and some others didn't. For all these reasons, the choice of the case studies was not easy and required several field trips between cities both in the Flemish and Wallonia regions, through which it was possible to understand similarities and differences between the two regions and between styles of life of the inhabitants, as well as morphology and urban context of each of them. In the face of multiple readings and news reports regarding the tendency of some extremist groups residing in Aalst to unleash violent episodes of racism, it was considered that the comparison between the latter and Mechelen could be extremely interesting, precisely because of the similarities of the two cities, but at the same time the huge differences.

⁶ CEMIS is an interdisciplinary research centre that has received national and international praise for its work. The centre conducts research as well as providing education and other academic services relating to migration, integration and intercultural themes in various social fields, including education, the labour market, welfare, family, health and law. For more information about the Cemis, please go to the official website: <https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/research-groups/cemis/>

Initially we started from a direct observation of the two cities, their public spaces, how they were configured within the urban fabric, who the users were and how they used the space, to understand if the space favoured the social relationship. or if the way it is designed leads to closure. Going deeper into the analysis, given the desire to return a broader reading of the urban setting, a second step was made aimed at identifying the subdivision of the neighbourhoods, the position with respect to the center and the easy / difficult accessibility, the presence of infrastructures and services accessible free of charge, which residential typologies were present and last but not least the dominant social context.

For the purposes of the research, two districts with multi-ethnic dominance were selected, where however there is still a significant presence of Belgian natives.

After various bibliographic searches, interviews with key personalities (referents of neighbourhood associations, representatives of urban social inclusion policies), the work continued with the analysis of the statistical data published by STATBEL, comparing them with those of the municipal site and with those related to individual neighbourhoods. We then proceeded to deepen the study of the historical development of the neighbourhoods and the projects that led to their current conformation, arriving at a final skimming, based on the following criteria:

- multiculturalism, not only understood in terms of ethnic diversity, but also in terms of age difference, thus looking for a neighbourhood where the social pattern was not composed exclusively of families, or students, or groups of the population with a minimum wage. A neighbourhood that was, in short, multi-ethnic but heterogeneous.
- Presence of public spaces and type: first of all it was necessary that there was a significant amount of public spaces and that it was close to the residential area of reference; secondly, that they were usable by everyone, open, easily accessible, free of charge, containing different activities, in other words, flexible spaces.
- Quality of the context, where, by context we mean both the project of the public space and the residential built space, as well as services and facilities, presence of neighbourhood associations, day centers, etc.

2.4 Analyzing neighbourhood dynamics: interaction in public space for a sustainable and harmonious community

Once the places were selected with the criteria listed above, the approach with the associations to involve in the project was structured, with the outline of an operational plan and collaboration agreements for the following months.

Unfortunately, due to Covid-19, the activities planned with the associations had to stop. It is hoped to be able to resume all the agreed initiatives as soon as possible and to be able to develop the “make me space” project in the near future, a practical application of the concepts theorized so far.

CHAPTER III

Case studies

CHAPTER III

Case studies

Introduction

On the following pages, we will first report a general description of the current situation in the Flemish region regarding social context, economic growth and long term policies for integration and inclusion; afterwards, we will explore the 4 mayor governmental bodies responsible of transforming policies into concrete actions (strategic plans): VDAB for what regard employment, OCMW for social services , *Kind en Gezin* for family and parenting support and *Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering* for adult education programs.

This macro analysis is necessary to understand the next step towards a detailed analysis of the two case studies. The first one is *Pennepoel* park and its surrounding areas, located in the neighbourhood Mechelen Noord, in the city of Mechelen, the second is in Aalst, named *Ten Rozen*, in the neighbourhood Aalst Rechteroever Periferie Noord. The selected areas are the result of two big social housing projects and, even if in different time (Ten Rozen was completed in 2019 and Pennepoel some years earlier), both have undergone a restyling of green areas and spaces for relationships, according to the action plan of urban regeneration promoted by the local administration.

Both cities can be portrayed as typical medium-size Belgian cities, very similar in urban morphology and structure, number of inhabitants and variety of ethnicities, social pattern. Despite this, the outcomes of the implemented policies for integration and inclusion have completely different impacts on social dynamics. The reason behind the choice of the two case studies is to find out what are the factors creating such a relevant difference, what makes one of the two cities very welcoming and open-minded and the other one less open to newcomers, more conservative and where often episodes of social tension are registered.

In this chapter it will be given an overview of the two cities, focusing further on local policies on social inclusion of migrants and people with migrant background, and the use of public spaces as a mean of promoting their implementation in multi-ethnic dominant contexts. It

will end with the analysis of the neighborhoods in which the research was carried out, reporting the gained insights.

The data presented here comes from the 2020 report by *Statistiek Vlaanderen*⁷, the statistical research institute of the Flemish region.

In the following, only the data relevant to research, i.e. population growth, economy and productivity, were taken into consideration in an attempt to outline a picture of the socio-economic context in Flanders.

As can be seen from the graph below, in 2020 in the Flemish region 6,010,000 with Belgian nationality and about 619,000 with foreign nationality were counted. This means that 1 out of 10 people are foreigners and 2 out of 3 of them have European (non-Belgian) nationality. In general, the number of foreign nationals in Flanders doubled between 2000 and 2020, from 4.9% in the previous two decades to the current 9.3%.

Population of foreign nationality
Flemish Region, 2000-2020, number of persons

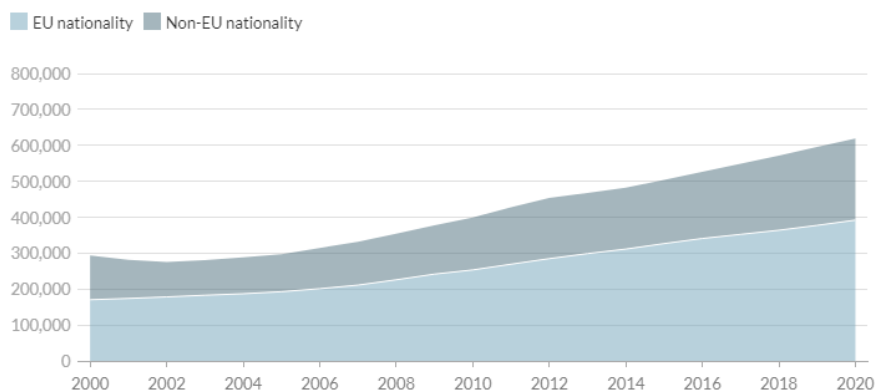


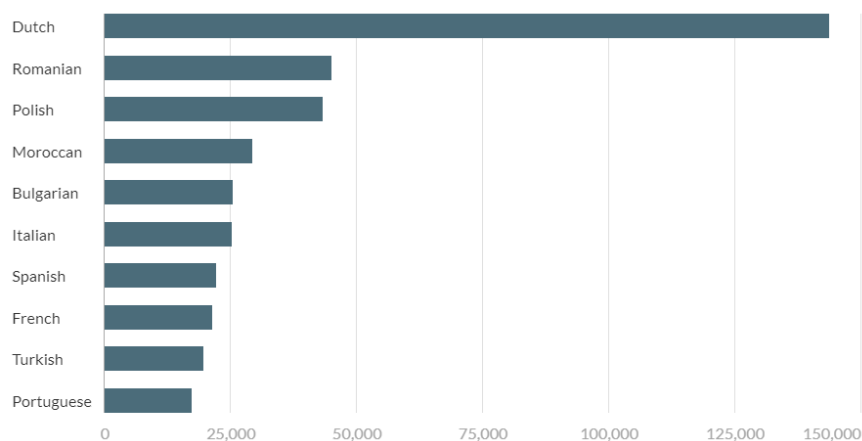
Fig.1: Increase of the foreign population in the Flemish region, from 2000 to 2020.

The most representative nationality is the Dutch one, which at the beginning of 2020 represented 144,000 people, or about 23% of the total number of foreigners.

⁷ For more information about statistics of Flemish region, see the website: <https://www.statistiekvlaanderen.be>

3.1 Current situation in the Flemish region: population, growth, economy, urban development

Romanians, Poles, Moroccans, Bulgarians, Italians, Spaniards and French follow. Turks and Portuguese complete the top 10.

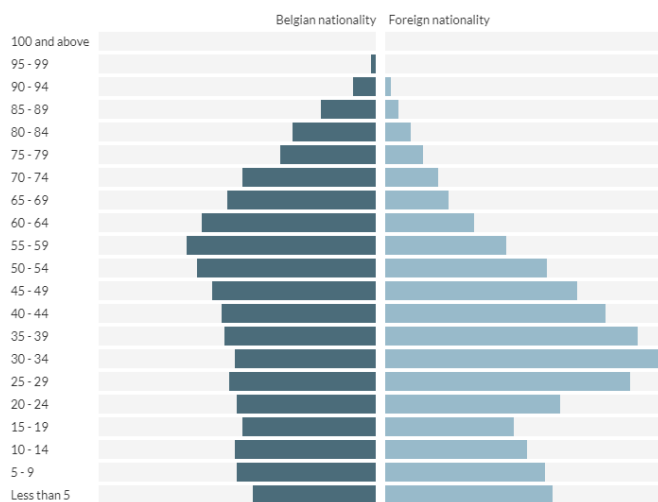


Source: Statbel, processed by Statistics Flanders

Fig.2: Foreign population in the Flemish region, by nationality.

The same report highlight, also, that the part of population with foreign nationality is younger than the Belgian part, especially in the age groups up to 9 years and from 20 to 49.

Age distribution by nationality group
Flemish Region, 2020, in %



Source: Statbel, processed by Statistics Flanders

Fig.3: Comparison, by age groups, between Belgian population and Foreign population in the Flemish region.

For many years, there was a positive balance of international migration from and to Flanders. Since 2001, the balance has risen sharply. In 2010, there was an adjustment in the counting methods, which resulted in a high positive balance for international migration

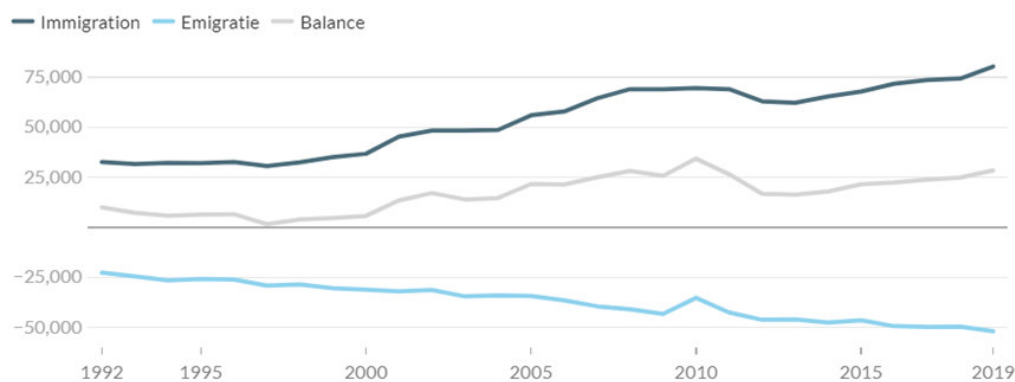
for that year (+34,396). Afterwards, the balance shrank to rise again from 2014 onwards.

In 2019, there were just over 80,000 immigrations from abroad and almost 52,000 emigrations to other countries. This resulted in a positive international migration balance of approximately 28,500 units, which contributed to the growth of the (legal) population of the Flemish Region.

During the last years, there has been an increase in both international immigrations and emigrations, which shows an increasing of international mobility.

International migration

Flemish Region, 1992 - 2019, number



Note: Break in time series from 2010 onwards.
Source: Statbel, processed by Statistics Flanders

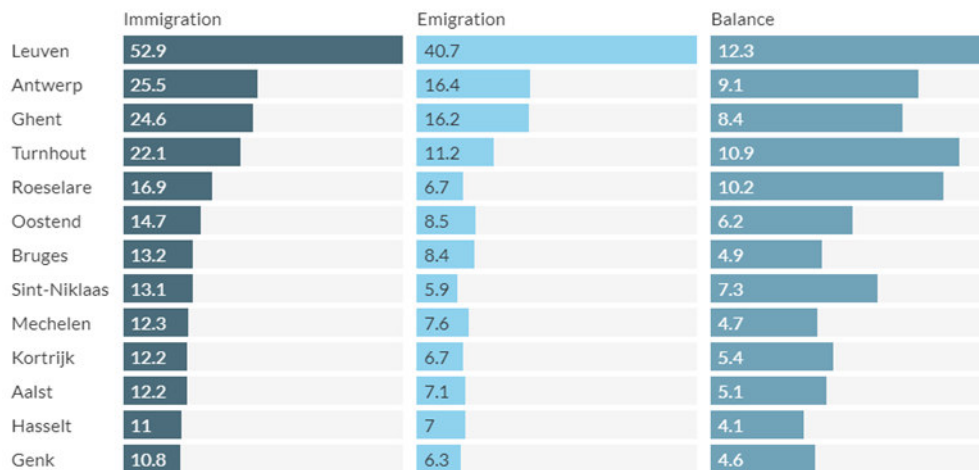
Fig.4: Comparison of the trend between immigration and emigration in the Flemish region.

Among the Flemish central cities, Leuven seems to be the most affected by migratory phenomenon, not only with a high positive balance for international migration but also with a high migration intensity. This parameter, which reflects the sum of all immigrations and emigrations, expressed per 1,000 inhabitants, shows that between 2017 and 2019 Leuven had an average migration intensity of 91 units per 1,000 inhabitants per year.

For Antwerp and Ghent (around 40 units per 1,000 inhabitants), as well as for Turnhout (34) migration intensity is still high. Lower values are noted for the other central cities (around 20).

International immigration, emigration and balance

Flemish central cities, 2017-2019, average number per 1,000 inhabitants/year



Source: Statbel, processed by Statistics Flanders

Fig.5: Comparison of the average migration intensity in the Flemish central cities

Between 2004 and 2007, economic growth improved, with real growth of 4.2% of Flemish gross domestic product (GDP) in 2007. At the end of 2008, due to the financial and economic crisis, there was a growth halt, which turned into an economic recession in 2009, with negative real growth (-1.8%). This was followed by a partial recovery in 2010 and 2011, but due to the debt and euro crisis, economic growth did not see a real surge in the following years; in 2019, due to the weakening of the international context, it was even lower than in 2018.

In 2020, after the outbreak of the Covid-19 crisis, in Flanders Real economic growth has suffered a severe collapse with an estimate of -11.1%. Never before had such a significant loss been recorded and even if the trends for 2021 show a current recovery, with an estimated growth of + 8.6%, the figure is still not higher than the loss.

Real economic growth

Flemish Region, 2003-2021, in %



Source: HERMREG-FPB, BISA, IWEPS, SV 2020, processed by Statistics Flanders

Fig.6: Trend of the real economic growth in the Flemish region

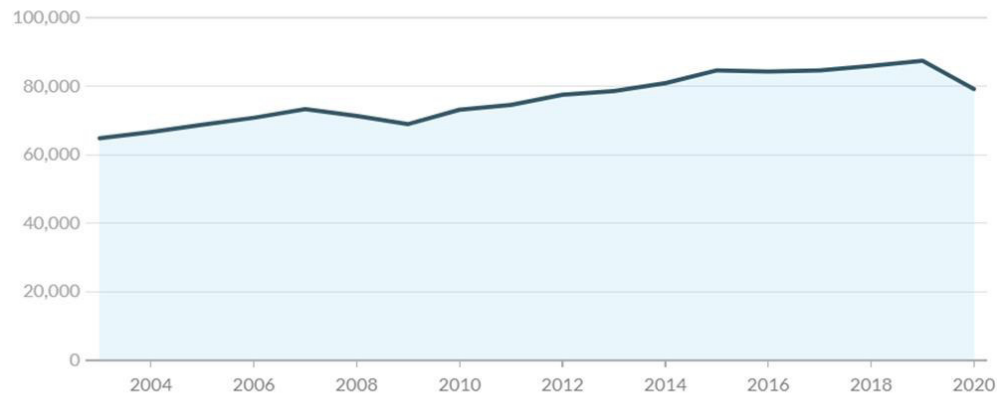
The Covid-19 crisis has also had an important impact on production activity and consequently on the working sector. In fact, in 2020, labour productivity in the Flemish region was estimated at 79,200 euro standard purchasing power (PPS).

Looking at the same data between 2003 and 2007, we can see that labour productivity has always increased, becoming an important component of real Flemish economic growth. The economic crisis that occurred between 2008 and 2009 caused a decline in this productivity, which then recovered in 2010 and also increased throughout 2011. From 2015 to 2019, the increase in employment was clearly the most important component for the real economic growth of the Flemish Region.

The strong recession of 2020 is visible in the significant contraction in labour productivity, due to the decline in gross domestic product, which is however estimated to rise in 2021. Labour productivity is also expected to recover to a large extent this year. but it will not lead to improvements in the employment sector, where jobs are expected to decline further.

Labour productivity

Flemish Region, 2003-2020, in euro PPS



Source: HERMREG-FPB, BISA, IWEPS, SV 2209, processed by Statistics Flanders

Fig.7: Trend of the labour productivity in the Flemish region

Several studies report that the most significant urban realities in the Flemish region, considering the services hosted, the international connections (commercial, economic, political and transport), and the relevance on the country's productivity, are exclusively three: Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent.

All the other cities, regardless of their size and their form of urbanization, are included in a second group, formed by 11 so defined regional cities, which are: Leuven, Mechelen, Turnhout, Hasselt, Genk, Aalst, Oostende, Bruges, Kortrijk, Rotselaar and Sint Niklaas.

From personal studies and field research conducted, however, it is believed that this partition does not reflect reality, as it does not seem to consider the meaning that each of these cities, in a different way, has assumed at national level, under the socio-economic, touristic, scientific aspects. Unfortunately, it will not be possible to cover here the matter. Instead, what will be discussed in this chapter are the reasons that led to the choice of the case studies presented, Mechelen and Aalst, what are the points of contact and how they differ and ultimately why they are relevant to the research.

To be included into a society means to have same rights, same opportunities and same quality of life. If one of these aspects is missing, then it will start a slow process of marginalization that will end with social exclusion. On April 3, 2020, the Flemish Government approved the *Flemish Reform Program 2020* (VHP 2020, acronymous for *Vlaams Hervormingsprogramma*)⁸. It is the tenth reform program drawn up by the Flemish Government and the first by the Flemish Government Jambon. As reported in the VHP 2020, in 2009, the percentage of people living in conditions of poverty and social exclusion in Flanders was 11.8%, significantly lower than that of the EU-27 (16.3%) and Belgium (14.6%); nevertheless, several EU countries have a much better score. Unfortunately, discrimination against the disabled, low skilled workers, the elderly and immigrants has not yet been eliminated. Another difficult problem facing the Flemish administration is the lack (and unequal distribution) of social housing, both for rent and for sale, as well as a lack of land for sale, and limited availability of land available for construction of social housing. The VHP 2020 provided an integrated strategy to prevent social exclusion and make accessible social assistance, health and welfare, employment support to the most vulnerable groups and to guarantee an adequate income, in line with one of the aims of the Agenda2030, to fight poverty. These policies are not directly tailed for migrants or people with migrant background, but as part of the Belgian society, they are entitled to benefit from them.

In the Belgian report “*Assessment of the implementation of the European Commission Recommendation on Active Inclusion*”⁹ (2012) were mentioned the three pillars of the active inclusion approach, operating on the fundamental aspects of social inclusion:

- adequate income support
- inclusive labour markets
- access to quality services

⁸ The official version of the FRP (in Dutch) was adopted by the Government of Flanders on 3 April 2020 and can be consulted at <https://www.flandersineu.be/nl/vlaams-hervormingsprogramma-2020>

⁹ Members of the European Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion were asked to prepare country reports on the implementation of this Recommendation in their Member State (MS). Finalised in the summer of 2012, their reports were in particular intended to contribute to the Commission’s assessment of the Recommendation’s implementation. This assessment has now been published by the Commission as part of its “*Social Investment Package*” issued on 20 February 2013.

3.2 The Flemish Reform Program Europe 2020: Integration and Inclusion Policies at Regional level

In this system, the innovation lies in the transition from assistance-type support to active help, which aims to make the person independent. Such a change of strategy, even if initially it requires a great effort and expenditure of energy, is more sustainable in a long-term perspective; in fact, on the one hand, the user receives financial support, necessary to guarantee him a decent quality of life and prevent him from falling into poverty and social isolation; at the same time, on the other hand, he is stimulated to transform his position from passive to productive, through access to basic social services, such as medical care, transport, education and programs aimed at entering the world of work.

However, to find an answer on the real level of inclusion of migrants and people with a migratory background in society, it is necessary to look closely at their everyday life, to understand who is entitled to access quality services, such as housing, childcare, healthcare and networking, and to what extent these services meet their needs.

As shown by the survey of 'Kind & Gezin' (Child & Family), in the Flemish Community childcare services tend to be little used among ethnic minority families, households living below the poverty line and alone parent families (Meulders et al., 2008).

To explain this, two hypotheses can be suggested:

A) the interested parties do not have the tools to understand and start the request procedure, nor do they know where to ask for information about it.

B) Being already in a condition of "numerical disadvantage" they are more exposed to attacks, therefore they prefer not to show weaknesses among the members of the native population, choosing to ask for help directly from friends and /or relatives.

What has just been said, guides us towards reflection: To fight poverty and social exclusion it is not enough simply to want it, have a good action plan or create funds to support those in difficulty; a strong organization and cooperation between the different levels of governance, national, interregional, regional and local, is necessary, which is not however bound to this pyramidal structure.

The Belgian Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion EU 2020 (BPAPSE)¹⁰ gathers all players involved in the fight against poverty in the Belgian context: representatives of national and subnational administrations, civil society, social partners and academics.

One of the main objectives is the decentralization of powers from the national level to the level of the Regions and Communities, to allow easier and quicker coordination of the various actions and to direct the energies where it is most urgent to intervene.

In fact, in some sectors the Government deals exclusively with setting the guidelines of the policies, leaving the implementation part to the federal bodies, which, individually or in synergy, can propose strategies aimed at solving problems specifically related to their social economic and economic reality urban. In this way, these entities become solely responsible for the effectiveness of the policies and actions promoted.

Today the Flemish administration is investing heavily in subsidized employment for the unemployed, on average more than the rest of Europe. However, of the total budget to be invested in vocational training and career guidance, only 20% is already active, a percentage well below the European average of 40%.

In the Federal Plan for Poverty Reduction is central the urgency to open a dialogue with associations and institutes who represent the needs and concerns of people living in poverty. This plan is made to provide structural support to those associations that aim to give voice to the most vulnerable groups. A similar strategy is already in action on the regional level, where the Flemish Network Against Poverty (*Netwerk tegen Armoede - NtA*)¹¹ operates.

In the final part of the report, for the three pillars of active inclusion, priority action points are listed, as follows:

1) Priority actions related to adequate income support (first pillar):

- Bring the minimum standard of social benefits to the European at-risk-of-poverty threshold.

¹⁰ The BPAPSE was found to be an important initiative that has been successful in involving a wide range of stakeholders, especially from the different regions and from civil society, including people experiencing poverty. It has also proved an important source of information and awareness-raising about EU social inclusion processes

¹¹ A network composed by 58 associations working together to give voice to people living in poverty, with the ultimate goal of eradicating poverty. More information at <https://www.netwerktegenarmoede.be/nl>

- Strengthen the Federal Government's financial interventions on the minimum wage, in order to smooth out the differences in financial capacity between municipalities.

2) Priority actions related to inclusive labor markets (second pillar):

- Promote the participation of people very distant from the labor market, supporting the social economy as a gateway to inclusion and social integration.
- Introduce additional measures aimed at reaching people with the lowest incomes instead of focusing on short-term results.

3) Priority actions relating to access to quality services (third pillar):

- Activate the automatic granting of social security services for those most difficult cases.
- Strengthen the rental allowance system in order to increase uniformity between the services provided.

The current COVID-19 crisis has profoundly affected labor markets and workplaces, requiring their adaptation to emerging risk prevention measures. Those who failed to implement these transformations had to close their business, even in the face of lack of income. The direct consequence has been the loss of many jobs, on the one hand, but the creation of new opportunities, on the other. In fact, the request for new professional figures has given the opportunity to activate courses for the acquisition of specific skills to be spent in those sectors in shortage of trained personnel.

Many companies, on the other hand, have focused a production sector on personal protective accessories and other devices such as gels and disinfectant wipes; other companies have transformed part of their working methods, passing for example from face-to-face to smart working.

Social resilience was also manifested once again through the flourishing of community buying groups, fundraisers to support economically more people and amateur psychological support groups, where ordinary people virtually gathered to exchange thoughts, concerns and hopes. This testifies that social innovation must not only be sought in multi-year strategic action plans, but can also take the

form of creative practices of social solidarity, in which a collective need leads to the implementation of simple and direct solutions.

In the Belgian constitution it is written that everyone has the right to a decent life. To count on good education, a quality job, a safe and healthy home, a livable environment, are all fundamental rights that each member of our society should have for granted. Unfortunately, as it is known, the reality is different and there are still a lot of people who are deprived of these fundamental rights.

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the Flemish region is following a broad action plan, based on the SDG of the Agenda2030, aiming to fight poverty and social exclusion, to guarantee equal opportunities and to foster social cohesion.

This plan has identified four main areas of action, for which four government bodies have been established respectively: VDAB for what concern labour market, OCMW for social services, The Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering for all the issue on education and social orientation, VMSW and Samenlevingsopbouw for housing¹².

3.3 Labour market, social services, education, housing: what is “affordable”?

VDAB¹³ acronym for *Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding*, is the public employment service of Flanders. Scope of this body is to help people finding a job according to their level of education and their skills, but also to provide training courses to improve personal skill and to offer work trajectories, stage, etc.

The official language is Dutch, which, considering the service it proposes to offer, it can be seen as a weak point. In fact, anyone arriving in Belgium, unless they come from the Netherlands, has no minimum knowledge of Dutch language. This often makes

3.3.1 VDAB and its services to help foreigners entering the labour market

¹² Disclaimer: all the information here presented are extracted from the official website of each institution and automatically translated from Dutch to English. The author of this work has tried to remain as faithful as possible to the original content, however the translation may contain inadvertent stylistic or grammatical errors.

¹³ All the information here presented come from the official website. To know more, please surf on <https://www.vdab.be>

communication between employees and users who would like to use the service impossible. Its website has a very intuitive interface, allowing even people who have not so much experience with browsers and internet, to surf and find basic information easily. The policy behind this is to make those who move to Belgium the earliest possible active member of society and get at least a minimum wage.

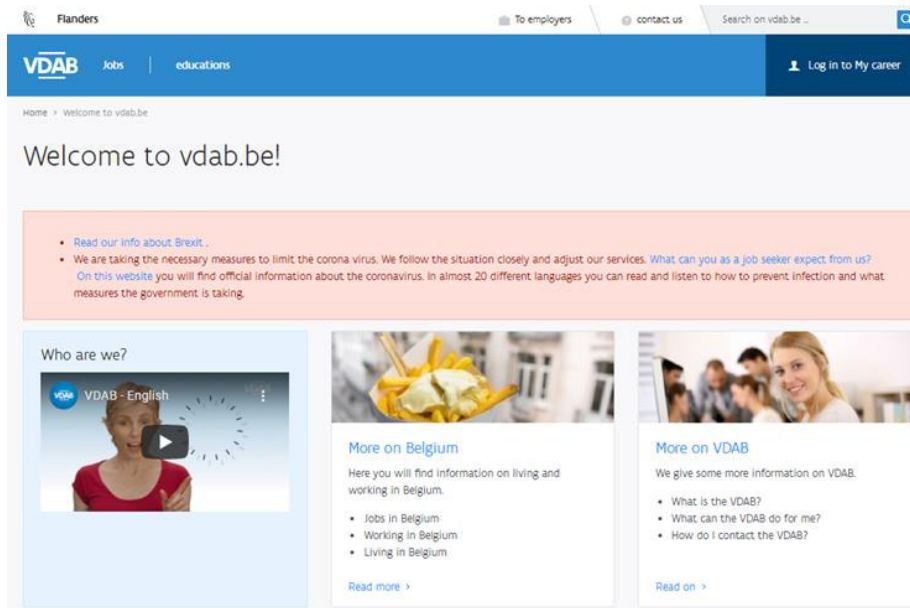


Fig.1: home page of VDAB website

To access to all the services, a registration is required; the registration is possible only with a national register number, which for instance in case of undocumented people in the process to get their visa, they will not have it. In other words, to enter in VDAB system, the pre-requisite indeed is to be allowed to live and work in Belgium. This can be another critical point to solve.

In case the person meets all the required parameter, then VDAB can help him to face different issues:

- Find the best job position among thousands of job offers, according with personal skills.
- Publish CV on vtab.be for employers to read it and contact you.
- Ask for a personal consultant to receive guidance and suggestions.
- Participate in one of many training courses VDAB offer, to fill some lack in personal skills or to acquire new ones.

Also, unemployed people who meet the conditions (one of which is having paid taxes at least in the previous year, in addition to those mentioned above), are entitled to ask for unemployment benefits. It is the RVA who decides whether you will receive benefits.

In order to apply for unemployment benefit, users need to register as job seeker at the employment service in their own region. Once again, it is not really clear how it works for who comes from another country, especially if is a non-EU.

Everyone legally residing in Belgium is entitled to social assistance. Through its bodies the government provides resources to every person in need, to ensure living conditions that respond to human dignity. As reported on the Belgian Social Security website¹⁴, “The concept of “human dignity” has evolved over the years, but in today’s Belgian society it means at the very least that one can feed, dress, accommodate, groom and have access to health care.”

The OCMW, acronym for “*Openbaar Centrum voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn*”¹⁵, is one of the bodies that offer a wide range of social services and care, free of charges, for the well-being of every citizen. The support provided by this institution includes several sectors, as financial, psychosocial and other medical assistance. To give an example, people who have insufficient means of subsistence or even no permanent place of residence can receive social assistance from the OCMW.

However, as for VDAB, certain conditions apply in order to receive social assistance. Before granting social assistance, the OCMW therefore always conducts an examination of the applicant's means of subsistence. Depending on the person's individual or family situation, the OCMW evaluate which assistance is most suitable and then offers the appropriate resources to meet the needs of the person in question. Each city has its own OCMW, which gives support in the following sector: financial help, housing, medical assistance, home care, job creation, debt mediation, psychosocial help, legal advice, reception in

3.3.2 OCMW, the government agency responsible for social services

¹⁴ www.socialsecurity.be/citizen/nl/hulp-ocmw

¹⁵ which means Public Centre for Social Welfare, for more information visit the official website: https://www.belgium.be/nl/familie/sociale_steun/ocmw

social restaurants, guidance and financial assistance regarding energy supply, culture vouchers to promote social and cultural participation, and so on. As shown so far, the Belgian social security system is particularly extensive. Unfortunately, there are still visible gaps here and there to be filled, partly due to long bureaucracy, partly due to the language gap and cultural diversity, especially for migrants.

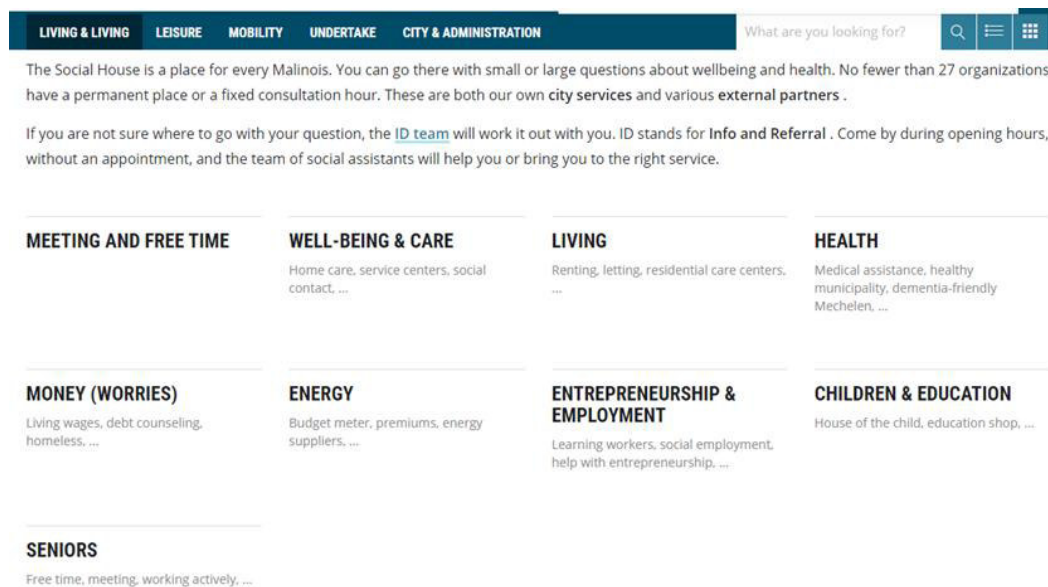


Fig.2.: home page of the OCMW website of the city of Mechelen¹⁶

¹⁶ <https://www.mechelen.be/sociaalhuis>

Another relevant reality in social services panorama is called *Kind en Gezin*¹⁷(Child and family), a branch of the main agency Opgroeien¹⁸. Here it is possible to find experts ready to give advises and guidance in different areas: nurses, family support workers, social workers, psychologist, volunteers and doctors. Opgroeien recognizes, subsidizes and supports these professionals. Kind en Gezin also set up innovative projects to improve the offer for families.

3.3.3 Kind and Gezin, the association to support children and parents



Fig.3: All areas for which Kind en Gezin offers support and information

The aim of the whole agency is to guarantee the right to a promising growth for every child and every young person in Flanders. To achieve the objectives mentioned above, Kind and Gezin gathers a series of associations with which it enters into a relationship of mutual collaboration, for the promotion of projects and services to families. the Huis van het kind¹⁹ is one of this, a place where parents and children can go to activities for ask for support for every issue related to parenting and growing up. It provides help with childcare, healthcare, leisure activities, parenting support, workshops and much more. The Huis van het Kind is a meeting place for (future) parents and families, but also grandparents, educators and all other people involved in the education of children and young people.

¹⁷For more information, please visit the official website: <https://www.kindengezin.be/nl>

¹⁸For more information and to understand better the structure of the agency, please visit: <https://www.opgroeien.be/>

¹⁹ Each city has its own Huis van het kind, but the general information about the association can be founded at this website: <https://www.huizenvanhetkind.be/hk/>



Childcare 0-3 years

Looking for childcare? You can contact us for more information. Our employees help you in the search for a suitable shelter for your child.

[MORE ABOUT CHILDCARE](#)



View the leisure offer for children

What is there to do in Aalst for children? We group the leisure offer in a handy overview.

[VIEW THE LEISURE OFFER](#)



Looking for (holiday) care?

Are you looking for care for outside school hours, during holiday periods or when your child is sick? Our employees will work with you to find a suitable solution for your child (ren).

[MORE ABOUT OUT-OF-SCHOOL CARE](#)



Game and meeting

Come and visit Huis van het Kind during one of the play and chat moments for parents and children. Exchange experiences with other parents while your child can play with other children.

[MEET OTHER PARENTS](#)



Info evenings and workshops

Because many parents and grandparents struggle with the same questions, it is often nice to share experiences or to get an explanation about a particular parenting theme in groups. View the overview of the information evenings and workshops.

[VIEW THE CALENDAR](#)



Need support with parenting?

Parenting is not always easy. Every parent has doubts, a question or is looking for information about the upbringing of children. We are happy to give you tips or look for suitable answers.

[MORE ABOUT PARENTING SUPPORT](#)

Fig.4: homepage of Huis van het kind website of the city of Aalst²⁰

²⁰ <https://www.aalst.be/huis-van-het-kind>

The *Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering*²¹(AgII) is an external independent agency (EVA) of the Flemish government, created in 2015 as a merger of various services and organizations that are active in the field of social inclusion, civic integration and social orientation. The main aim of AgII is to make people who migrate to Belgium self-reliant, giving them equal opportunities to participate fully in society, regardless of origin or background. To do so, they collaborate with local authorities, organization and citizens who share the same desire of building an inclusive society, where even foreigner can develop their skills and attitudes. They not only offer guidance, information and free Dutch language courses, but also, they propose tailor-made programs for every different need. The innovative approach here is the so-called “starting from practice”, a sort of learning by doing technique where people are immediately invited to taking part to interactive language classes. In fact, speaking among each other make faster and easier to overcome the embarrassment and the fear of making mistakes.

3.3.4 The Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering: not just Dutch lesson and social orientation

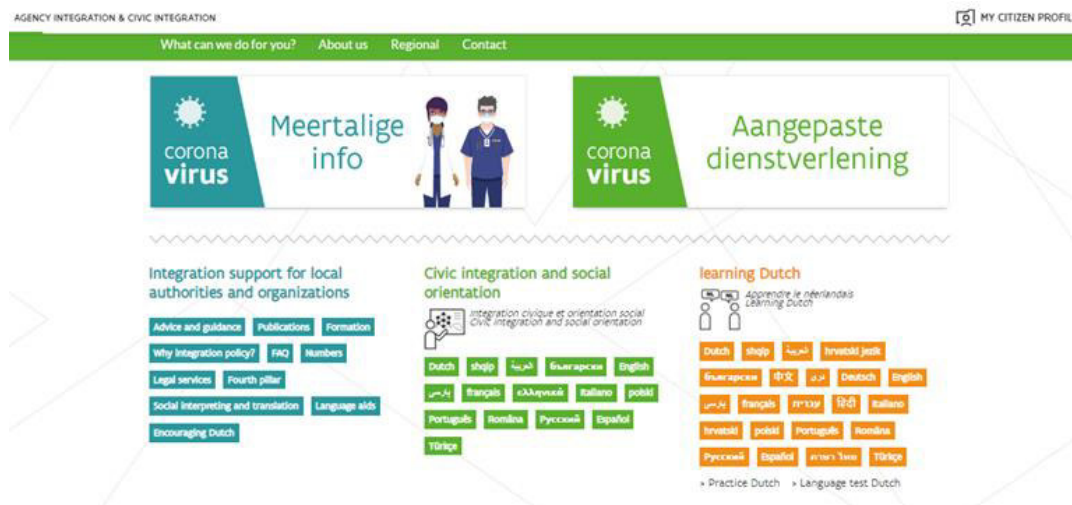


Fig.5: The homepage of the Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering website

The AgII recognizes the huge impact that migration is having on society as a whole and on organizations, on social policies and in different work contexts. For this reason, it believes that the issue must be seriously addressed in a proactive way, proposing actions and offering services, in collaboration with other partners.

²¹ In English *Agency for Inclusion and Civic Integration*. for more information about the structure of the organization, please visit the official website: <https://www.integratie-inburgering.be>

Their mission can be summarized as follows:

“Moving with an environment that is changing requires efforts from everyone. In this way, we are working on a shared future. In it, people, regardless of origin or background, get equal opportunities and everyone uses his or her talents. Citizens, services and policy find a sustainable partner in the Agency for Integration and Civic Integration. Our services are based on their needs and questions.”

The current integration process consists of three pillars:

1. Dutch lessons;
2. Social orientation;
3. Counselling (guidance towards work, further studies,...).

Recently, a fourth pillar has been added. Migrants receive a further tailored plan to strengthen their social network and participation. Some examples: buddy project; internship at a company, association, organization or local government; guidance process in voluntary work; language internships.



Fig.6: Graphic description of the AgII strategy and key points

The VMSW, acronymous for *Vlaamse Maatschappij voor Sociaal Wonen*²² is an external independent agency of the Flemish government. It is divided in four departments: projects, actor support, finance and support. The VMSW is under the control of the Flemish Ministers of Housing and Finance. Their representatives attend the meetings and have an advisory voice.

The main purpose of this agency is to stimulate, to give advice and to support, administratively and technically, local housing actors to make possible a high-quality and affordable social living in Flanders. Social housing companies (SHMs), social rental offices (SVKs), municipalities and PCSWs can contact the VMSW for a wide range of information and support in the realization of construction projects, from concept to completion.

An example of this is the publication “*Infrastructure construction for social housing projects*” with descriptions, explanations and guidelines for infrastructure design and public space.

3.3.5 Vlaamse Maatschappij voor Sociaal Wonen and Samenlevingsopbouw: two different faces of social living and housing services

The screenshot shows the home page of the Flemish Society for Social Living (VMSW). The header is dark blue with the text 'FLEMISH SOCIETY FOR SOCIAL LIVING' in white. Below the header, there are three links: 'Home', 'I am private', and 'I am professional'. On the right side, there is a button labeled 'To register'. The main content area is titled 'Choose your profile' and contains a paragraph explaining the registration process. Below this, there are two columns. The left column is titled 'I am private' and contains the text 'I want to rent, buy or let a house.' and a button labeled 'Continue as a private person'. The right column is titled 'I am professional' and contains the text 'I want to start a social housing project or build infrastructure.' and a button labeled 'Continue as a professional'.

Fig.6: home page of VMSW agency website

²² For more information about the organization, visit <https://www.vmsw.be/>

Samenlevingsopbouw²³ is an association organized in eight regional non-profit organizations, in the Flemish provinces and in the cities of Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent.

Their mission can be synthesized as “being always on the side of people who are struggling”. In other words, their final goal to achieve is community development. They work “For groups struggling with social exclusion and deprivation [...] For solidarity, against discrimination, for justice, against poverty, for inclusion.”

Social workers know what are the problems that make people vulnerable: not finding a healthy and affordable home, struggling with payment of bills, an insecure work situation, having to postpone doctor visits. For this, they want to work together with these people on tangible and innovative solutions, that can be translated into structural and sustainable results. In order to empower them, Samenlevingsopbouw brings their voice closer to policy. Their aim is *“to let socially vulnerable groups have their say, strengthen their voice, appeal to their competences, let them take and bear responsibility, and look for solutions together.”*

The innovative approach here is based on two key points: first, the awareness that alone you can do enough, but in partnership you can do better. Therefore, it is necessary to expand collaboration and always seek for new organizations that share the same values. Second, the fundamental need to establish a dialogue between involved target groups and solution partners. Only through this combined strategy it can be possible to realize the best solution feasible, sustainable and with broad support.

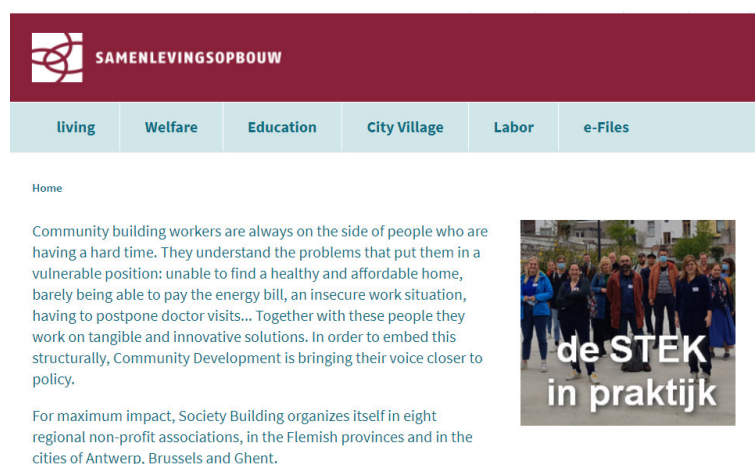


Fig.7: home page of Samenlevingsopbouw agency website

²³ For more information, visit <https://www.samenlevingsopbouw.be/>

3.4 About Mechelen: an overview

Mechelen is a medium-sized city in the province of Antwerp in the Flemish region, with a population of 86,921 inhabitants (STATBEL, 2020) spread over an area of approximately 65 km². It is in a strategic position for its economic and territorial development, between Antwerp and Brussels, the two largest and most important cities in Belgium.

3.4.1 Brief description of the city: Urban structure, economic and social context

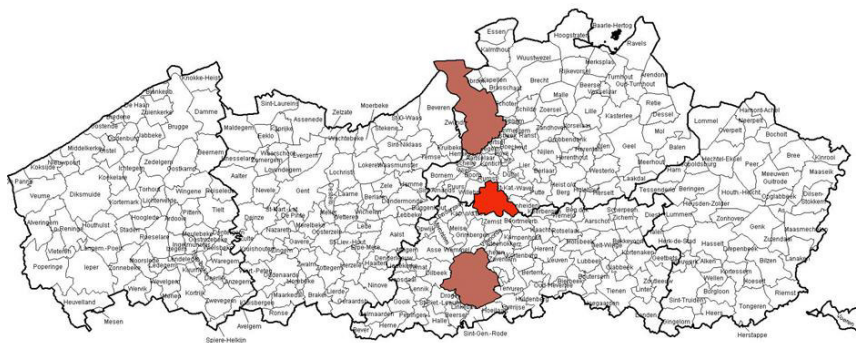


Fig.1 Map of the Flemish region. Mechelen is marked in light red while Antwerp (top) and Brussels (bottom) in dark red.

From a morphological point of view, Mechelen looks like the typical Belgian city, with a medieval historical nucleus, in which the main elements are the Great Square (in Flemish Grote Markt), St Rumbold's Cathedral, a world heritage site since 1999, the Tower (Belfort). The most recent part of the urban expansion at first continued to follow the development from the center outwards, then it was directed along the main road arteries, respectively towards Antwerp and Brussel. From an administrative point of view, the Malinese territory is divided into 12 districts: Arsenaal, Battel, Heffen, Hombeek, Leest, Mechelen Centrum, Mechelen-Noord, Mechelen-Zuid, Muizen, Nekkerspoel, Tervuursesteenweg, Walem. The case study that will be analyzed later is located in the Mechelen-Noord district.

The perimeter of Grote Markt is defined by various commercial and gastronomic activities frequented by both tourists and the resident population, of which there is a greater presence especially on Sundays. Although visually very compact, the perception of the historic center is not that of an introverted place, which denies the relationship with

its surroundings, on the contrary, it itself directs the flows from one part of the city to the other.



Fig. 2: City of Mechelen, a representation

Public space is a fundamental element of the city and often dominates the scene, carefully designed and curated, it becomes a recognizable element in the urban context. Even the city park, albeit modest in size, acts as a social collector, offering different possible scenarios throughout the day: a meditative / contemplative place, equipped for outdoor sports but also as a playful space for children and meeting point for teenagers.

The Dijle River is an important presence in the urban context, both as a physical landmark, because it divides the city into two almost perfect halves, and as a structural reference, because together with the network of canals that take shape from it, it guides the division of the fabric of the city. and facilitates its understanding.

Of great interest are the promenades that run along the banks of the river. Recently redeveloped, the Dijle embankments until recently had undergone simple basic maintenance, aimed at protecting the river environment. Although this ecosystem performed its function of guarantor of biodiversity, there was no attention to its potential aesthetic value, in relation to the urban design. The transformation

project has partially reconfigured the appearance of these areas, creating order and new space: the embankments have become protagonists of the relationship between river and city and between river and citizens. Now the Dijle is not only an important natural system, but also a space to live, part of the urban fabric; the transversality with which it crosses the city makes it able to return new scenarios, suspended between the ground level and the water level, with completely different perceptions of space.

Attention to public space is one of the first things that catches the eye in Mechelen; whether it is squares, neighbourhood gardens or parks, these places are always neat and clean, with an eye to quality and design. Behind this care is the desire to accustom citizens to look at public space not as a static and defined system, but in an innovative way, in which users themselves modify it by living it, photographing it, interpreting it to suggest new possible uses. The innovation introduced by the previous Mayor, Bart Somers, was to designate a landscape architect as responsible for the quality of urban public areas and landscape garden and architecture projects. Among his tasks, also that of coordinating the works, following the construction and organizing maintenance.

Mechelen, from this first reading, is characterized as a city attentive to satisfy the needs of its inhabitants and to offer a high quality of life; but to grasp its full essence and understand where the interest in deepening the study comes from, the brief description above is not enough. In fact, both its past and its current characteristics make it much more complex and peculiar, especially moving from the center to the more peripheral parts.

Also, in Mechelen, as in all Flemish cities, the most common type of housing in the centre is the terraced house characterized by the unmistakable Northern European style, with roofs that rise sharply towards the sky and monochrome brick facades. The parts of the new expansion are recognizable precisely for the strong contrast of style, among which a modern and experimental approach dominates. It is not unusual to come across buildings with an avant-garde, almost futuristic character.

Its urban structure is very linear, which makes it suitable for a slow crossing, on foot or by bicycle. Even if today it appears neat and clean, its image has not always been this. Until about 15 years ago, in

fact, Mechelen was a city with a bad reputation, with a high crime rate, due to the neglect of public space and the dirt of the streets, chaotic and polluted, also characterized by a social context of total closure towards the foreigners and especially migrants, seen as a threat to security. What has been said is also confirmed by the words of the previous mayor Somers²⁴, (2017) who promoted the transformation process of the city²⁵:

“Lately the “Mechelen Model” has gathered a lot of attention. That’s why I feel it’s important to stress that my city, Mechelen, is not a paradise. It’s a city of 86,000 inhabitants, located between Antwerp and Brussels. We’ve grown in our superdiversity, with more than 130 different nationalities living together in our city. Strikingly, one out of two children born here has a foreign background, most of them Moroccan. The latter being one of the most vulnerable groups to violent radicalisation. Fifteen years ago, Mechelen had a very bad reputation. Polarisation was high and over 30% of the people voted extreme right. We had one of the highest criminality rates at that time, middle class families fled the city and deprivation was high. Nowadays, Mechelen is considered as one of the reference point cities in Flanders. The appreciation for the integration policy is one of the highest in the country and the extreme right has less than 8% of the votes. The overall culture has changed and there is a growing openness towards each other.” (B.Somers,2017)

This transformation has also been reflected in the economic context. In fact, there has been both constant economic growth and an increase in productivity. Projections say that by 2024 Mechelen will be in the top 3 Belgian cities with most start-up companies, highest descent of unemployment and highest creating of new job opportunities. The city has been an important production center for luxury goods for centuries. Nowadays, it becomes famous for its gold leather, lace, alabaster, cannons, clocks and furniture. Indeed, the furniture industry remained still an important source of employment. Between 2012 and 2016, Mechelen was selected by 168 companies as place where set their location.

²⁴ Bart Somers was mayor of Mechelen, he won the prize as 2016 World Mayor Prize, for his outstanding achievements in welcoming refugees during recent years and for the long-term policies and actions in integration of immigrants from different cultures, religions and social backgrounds.

²⁵The full article can be downloaded here: https://www.cidob.org/en/articulos/monografias/resilient_cities/the_mechelen_model_a_n_inclusive_city

Without a doubt, the city can be defined as multi-ethnic; it hosts more than 120 different nationalities and has been recognized as one of the most inclusive cities in Europe. This is due to the mayor's great ability to promote social inclusion initiatives and projects based on the interaction between migrants and natives. Looking at the situation of Mechelen up to 20 years ago, the image of the city was very different, dirty and degraded, both in the green spaces and in the houses, significantly polluted, chaotic, with a high crime rate; in short, with a low quality of life and a social context in which foreigners were only seen as a threat.

The leap in quality, therefore, takes place thanks to a particularly enlightened administration, which was able to focus on urban criticalities and intervene on them promptly, but with a view to multi-scalar approach.

The relationship between institutions and citizens is another point of pride for Mayor Somers. A survey conducted a few years ago revealed that the percentage of inhabitants who have full trust in institutions is the highest in Belgium. On this point, Somers²⁶ relates these words:

"Some parts of Belgium are lawless. People feel that the government has abandoned them. The law of the jungle prevails. In Mechelen there are enough police officers and surveillance cameras everywhere," continuing "But let's face reality: today we all constitute the first generation of multicultural Mechelenians. As a mayor, I create opportunities for all of us to feel like full citizens of the city."

The perception of society in Mechelen is in fact right from the start that of an open, welcoming, organized, flexible, modern society. It is enough to look around to realize that the population is highly heterogeneous, not only with regard to the ethnic factor, but also with regard to education, age, wealth and employment position. In Mechelen, integration is in the air.

²⁶ The full interview can be found on this website: <https://euobserver.com/beyond-brussels/133185>

Social inclusion policies, as we have seen above, depending on the area considered, pass through the different dedicated government bodies. The offer ranges from free language courses that start every two weeks, to a series of social supports, such as aid for medical care, professional education but also for that of children. In the political agreement 2019-2024, 3 macro areas of intervention have been defined, in turn divided into 545 action plans, to make Mechelen even more sustainable and inclusive: new forms of mobility, fight against poverty to combat social exclusion, business development. On the fight against poverty, the main points of this policy are based on: housing availability, setting as a goal the increase of at least 10% of social houses for rent; transformation of empty sites in places for leisure activities, such as parks, garden, fairs, and so on; creation of new employment opportunities; reduction of child poverty by 50% by 2024.

Another policy in inclusion is the plan “*Inclusive City 2.0: Diversity and Equal Opportunities (2020-2025)*”²⁷. In this plan there are four domains of intervention: education, work/enterprise, leisure and housing, prioritizing equal opportunities for all.

Specific attention is given to children and young people, as well as people in poverty and newcomers who speak a different language.

The main achievement will be to create social commitment, active citizenship and (social) entrepreneurship, in collaboration and in dialogue with civil society.

Here a short list of goals in the four areas:

- Education: Increase Qualified Outflow

- Increasing the number of vulnerable young people who leave secondary education with a diploma.
- Increasing the number of vulnerable young people who leave higher education with a diploma.
- Striving for a healthy social mix in the schools.

²⁷ The original name in Dutch is *Inclusieve stad 2.0: Diversiteit en Gelijke Kansen (2020-2025)*. The part here reported is extract from the original text. The author has tried to remain as faithful as possible to the original content, however the translation may contain inadvertent stylistic or grammatical errors. The full action plan can be found at this address: https://www.mechelen.be/inclusieve-stad-20_versie-websitepdf

3.4.2 City policies for integration and inclusion of migrant and people with migrant background

- Tackling racism & discrimination and shifting to the right in education.

- Work and entrepreneurship:

- More suitable work for low-skilled people (or people at a great distance from the labour market) that matches their skills and interests.
- Accessible labour market.

- Leisure organizations are open workings (diverse and accessible):

- More vulnerable young people participating in social life in their free time as a place to interact, to network, to acquire social skills, to deal with rules.
- Diversity and room for polyphony in the cultural offer

- Living and housing:

- Strengthening, subjectively and objectively, the feeling of belonging and safety for each citizen, in Mechelen and in his/her neighbourhood.
- Stressing the importance of the neighbourhood level to make possible living together in diversity: investing in social cohesion projects & activities at neighbourhood level and in spatial attractiveness in function of a liveable neighbourhood.
- Guaranteeing equal access to the rental housing market for each citizen.

Last initiative presented is the project "Police and Human Rights" for security cooperation, promoted once again by Mayor Somers. Starting from the elementary consideration that to prevent crime and maintain an adequate level of urban security there is a need for control, he decided to make a big investment in strengthening the police force and the video surveillance system. The mayor strongly believes that the role of the police is to promote security cooperation through integration and diversity, and also that "police need to be a mirror of society where 25% or 30% of the people in uniform are people from a foreign background. This is important for two reasons, it strengthens the information gathering process about what is really happening in society and secondly, it creates bigger trust between the people, the

city, and the police." In his opinion, the fight against crime is also a social policy, so it is important that there is a commitment by all citizens to be themselves vigilant, for the good and tranquillity of the community. Building "bridges between the community and the police".

Various activities are also promoted by non-profit associations present in the area, especially in the context of educational projects with children and young adolescents. Among these, one of the most important realities is the *ROJM Center*, acronyms for *Regionaal Open Jeugdcentrum Mechelen*²⁸.

3.4.3 Local associations: bottom-up initiatives to encourage participation



Fig 3: Homepage of the official website of ROJM

Created in 1978 thanks to the initiative of a group of citizens, it is a pedagogical space for socially vulnerable youth where:

“youth of foreign origin invent the future through cooking classes, professional start-ups and in recording studios, finding stimuli and resources in a spirit of mutual collaboration. Migrants and locals discover unexplored paths by participating in conversation class programs at De Rooster or the Social House of Lange Schipstraat; [...]At the Royal Gym sports centre there is always a Thai or kick boxing course for challenging oneself and unloading some stress while respecting rules, and the neighbourly spirit is strengthened

²⁸ Most of the information here reported are extract from the official website. For more information, visit: <https://www.rojm.be>

every day with original neighbourhood parties held with funds provided by the Municipality.” (Vittorini)

This youth center focuses on socially vulnerable young people, especially those who belong to minorities in Belgium. For this reason, the target group is composed by people with a migration background between 11 - 25 years old, also Roma young people, making it one of the most diverse youth centers.

The ROJM Centre is a place where young people can develop their personal and social skills and where they can participate in a wide range of activities, learning how to deal with rules and respect diversities. The proposed activities are: sports, cultural activities, courses for learning independent entrepreneurship, art workshop, among other useful leisure activity.

It provides to young people a safe space to share their experiences with each other, to develop their self-confidence and reduces the negative self-image, trying to increase the positive cultural self-image.

There are snooker table, football table, internet, tennis, board games, cinema, gym, video games to enjoy spending time there. There are also dance halls, boxing halls, soccer field, basketball court where daily use is made in the context of sports activities. There are weekly creative workshops to follow: HipHop, Rap dance, Moroccan music groups, cooking classes, dance classes, Kungfu classes, among others. Other workshops are based on working with respect for other people's religion and / or culture. There is the chance to get homework assistance for the youngsters who are struggling more in school. ROMJ is a bottom-up association, which ensures that anyone can find space and have a say in the youth center.

The structure of the youth center is composed by professional workers who have a lot of experience in social sector and especially in inclusive projects for young people; even if often it happens that volunteers are recruited from those who were formerly participants. Through various trainings and workshops and with their experiences as a member and as volunteers in the youth center they become ready to be youth workers. In addition to professionals, ROJM has indeed a large number of volunteers.

Welcome in Mechelen VZW is a non-profit organization established in 2016. Today it is a network of citizens engaged in the implementation of reception activities for asylum seekers and refugees. Their constant commitment is focused on offering support in the following areas: working, living and housing, language, info session on specific topics.

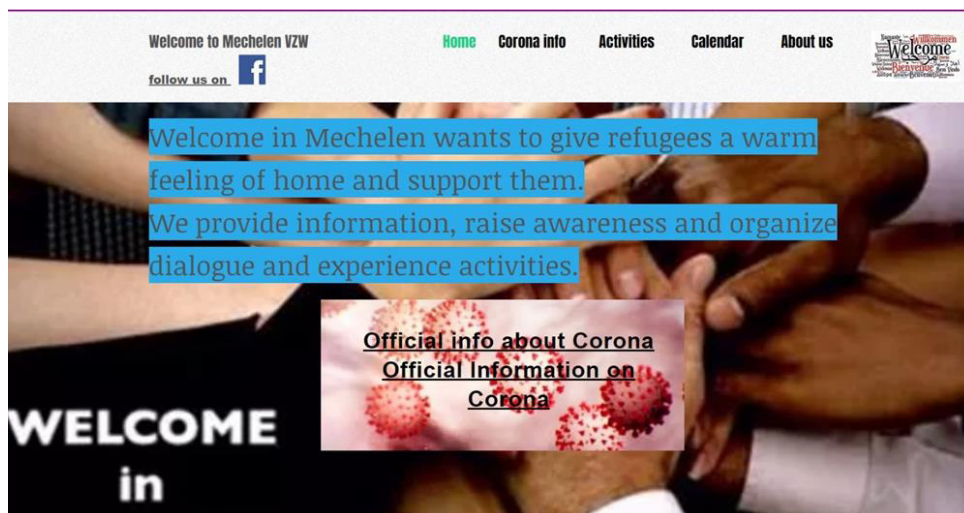


Fig.4: Home page of the official website of Welcome in Mechelen VZW

The vision of this association can be summarized with these words:

“A volunteer movement such as Welcome in Mechelen has been trying for quite some time not to resign itself to the cynicism of this reality and is rolling up its sleeves to actually offer help: practical and material; to go along a bit and to give a warm feeling of home to these uprooted people.”²⁹

²⁹ Extract from the official website, reachable at this address:
<https://www.welcomeinmechelen.be/>

The neighbourhood examined, Pennepoel - Mechelen Noord, was chosen for some characteristics that make it interesting for research purposes, as explained above. To those, others are added, which will be presented in these pages in more detail.

3.4.4 Case study: Pennepoel – Mechelen Noord



Fig.5: localization of the neighbourhood under study within the urban perimeter

Since 2001, it has been an administrative collective name for a series of smaller neighbourhoods, including the popular districts of Pennepoel, Otterbeek, Marokken, Galgenberg, Katanga and Oud Oefenplein, and the residential on the other, Kauwendael.

Beyond this, its origin is due to the desire to create a large social housing project not only intended to respond to the growing housing demand and the need to welcome low-income or no-income communities, but also to be able to bring quality and restore dignity to these more fragile groups.

In other words, a real popular residential complex where even the outdoor space plays an important role, as an extension of one's home and as a meeting place for the local community.

General analysis of the neighborhood: services and infrastructures



Fig.6: The image above represents the framing of the study area, with respect to the relations with the surroundings. The elements of value, considered significant for the creation of connections, were highlighted, bearing in mind the future urban development of the area.

Within this scenario, the heterogeneity of the population is therefore not surprising, not only from an ethnic point of view, with a significant Moroccan dominance, but also socio-economic. In fact,

Belgische herkomst (t.o.v. alle inwoners)

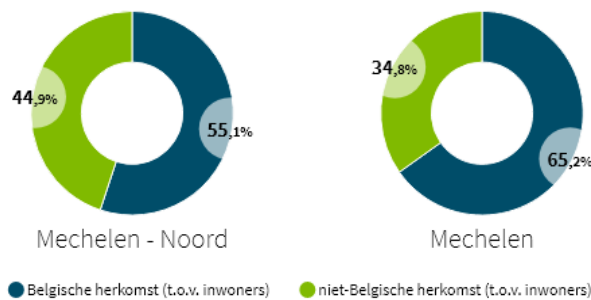


Fig.7: percentage of inhabitants of foreign nationality: comparison between Mechelen Noord and the whole city

here you can find both families with a migratory background, both young students who choose this accommodation because of the more affordable rent, and elderly people who find here a dimension in which they can be autonomous and feel the control over the spatial dimension, an element to be do not underestimate. The interest in this district also arises from the presence of the nearby urban park, the Pennepoelpark, a project strongly desired by the city administration. previously, in fact, the area did not have a real public green area at a reasonable distance and this lack was felt as a major disadvantage by the local community. The park is 55 acres and is located in a densely built residential area, where previously there was a lack of public greenery and play space. The previous owner, Fluvius, first wanted to build new homes on this site, but the city decided to buy the land and transform it into a fully-fledged green lung. You can walk into the park through three entrances. A house was even demolished near the Oude Liersebaan to increase park access and security.

Fig 8a and 8b(below): Graphic representation of full and empty areas of the neighbourhood under study. From the comparison between the two images, the area appears much denser than it really is. In fact, although heavily built, most of the constructions are terraced houses with 2 or 3 floors. There is a part where buildings are dominant, in any case do not exceed 5 floors in height. it is interesting to observe the shape of the streets, with regular mesh.



— Area of investigation



In the case study presented, two characteristics are to be highlighted: first of all, the typical position of the social housing districts, outside the ring of the city center; in this case there is also the presence of a road bridge and fast-flowing roads, which make pedestrian travel complicated, despite the dedicated paths at the edge of the carriageways.

However, there are urban transport lines that guarantee the connection with the city center, even if they should be strengthened; secondly, the conformation of the public spaces, which wind between the buildings, creating an almost entirely pedestrian horizontal pattern. As already said, the resident population is heterogeneous, both in terms of age and social class, and in terms of ethnic background, in fact, despite the high percentage of migrants living here, there is still a significant number of residents of Belgian origin.

This study aims to give visibility to the case of the Pennepoel district as a positive example of living together in diversity, analysing the dynamics that are created, and the strategies of negotiating space and resolving tensions. In fact, although the population is multi-ethnic, the tensions between the residents are almost absent, mitigated by the presence of an association that mediates in the community and helps the human exchange of people, knowledge, contact, through the organization of events, dances, shows. During the various inspections, no tension or fear was ever perceived in these specific areas between those who were sharing the outdoor space. Indeed, it seemed that everyone was careful to respect that place, recognizing it for everyone and for everyone. The playground is lived almost all day, the small park often welcomes mothers, the elderly, and young children, even until late in the evening, to confirm that even after the sun goes down, no one feels in danger. It is a space for the community, lived by the local community, which takes care of and respects it.

Analyzing cases like this, the question that arises is whether the connection with the downtown could really be an added value or could affect the balance created between the parties, the public space on one hand and the neighbourhood community on the other. If instead, the question arises in another form, not as forced searching for connection, rather as creation of a new centrality for the surrounding areas, it sounds useful and necessary to investigate further which potential users could attract, what needs, what uses.

In fact, as can be seen from the analyzes on the fabric, the Pennepoel, including the park, the playground and the sports area, plus the system of paths and squares, covers a considerable size. Furthermore, its characteristic sinuosity creates a sort of wings, small spaces that lend themselves to being reinvented in uses, with the intention to emphasize flexibility and temporary nature: pop up bar, pop up market, Fablab, exhibition spaces, that through use invite to socialize, always having a "way out" available when the situation is no longer comfortable.

Analysis of urban fabric of the selected area and its surrounding, by construction type



Fig.9: In this representation, attention is drawn between the horizontal dimension of the public space and the vertical dimension of the building. Despite the density of the building, visual permeability is always allowed; on a perceptual level this translates into the feeling of openness and relationship with the elements of the surrounding.

For the aim of the investigation, it is relevant to look at the projects carried out by the daycenter RIVIERENLAND, a subsidiary association of Social Huis Mechelen and OCMW Sint-Kateline-Waver. The elderly are the protagonists of most of the activities, but during the first face-to-face meeting, the volunteers showed interest in developing new projects aimed at social inclusion, favouring the encounter between migrants and Belgian natives. Before Corona, there was an agreement of collaboration with this association, to promote together a new project aimed at involving migrants and people with migratory backgrounds more, both in the activities of the association and in the life of the neighbourhood, bringing new life to the community, improving livability and transforming public spaces into meaningful shared places.

3.5 About Aalst: an overview

Aalst is a medium size city in the Flemish region, located between Brussel and Ghent. Like the previous Mechelen, here too the development follows the typical layout of Belgian cities: the historic center identified by the large square with the cathedral and the city hall, from which the other streets branch off, sprawling open to the rest of the city. Also in this case, water is a natural element that is well present due to the Dendre River. Compared to the previous case study, the difference that most catches the eye is the design of the public space and the weight it has in the urban fabric. Apart from the large city park that extends as far as the Osbroek forest, there are few public spaces, small parks and gardens or squares in the surrounding neighbourhoods. Aalst outside the center, develops in a dense urbanization in which the possibility of a slow mobility, cycle and pedestrian is scarce. The long busy streets that surround the city center create a real break between the center and everything that exists outside it. Aalst has a special feature compared to other cities in Belgium. If in most other cases the perimeter of the Grote Markt appears easily recognizable, in Aalst it is not so easy to read, it is rather fragmented, frayed, opening on one side towards one of the main pedestrian arteries.

3.5.1 Brief description of the city: Urban structure, economic and social context

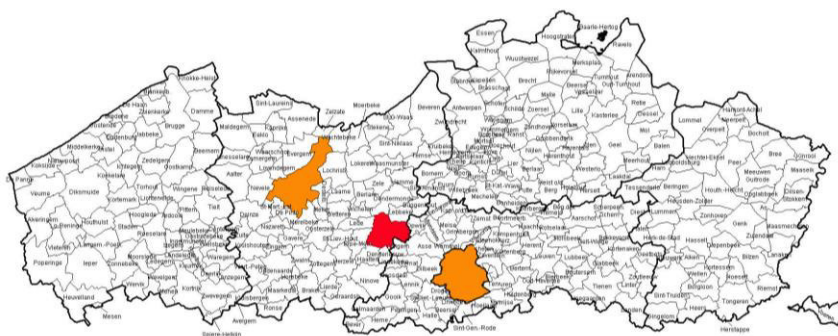


Fig.1 Map of the Flemish region. Aalst is marked in red while Gent (up left) and Brussels (bottom right) in orange.

Although Aalst is a medium-sized town, it is easy to get lost in the various internal streets, between which suddenly appears an open space with a little defined character. In fact, the distinction between public space and private space is not always clear-cut, at least as far as the central urban nucleus is concerned. Compared to the previous

Mechelen, with a linear and compact development that facilitates its "walkability", Aalst has developed according to a different system, also probably due to the morphology of the terrain, in which the changes in altitude between one part and the other are sometimes noticeable. Looking carefully at its layout with respect to the river, it is easy to recognize that the greatest urban development took place on the west bank of the Dender, while the east bank remained more on the margins initially. The city grew over time, continuing to expand towards the west, until the expansion of nearby Brussels led to a total inversion of urban development, directing its growth towards the east, motivated to weave economic and commercial relations with the capital. Coming to the present day, this interdependent relationship with Brussels has become even more evident, especially from an economic point of view.

This is evidenced by the commuting flows that occur daily between the two cities: Kesteloot (2003) reports that it is 15% of the resident population who move regularly for work reasons. The positive side of the matter is that by virtue of this proximity, Aalst is chosen by many as their city of residence, offering the possibility of living outside the chaos of the big metropolis, but close enough to still feel part of it. This portion of Belgian territory is dotted with small towns such as Denderleew, Asse, Liedekerke, Pamel, Ninove which together with Aalst form what many define the great suburb of Brussels. To support this thesis, it is sufficient to take the road that leads from Aalst to the capital to realize how unclear the distinction between the city, the suburb and other towns is. It is probably also because of this characteristic that Aalst still cannot find its own defined identity. The economy is partly based on local trade, but mostly on the textile industry, inherited from the French occupation period. Aalst produces not only the textiles themselves, clothing and footwear, but manufactures many of the needed machines. The more rural regions are noted for their production of hops, which are sold to the old breweries there. They also have a large active cut flower business in the region. Unfortunately, the tourism sector is missing, as it still has a weakly developed flow to be relevant.

The data of a study recently conducted on the economic and social situation of the city, highlight that the trend of the last 15 years have registered a deep welfare loss, even if the average is still in line with

that of the rest of the Flemish region. Among other aspects, it should be noted that in 2005 unemployed migrants were 12.7% of the total unemployed population, while in 2020 this percentage reached over 37%. The reasons must be founded probably in the increasing number of inhabitants, in the urban growth and in a general economic crisis, that even if more silent, it is happening also in Belgium. But, unfortunately, this also coincided with the increase in migratory flows and with the stabilization of these groups in the city. It is therefore clear why the equation more foreigners less well-being was endorsed and ridden by the far-right party, which gained enormous support in the last two elections, so much so that it won the last elections.

Although the city has all the credentials to be competitive on the Belgian scene, the only real attraction for which it is known nationally is the famous allegorical carnival, which for some years has been the subject of political disputes and social tensions. But the carnival is unfortunately not the only time in which there are episodes of racism and discrimination. Aalst is known as one of the less welcoming cities in Belgium, where often intense episodes of crime and violence against ethnic minority groups were reported. Probably due to this state of latent tension, clashes also occur between groups belonging to different ethnic minorities. It could be defined as a struggle between the poor where everyone loses. What has been said so far helps us to better understand the social context of Aalst, which despite being definitely a multi-ethnic city, does not boast the nickname of a welcoming city: most foreigners live "closed" in their own communities, divided by ethnicity, little they mix with the others and are rarely welcomed into native communities. There is a strong hostility towards the foreigner, which is already perceived by going around the city. This also reflects the political reality of the city, in fact the city administration is headed by the right-wing party, which carries out social policies that aim more at cultural assimilation than inclusion. Any foreigner who wants to have a quiet life in Aalst must become Aalstenaar, he must be able to speak the language, understand and respect traditions, know which are the spaces where he can stay. At this point, the question to be answered is why two cities with approximately the same urban extension, the same urban layout, the same type of society, characterized by a strong presence of people with foreign nationalities, have such different outcomes. While

Mechelen is among the most inclusive cities in Europe, in Aalst the population is divided between the local community and the non-native Belgian community. It's not rare to meet people that refuse to talk in English. This reality obviously also has another side of the coin. If on the one hand there is a "hard core" of conservatives, traditionalists, unwilling to openness and who do not see the presence of people with different nationalities, on the other hand there is a large slice of the population that is instead open-minded, welcoming, young, who would like to see their city take off, even from a tourist point of view. This vision is not shared by the inhabitants historically rooted in the territory, who defend their roots, sometimes even with too much vehemence. Among the citizens interviewed during this research, many revealed that they feel profound discomfort in being labeled as racist, since, especially young people, they welcome the cultural mix and differences, seeing it as a personal enrichment. The fact remains, however, that there are frequent episodes of racism, especially aimed at Islamic, Turkish and Jewish communities, episodes that obviously cause more media sensation than those of reception.

The interest in Aalst arises precisely from the tangible political-social split, an aspect that makes this reality unique. On the one hand, an extreme right that praises the closure of its territory, not only to foreigners, but also to those who are not part of the Flemish region, who refuse to take part in events other than traditional ones. On the other hand, a society that does not identify with a precise, open, dynamic, curious, young, vital political alignment, which would welcome change, which promotes social inclusion and cultural sharing, from food to music, to support events. to minority communities. To conclude, it can be said that as a whole, the city certainly has an interesting potential, yet to be understood in many aspects.

Until few years ago, there was kind of a head quarter responsible for policies, activities and projects for inclusion, named *Team Inburgering*.

In 2016 this team started a project called “*Samen Inburgeren Aalst*”³⁰ which means “Integration together”, addressed to new foreign residents of Aalst who wanted to practice their Dutch and get to know the city better, with the help of real locals as coaches. each coach is a volunteer who is 'at home' in his society: he is fluent in Dutch and familiar with the local facilities in the areas of education, welfare, training, work, leisure and culture. In 12 meeting along six months, on voluntary participation, they get to know each other's environment through activities that they both enjoy (sports, culture, leisure, ...) and together they look for answers to questions about everyday life in Aalst, like where to find a specific shop or which kind of organizations are active in the city, and so on. Integration together thus creates more mutual understanding of other cultures.

In 2018 another campaign was launched with the name “*Oefen hier je Nederlands*”³¹, which means practice here your Dutch. The aim of this program was stimulating foreigners to practice more Dutch in their everyday activities, with the help of local entrepreneurs or owners of bars and restaurants or sale assistants and so on, using simple word, speaking slowly, avoiding dialects, in order to make communication as clear as possible.

In 2020: *Wereldmama's*: this new project differs from the others because it is aimed at a specific category, that is, mothers of foreign nationality who speak other languages, with children from 0 to 3 years old. It takes place in the Huis van het Kind every week. Integration, learning Dutch together, parenting support and getting to know the city are the objectives of these training and meeting moments. Mums and children can participate in the meetings together.

3.5.2 City policies for integration and inclusion of migrant and people with migrant background

³⁰ To find more information, please visit the website: <http://www.sameninburgeren.be/initiatieven/Samen-Inburgeren-Aalst---Stad-Aalst---Team-Inburgering>

³¹ <https://www.aalst.be/economie/oefen-hier-je-nederlands>

To ensure the participation of migrants and people with a migratory background in social inclusion activities and projects, it is not enough for the city administration to send them an invitation. Nor can it be enough to organize urban inclusion policies that support “bottom-up” activities promoted by associations or local bodies. Of course, these are necessary actions to continue to keep the spirit of initiative and the drive for innovation active, but what makes the difference in stimulating participation is the feeling of pleasure that is transmitted to potential users. To make these groups feel truly invited to participate as an integral part of society, an extra effort must be made upstream. To ensure that there is a direct dialogue with the representatives of the various ethnic groups, to give voice to their proposals and their life experiences, to build policies and actions together, learning from each other.

To explain what has been stated more clearly, the following is the direct experience of 3 different events hosted in the city of Aalst: the first is the Casa del Mundo³² festival, promoted by the NGO association of the same name. In this event all the communities of ethnic minorities participate to promote their culture and make their stories known, through food or music, but also through the sponsorship of humanitarian aid programs that individual associations support in their countries of origin. For the duration of the festival, usually two days, the entire neighbourhood that hosts it is filled with colours and scents, improvised dance performances rather than impromptu musical performances animate the streets and the courtyard of the center, in which food trucks of each ethnic group is the backdrop.

Suddenly living conflict-free in a multi-ethnic space seems not only possible, but real. As many as 95% of the participants who were asked what they thought of the festival and if they were interested in repeating the experience again the following year responded positively, and with generous feedback on the importance of making it clear that cultural diversity can no longer be a taboo or something to be looked upon with suspicion. The representatives of the *Aalst mixte*

3.5.3 Local associations: bottom up initiatives to encourage participation

³² <https://www.casadelmundo.be/>

association, which is involved in promoting social inclusion projects mostly aimed at Hispanic communities, were also heard, and they too were enthusiastic about the resonance of this initiative, as well as showing their desire to contribute to the research with their stories and feedback on projects already completed. Attention to respect for all diversities is manifested not only through food and music, but also through art, typical craftsmanship, the photographic exhibition "diary of the world", a story of cultural diversity made through photographs. The location of the event is also significant, in fact, although it did not take place in the central town square, but in the internal courtyard of the, flows of visitors have alternated continuously. This event is significant because although it is not gigantic in scope, it also attracts people from small cities nearby and also from Brussels (according to the data collected on the spot).

The second event described, promoted by the SMAAK³³ group, differs in type and scope, remaining in fact on a local scale, but it is considered significant to mention it for the great success in terms of participation. The event consisted of a small street food festival combined with live musical performances during the day and DJ sets in the evening, until night. The interesting thing to note was how the users changed according to the time, passing from users mainly composed of families with children, young couples, but also people between 50 and 60 years during the daytime and early afternoon, to an audience mainly composed of young adolescents and young adults in the night time slot. A second equally important aspect to note is the choice of location. The event, in fact, was held in a large square in a strategic position, as it connects three significant urban centralities: the railway station, the bus terminal and the City Hall.

The importance of this event, as of the previous one, also lies in the fact that both can also be enjoyed for free, it is not mandatory to buy a ticket, or necessarily purchase products, thus putting anyone in the condition of being able to enjoy the service offered.

The significance of telling these two examples is to highlight how a favourable environment, where participants feel at ease despite the rich cultural diversity, certainly places those who participate in a position of openness to the other, of curiosity and also of unconscious

³³ <https://www.smaakfestival.be/>

"acceptance". In that public space, "the other" no longer seems so far from us, it does not act so differently from us. This example wanted to show that it is certainly easier to overcome even large differences if you have common goals / purposes or if you share the same values. Cultural mixing, heterogeneous, eclectic environment.

The analyzed area is located in the district Aalst Rechtoever Periferie noord.

3.5.4 Case study: Ten Rozen – Aalst Rechtoever Periferie Noord

Compared to the previous case study, the situation here is completely different, although it is still a Social Housing complex, known as Ten Rozen.



Fig.10: localization of the neighbourhood under study within the urban perimeter.

a square, a play area worthy of being called such, but also simpler elements, such as baskets, seats, lighting.



Fig12. in this elaboration the relationship between the vertical dimension of the building and the horizontal dimension of the public space was analyzed. The predominance in the scene of the buildings is clear, which not only fail to integrate with their surroundings, but interrupt the perception of permeability of the space. The space despite being open, without barriers, is enclosed between these scenes.

The district in general has a great lack of services and the situation in the immediate vicinity of a retirement home for the elderly has not improved the situation. The only other public space in the neighbourhood is located about a couple of kilometers from the Ten Rozen district: it is a sports center with garden and playground, with a fairly large wood, the only outlet for the local community. There is also always nearby, but going north-east, a large park, Tivolipark, a nature reserve where it is also possible to have educational experiences and playful activities, as well as excursion, workshops among others. The Tivolipark represents a great strength in this desolate context, it is the central element that manages to attract flows even from the city center. In any case, it cannot by itself create the urban continuity that would serve to revive the area, so it is necessary to fill the lack of services and invest in transport and infrastructure that can fuel a more intense exchange with the urban center.

As mentioned at the beginning, the area has already undergone a redevelopment project between 2014 and 2019, through a neighborhood development project, promoted by the NGO Samenlevingsopbouw Oost-Vlaanderen Vzw, in cooperation with the city of Aalst.

The project was called 'Buurtopbouwwerk Ten Rozen' and involved participatory process with residents, with the aim to improve the social and physical livability of the social housing district.

From what was told by one of the project managers, the participatory process never really took off. Only two meetings were held with the residents, in the first where it was explained what would happen in the next few years, motivating the need to redevelop public spaces to relaunch the whole area. In the second, the participants were asked if they had doubts and questions, if they wanted to propose ideas, but in a very informal way. In the opinion of the experts, however, a participatory process in order to work, should first of all try to create engagement with the local community, convey the message that they are the protagonists of what will be created in those areas and that for this reason it is necessary the contribution and active participation of all. Participatory actions must therefore start from the knowledge of the local community, so as to be able to build a responsible working group, which guarantees continuous presence during consultation operations and focus groups. It is not enough to go to propose a

captivating presentation of a project already established upstream. In fact, to date, once the redevelopment project has been completed, the areas are even less frequented than previously. The total upheaval of linger in such an "uncovered" space.



Fig. 13a and 13b: Graphic representation of solids and voids. the area that is here identified as "full" is very small compared to the "empty" but incredibly dense, as it is large buildings in line between 7 and 10 floors high.

the previous design and the drastic reduction in the effective quality of green areas, has created a real distrust in users, who feel threatened to

These are some of the stories of the inhabitants interviewed during one of the inspections. Furthermore, if before the strong winds, especially in winter, were mitigated by the rich presence of trees, now with the new completely horizontal setting, there is no obstacle that calms their strength, making it impossible to stop in the areas in the direction of the breath.

The lack of a space to facilitate the encounter between the inhabitants, all with different cultural and social backgrounds, prevents the creation of a community that has shared values and that feels like belonging to a neighbourhood. Indeed, there is a certain distance between all the inhabitants.

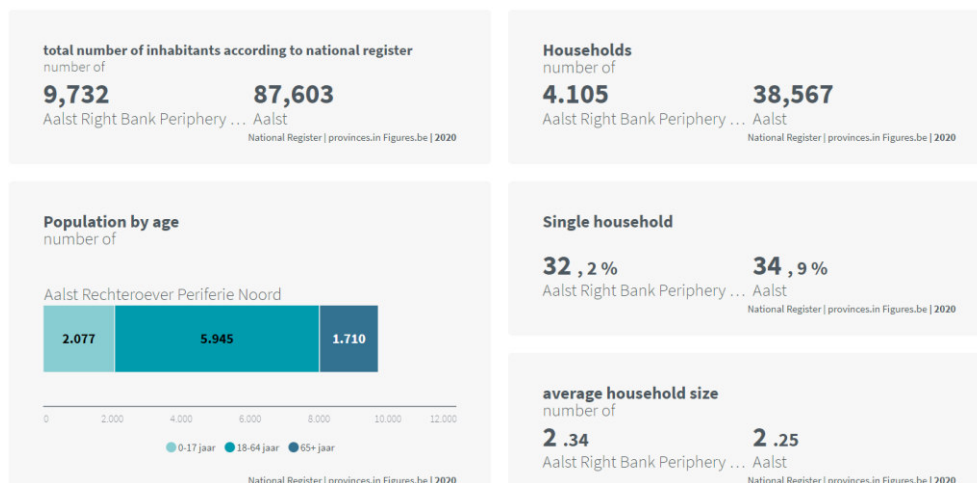


Fig.14: percentage of inhabitants of foreign nationality: comparison between Aalst Rechteroever Periferie Noord and the whole city.

In Ten Rozen neighbours don't know each other, relationships are of simple education. The hope of an improvement in current conditions is to be placed only in the new developing areas. It is hoped that this time more attention will be given to the space of relationship, to the local community and to guaranteeing them equal access to those services that improve the quality of life of the inhabitants.

CHAPTER IV

Results and discussion

CHAPTER IV Results and discussion

The results obtained and presented here are the product of an extensive bibliographic research activity and a consistent and stubborn activity conducted online, through social media. Valuable help also came from the Leuven Integration Agency which collaborated in facilitating contacts between the various heads of the Mechelen and Aalst agencies.

Despite the difficulties, it was possible to obtain significant insights and prepare the start of a pilot project called "*Make me space*" in which it is desired to involve the two Flemish cities object of this research.

The idea is to promote community activities at the neighbourhood level, aimed at social inclusion of everyone, especially minorities, starting from a radical change in the approach, that is, placing at the center no longer one's own needs, but others' needs, of the neighbour, of the elderly who struggle to find moments of sociality, of young adolescents who often feel they do not have a meeting space, and of all the other categories who want to create a flexible space, adaptable to different uses, even unexpected uses. A space that is son of Sennett's disorder, therefore not anarchic, but out of the ordinary, extra-ordinary, indeed. The question that should act as a guide is "what might my neighbour need to have a better quality of life? What could help him improve his relationship with the neighbourhood, with the space, with the community?".

This reflection invites us to no longer think about personal needs, but about the needs of "the other", thus leading to questioning who the other is, stimulating a real and deep knowledge of those who live there "next door" or "front door", going beyond the surface.

Only the encounter with the other, with his difficulties and hardships, with his cultural and creed differences, can lead to transforming differences into potential, to understand that we are not so different, because we all live the same daily hardships and difficulties.

4.1 Results

Understanding who is in front of us means understanding how important it is to feel accepted instead of always feeling under "threat" or accused, for the way one is.

With this work we wanted to show that the relationship between public space and the social inclusion of ethnic minorities is stronger and richer in meaning than is often visible.

Ethnic minorities often struggle to find a space for expression suitable for individual but also community experience. The urban public space, as it has been demonstrated, becomes a space of opportunity, of equality, a flexible place, where uses and functions are not established by a "deus ex machina", but it is the project itself that must know how to adapt to new uses, to be modified. No longer an "ordered" space, but a project that can be remodelled, altered, modified for impromptu uses and then reassembled, a space that can belong to everyone and for everyone.

Mechelen's example is testimony to a project that has invested in quality. The Pennepoel neighborhood, with its neighborhood park, playground, outdoor sports facilities, sees the community live, which is unconsciously stimulated to activate virtuous processes of inclusion, such as neighborhood parties or events in which different ethnic groups can show their cultural richness, through songs, dances, food, showing that diversity is not a phenomenon to be fought. This reality could not be possible without the active collaboration of the day center, where volunteers devote energy to negotiate between the different ethnic groups and lend themselves to proposing projects to support the community. The ultimate goal is to create solid bonds and improve the quality of life, making everyone feel they have the same rights, no matter what is the color of the skin, the age, the income. Currently, due to covid-19, the day center has suspended all activities but is still trying to work to continue making the community feel close, offering take away or delivery meals.

The neighbourhood in which Pennepoelpark is located is a developing area with a residential vocation. From the urbanization plans, it appears clear that part of the fabric will still be destined for further social housing construction, while another part will be dedicated to the

4.1.1 Critical readings the case studies: Mechelen and Aalst, similarities and differences

construction of housing for a medium-high population. In any case, these new lots will require the adaptation of basic infrastructure services and the introduction of new neighbourhood services. This suggests the possibility that the analyzed public spaces may in the future serve as a hinge between the existing and what will be the new. To make this possible, it is therefore important that public administrations become aware of this potential and use it to create centrality where it does not now exist, proposing a participatory management method to the community itself. In this way, the inhabitants of the neighbourhood themselves will be able to promote cultural, sporting, recreational activities, laboratories, workshops and other possible uses, with the supervision of local representatives able to help the communities to structure the events and to remain in dialogue with the public administration.

Mechelen has proven to be an innovative and creative city, a city that truly believes that diversity is an added value and a potential to be explored in order to increase its social capital. There is certainly still a long way to go in order to create a scenario of inclusiveness in which all citizens have access to the same resources and opportunities. Seeing public space in social housing complexes as the transformative place of the experience with "the foreigner" is not so visionary if you look at how this process is already happening naturally here.

As for the *Ten Rozen* district, after various investigations, it was possible to have a telephone contact with the head of the NGO *Samenbuurbouw*, who followed the regeneration project of this area. From what emerges, the project was not well received, for the following reasons: the residents were not asked about their expectations, desires and even needs. No participatory process has been proposed or activated, with which it would have been possible at least to attempt a dialogue and explain the reason for certain design choices, now seen as "imposed from above".

In fact, many residents are very unhappy with the new design, which has eliminated most of the existing trees, consequently eliminating an important natural windbreak barrier.

In addition, the number of green spaces has also decreased. The new project has opted for "green islands", similar to large planters, which however have no effective connection between them, and the residents do not feel the desire to stop and spend time there, but the perception

they have is just of something foreign, placed there as a decorative element.

Having seen how the spaces of relationship have been transformed and made functional and welcoming in Mechelen and how the residents really feel they are part of their own home, the reflection that comes spontaneously in the case of Aalst is whether the public administration is adopting the right strategy of urban regeneration, really aimed at relaunching marginal areas and social inclusion, or if it is facilitating the interests of a few entrepreneurs.

In the case studies described, two peripheral urban areas characterized by two relevant social housing realities were analyzed. Despite their decentralized location and the almost total lack of nearby services, the areas are interesting because they are both part of two neighbourhoods affected by an upcoming residential expansion and consequently urban and economic development. The existing public space, as already mentioned above, could really take on an even deeper meaning and a key role, not only as a place of physical encounter but also of the link between the past and the future, where different generations mix and they get to know each other. A public space that becomes an arena for negotiating social, cultural and ethnic diversities.

4.2 Discussion

This work initially wanted to focus attention on migrants and refugees, those who are "forced" to migrate due to severe conditions of poverty and poor job opportunities, or because their lives are in danger in their country, due to wars or climate disasters.

However, the more the investigations progressed, the clearer it became that many social problems were common to all newcomers: difficulties of insertion in the new social context, linguistic difficulties, racial discrimination, difficulties in accessing the working world, cultural differences, etc. Considering this, it was decided to focus attention on the post-reception period, that is, that moment in which the real confrontation with the new life begins, with the new social and cultural dynamics, trying to understand in which part of the system there are more difficulties in meeting between migrants and

4.2.1 A methodology as a strategy to support the analyses (replicability)

institutions, as well as between migrants and the society in which they settle.

To have further insights, in addition to the theoretical part of the study of inclusion policies and social integration services, we wanted to try a "direct" approach through a questionnaire, administered to subjects with foreign nationality who had been resident in Belgium for at least one year. The questionnaire³⁴, in English, consists of 30 questions, some with multiple choice and some open, to which the participants answered anonymously.

Because of the language in which it was written, the questionnaire was only given to people who can speak English, so the results obtained give a partial but still relevant reading of reality. Despite the great support of the Integration Agency and its affiliated teachers, who did everything possible to involve their students, many of them did not respond to the questionnaire. In the future, a French and a Dutch version could be prepared to reach the part of population who does not speak English.

From previous studies that have used this method for exploratory investigations in the IS field, it turns out that it was not the most effective system for gathering detailed information, since the portion of participants who do not have an "academic" education feel intimidated by the written mode, due to difficulties with the English language; in fact, also in this case it was found that the most useful feedback for research purposes came from respondents with a high academic profile, or from those who work within international companies, accustomed to writing articles or reports in English, to take part in conferences and seminars, to conduct interviews themselves and to deal more frequently with processes of active participation.

For what has been said so far, it has not been possible to obtain sufficiently relevant data to be able to compare with the historical data of the registers on migratory flows. However, these data were taken into consideration as a starting point for knowing the dominant ethnicity among those present and understanding how and why the data had changed over time.

³⁴ Due to the pandemic, the questionnaire was administered exclusively online. A copy of its paper version will be attached as an appendix to the research.

As mentioned above, the two cities are very similar in urban form and structure and number of inhabitants and typology. If on the one hand this is an advantage, because it allows us to use common analysis parameters, on the other hand the limit lies in the possibility of comparison and synthesis of the data obtained. If these data had been very similar, the extractable information to support the potential of public space as a tool for social inclusion would have been limited. Fortunately, the fact that the outcomes of the two urban realities are so different gave us room for movement to argue the initial hypothesis and support the final thesis.

Initially we also wanted to analyze the city of Leuven, the capital of the Flemish region, which as such has a different urban economic social context. A hint of it will be given here, leaving the door open for future investigations.

Leuven is dominated by the presence of the important KU Leuven university, through which everything passes. KU Leuven University is the economic engine of the city, even if not formally, practically. The influx of international students arriving every semester animates the social landscape of the city. English seems to be the official language here, because everyone, even the oldest, speaks it fluently. It is a lively and young city, like its mayor, a concrete example of inclusion, given its Moroccan descent. The Leuvenians are proud of their mayor. Students move the economy of bars and restaurants, but especially real estate. It is no coincidence that Leuven is the city with the most expensive rents in Belgium.

For reasons of time, language and limited means, it was not possible to extend the research to the Walloon region, but it would certainly be necessary for the purposes of restoring the Belgian situation to analyze that reality as well. From personal inspections, for example, it was found that Charleroi also hosts many migrants, but that the urban and social integration policies seem very different, even judging from the urban aspect, which removed the part along the river, seems neglected, almost a ghost town, where a certain latent social fear is perceived.

4.2.2 Limit of the research

The research presented here has suffered severe setbacks in the last year and a half in various moments of its development, due to the health crisis from Covid-19. As is known, severe restrictions on social interaction in public spaces have been introduced to counter the spread of infections, which has made it more complicated to find the information necessary for the development of investigations. Social interactions outside were not allowed except between those belonging to the same "bubble", that is, only between members of the same house or at most with another external person, limited to those who live alone. Suddenly the outside, the public space, is no longer the recreational place in which to play, chat, spend free time in contact with nature, but it has turned into a threat, the realm of an invisible enemy that always keeps us under. shot. Life in the public space has become impossible. Looking at parks, gardens, squares, streets, all so deserted, the thought becomes insistent on how necessary it is to get used to designing our "pandemic-proof" green spaces, to rethink which plant species can help us for a better air purification, or which materials may be more suitable for the design of outdoor furniture. To name one among others, bamboo is shown as an example of a natural material that manages to combine resistance, the ability to self-sanitize, quality, sustainability and flexibility of use. Already widely used in product design (cups, plates, cutlery, glasses, etc.), it is rapidly spreading also in the indoor and outdoor design sector.

Returning to the main discourse, covid has not only taken away a lot, but has also contributed to bringing to the surface not indifferent social problems: social tensions have increased exponentially, both for economic difficulties, but also for psychological fatigue, due to all security measures, mask, gel, forced distance, quarantine.

If it is true that the mask limits the hypothetical contamination, it is also true that it also limits communication between individuals, especially the non-verbal one. Furthermore, if these individuals are of different ethnicities, the linguistic difficulties that are normally encountered when speaking a language that is not one's own are doubled or tripled due to the use of the mask.

Social interaction has been eliminated in the public space. Observing the parks and gardens of our cities, the turnout had drastically decreased, even many spaces were completely deserted. This situation has brought to the surface a feeling of strong distrust towards the

Conclusion: Making social inclusion happen: Future trajectories

outside world and towards "the stranger", favouring the proliferation of extremist groups, which have seized the ball to fuel racial tensions and hit ethnic minorities. Several studies, including one recently conducted by the University of Ghent, have shown that episodes of discrimination and racial violence have increased due to Covid-19:

“Our analysis shows that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacts all aspects of refugees’ and migrants’ lives, and particularly affects those people facing poor living conditions, e.g., refugees and migrants without a residency permit or those holding a temporary one, as well as the homeless or those residing in centres for asylum seekers. The fact that their mental health is negatively affected is especially alarming, in particular because, in general, these demographics deal with mental problems more often, and because they have little access to mental health care.”

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon to hear comments without any scientific basis, about who is to blame for the presence of the virus. Ballini (2020), on the problem of immigration, underlines "the need for a strong direction of the local authority that has a strategic vision and continuous policies to be put into the system; a network of public, private and third sector entities that work together creating synergies; promote participation actions among the weakest sections of the community; usefulness of educational and preventive actions aimed at overcoming commonplaces. "

Working to mitigate social tensions until they are eliminated is possible, if public space is used as a tool to give visibility and voice to diversity and negotiate differences, starting from neighbourhood realities, to build common and shared values and improve the quality of everyone's life. This can only happen if there is "the ability of inhabitants and political decision-makers to create spaces to regulate conflict, with the participation and co-planning [...] of replicable good practices aimed at eliminating the barriers of prejudice, (practices) which can "enlighten the territory" and give it "the beauty" that comes from a community aware of conflicts and finds spaces and solutions to resolve them."

This society that emerges from the Covid-19 experience is deeply wounded, in body and mind. If previously the "long term" was a concept that seemed abstract, now the effort seems to have become

planning today for tomorrow. This extemporaneous way of living cannot take us far. The effort of the political class must be to restore trust and rebuild the values of community solidarity.

Social solidarity is ultimately the highest form of inclusion. And solidarity manifests itself in the most unexpected circumstances, it is not something that can be created, policies of social solidarity cannot be made. Social solidarity is like the caper plant, it grows only in the middle of the rocks, and only spontaneously. If it is allowed to grow, it gives beautiful flowers and sought-after fruits, if you try to replant on another soil it dies.

Unfortunately, Covid-19 crisis has also interfered in the field of solidarity, obviously changing the way in which space and communities meet. In the absence of anything else, but with needs to be satisfied, a new type of unexpected "public space" has taken shape: the balcony.

What was previously simply a part of the private space, to be protected and "isolated from the outside", has suddenly become the only window to the world and the only place for *safe relationships*. Suddenly, balconies turned into a large multilevel square, where people could feel close, still part of a community, active even from a distance, and all together doing something, whether it was singing, applauding, dancing or playing

The desire for space to be shared led to the creation of a common space through the appropriation of a dimensional stratification. "Unplanned uses of spaces to provoke social interaction and make the switch from private to public happen". This is Sennet's theory in a nutshell.

Perhaps the next challenge for the public space will be precisely the appropriation of a multidimensional space, a vertical rather than a horizontal space. Here, in front of this reflection, the visionary and debated or vertical forest no longer seems so "absurd", rather it now appears as the prototype of new possible landscapes, able to stimulate us to think of a different way of being together.

Shared spaces that do not necessarily belong to a single floor, spaces to be modelled according to functions, climatic characteristics and mechanical laws, of course. Shared space is no longer just physical, but is linked to a shared experience, because, as Aristotle said, man is a social animal and the sense of sociality that we carry within us is

inextricable. If it is the lived experience that makes the space, then the digital space also enters the public space, a space that is the same for everyone, where everyone has the same tools to interact and modify it. We can dare to call it cyber public space, in which augmented reality no longer seems so distant from us and perhaps not even so difficult to integrate into our lives.

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ANNEX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

How social innovative processes and practices in urban public spaces build inclusive cities for migrants.

Disclaimer: The scope of this questionnaire is to collect data for scientific purpose. No other use of the collected information will be permitted. The questionnaire must be filled in **ANONYMOUSLY**. The researcher is relieved from any responsibility for unauthorized uses of this document.

General Information

Age:

Sex:

Nationality:

Legal Status:

- ☐ Refugee ☐ Undocumented ☐ Climate migrant
☐ Family reunification ☐ Asylum seeker
☐ International Student ☐ Work permit
☐ Other _____

Civil Status:

Job:

Your life in Belgium

1) Since when do you live in Belgium?

- ☐ 1 year or less ☐ 2 - 4 years ☐ 5 years or more

2) In which city are you currently living?

3) **Underline** the adjectives you would use to describe the city in which you live:

Clean – Dirty	Boring – Exciting	Chaotic – Organized
Safe – Dangerous	Warm – Cold	Polluted – Not polluted
Young – Old	Open – Provincial	Beautiful – Ugly
Cheerful – Gloomy	Big – Small	Cozy – Depressing
Welcoming – Hostile		

4) **Underline** the adjectives you would use to describe the society in which you are living:

Friendly	Nervous	Observant	Inefficient	Predictable	Open	Weak
Sympathetic	Responsible	Smart	Disrespectful	Ambitious	Reliable	Passive
Charming	Creative	Enthusiastic	Close	Selfish	Cold	Welcoming
Efficient	Monotonous	Gloomy	Relaxed	Active	Cheerful	Unfriendly
Dumb	Good	Powerful	Indifferent	Introvert	Calculated	Cozy
Warm	Spontaneous	Disciplined	Nice	Incompetent	Calm	Extrovert
Resourceful	Lazy	Hostile	Strong	Caring	Boring	Daring
Irresponsible	Smart	Shy	Careful	Selfless	Friendly	Unpleasant
Warm	Bad	Funny	Energetic	Pleasant	Dowdy	Curious

5) From 1 to 5, are you satisfied with your everyday life?

☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

6) Do you feel part of the society you live in?

☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

7) Is the place where you live helping you to integrate into society?

☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

8) Which ones of the following aspects would you improve to feel more integrated into society?

☐ Job ☐ Education ☐ House ☐ Social services
☐ Language ☐ Culture ☐ Income ☐ Living context
☐ Friendships ☐ Other

9) Are the people closest to you of the same nationality or of different nationalities?

☐ Same ☐ local ☐ Different (which one/ones):

About your neighbourhood...

10) From 1 to 5, how do you rate it overall?

☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

What do you like most?

What do you like least?

What do you miss/ would you like to add in it?

11) From 1 to 5, how is your relationship with your neighbours?

☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

12) Are there parks, gardens, green spaces, square in your neighborhood?

☐Yes ☐No

13) If your answer was **YES**: How often do you go there?

☐Never ☐1-2 por month ☐1-2 por week ☐Every day

14) How do you spend your time when you go there? What do you usually do?

(e.g Reading, eating lunch, playing with your children, sport,...) if you answer NEVER to the previous question, you can skip this one

15) Are there associations or groups of people who organize activities (lunches, gardening, sports activities, BBQ's, second hand market shop and so on..) to help people to know each other and/or to gather together?

☐Yes ☐No ☐I don't know

16) If you answered **YES**, please, specify which kind of activities are organized and where? Are people participating in these activities? Which kind of people there are (families, students, elders, natives, people with different ethnicity,...)?

17) if you could design the park/garden/square in your neighborhood, what would you definitely include in it?

18) How has Covid-19 affected your relationship with public spaces?

(e.g. you spend more/less time in parks and gardens, you are feeling scared to stay in open spaces, walking/biking through green spaces helps you to relax...)

19) Which activity/ties taking place in public spaces and currently forbidden do you miss the most?

Since you move to Belgium...

20) ...from 1 to 5, how difficult was it to obtain the documents necessary to live here?

☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

21) ...from 1 to 5, how difficult was it to find a job?

☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

22) ...from 1 to 5, how difficult was it to find a house?

☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

23) ...did you feel more accepted or rejected?

Accepted ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5 Rejected

24) ...have you experienced hostile situations?

☐Always ☐Very often ☐Sometimes ☐Rarely ☐Never

25) ...did the institutions help you?

☐Always ☐Very often ☐Sometimes ☐Rarely ☐Never

Which ones helped you the most?

26) Have you ever felt or still feel scared crossing or staying in parks, public gardens, squares in the city where you live?

☐Very much ☐Somewhat ☐Little ☐Not at all

27) Have you ever felt or still feel scared crossing or staying in public garden, parks, squares in your neighbourhood?

☐Very much ☐Somewhat ☐Little ☐Not at all

28) Read the following statement: '**In Belgium I feel at home**'.

How much do you agree?

Agree ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5 Disagree

29) Why did you leave your homeland?

☐Work ☐Study ☐Family reunion ☐Unsafe living conditions ☐Poor quality of life ☐Other:

30) If living conditions in your homeland were good, would you leave Belgium to go back there?

☐Definitely yes ☐More yes than no ☐More no than yes

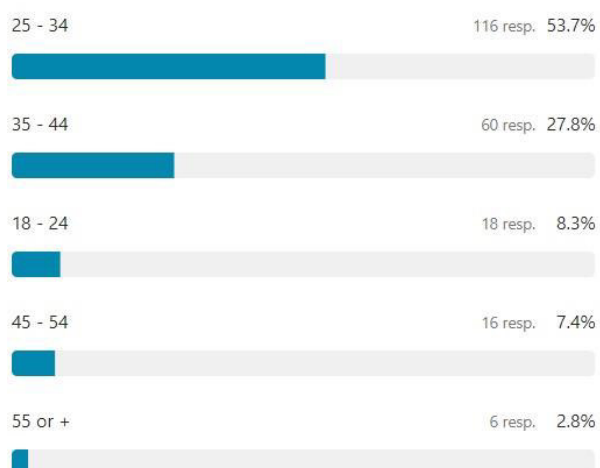
☐Definitely no

Why? _____

ANNEX B: Responses to the questionnaire

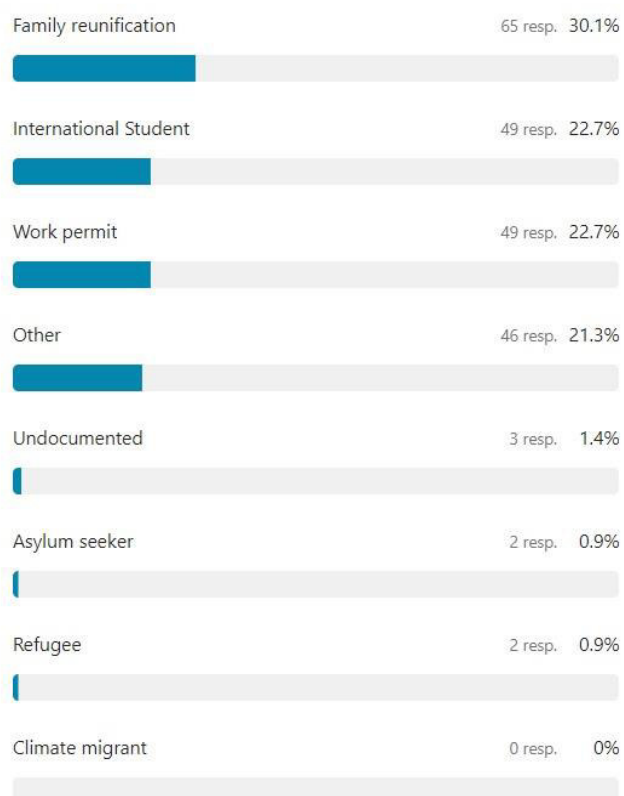
✓ 1a How old are you?

216 out of 216 people answered this question



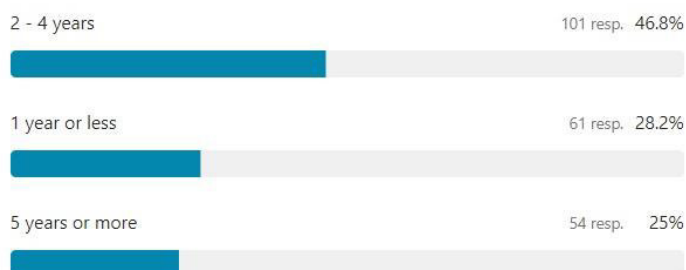
▼ 1d What is your Legal Status?

216 out of 216 people answered this question

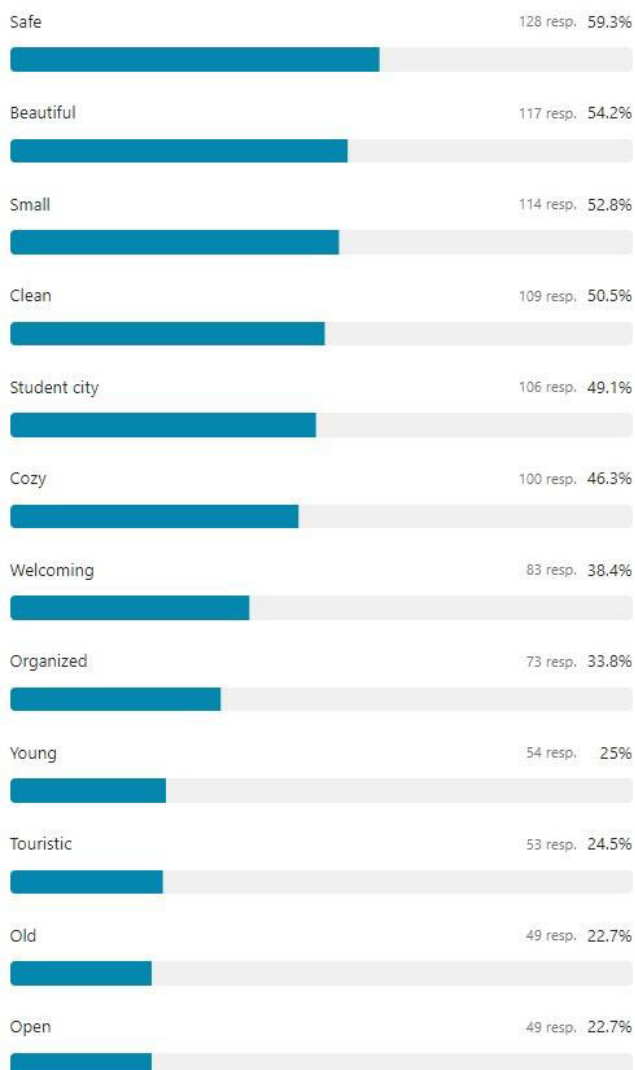


✓ 2 Since when do you live in Belgium?

216 out of 216 people answered this question

**✓ 4 Select from the list below the adjectives you would use to describe the city where you currently live:**

216 out of 216 people answered this question (with multiple choice)





5

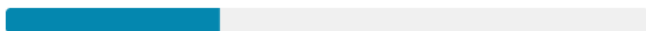
Select from the list below the adjectives you would use to describe the people of the city where you live:

216 out of 216 people answered this question (with multiple choice)

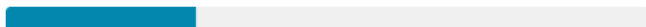
Friendly 105 resp. 48.6%



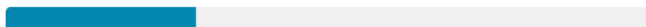
Responsible 72 resp. 33.3%



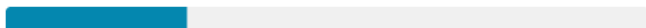
Friendly 64 resp. 29.6%



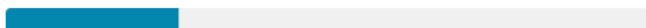
Sympathetic 64 resp. 29.6%



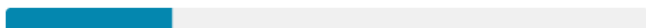
Active 61 resp. 28.2%



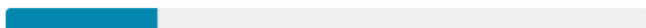
Welcoming 58 resp. 26.9%



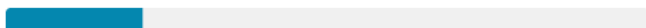
Calm 56 resp. 25.9%



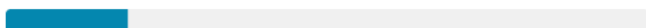
Disciplined 51 resp. 23.6%



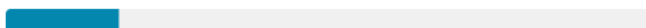
Indifferent 46 resp. 21.3%



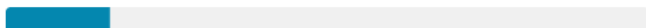
Introvert 41 resp. 19%



Close 38 resp. 17.6%



Open 35 resp. 16.2%



- 6** For each of the following question answer with a value from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most negative and 5 the most positive:

6a Are you satisfied with your everyday life? Avg. 3.6

216 out of 216 people answered this question



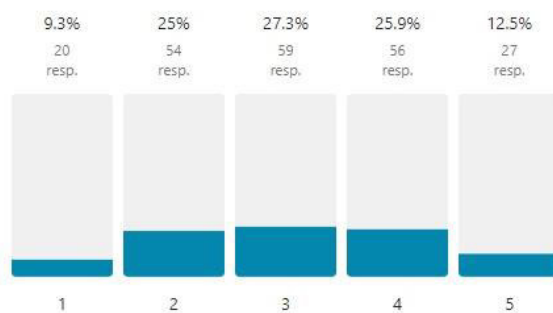
6b Do you feel part of the society you live in? Avg. 2.8

216 out of 216 people answered this question



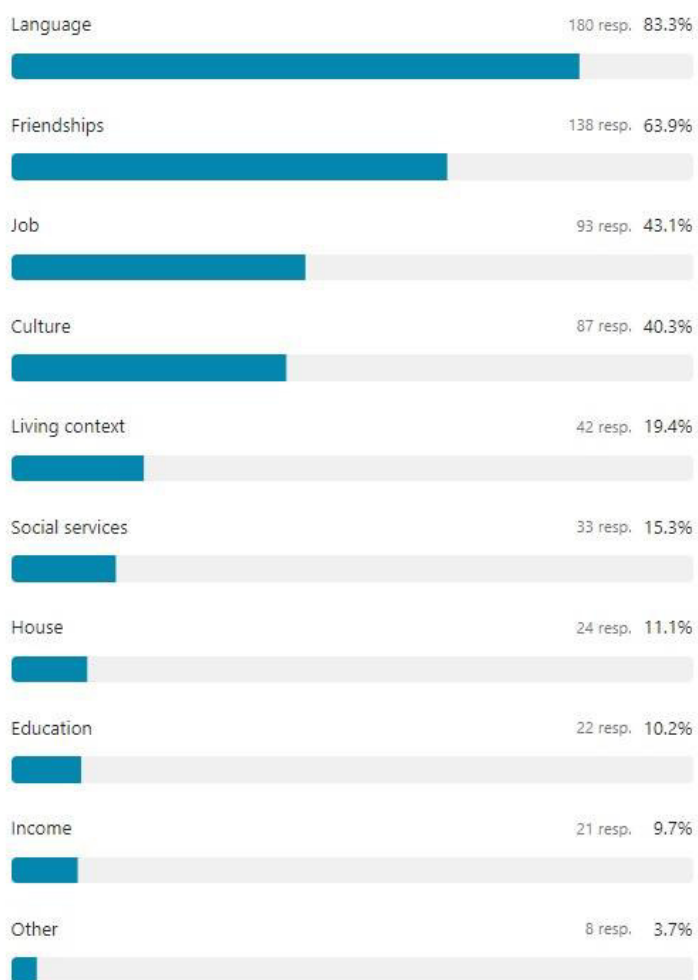
6c Is the place where you live helping you integrate into society? Avg. 3.1

216 out of 216 people answered this question



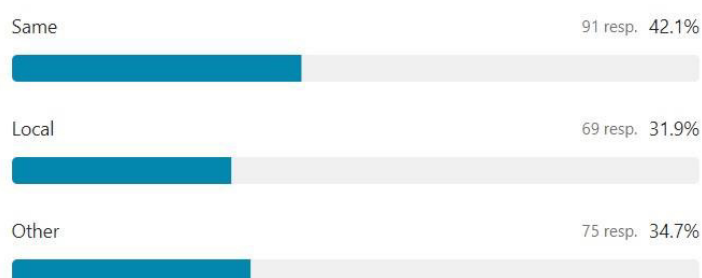
✓ 7 Which ones of the following aspects would you improve to feel more integrated into society?

216 out of 216 people answered this question (with multiple choice)



✓ 8 Among your closest contacts, are there more people of your nationality or other nationalities?

216 out of 216 people answered this question (with multiple choice)



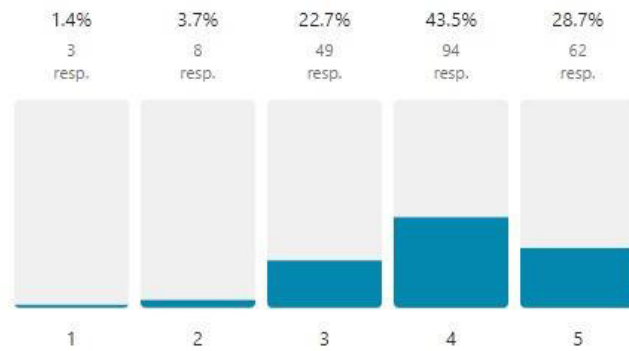


9b

From 1 to 5, how do you rate it overall?

Avg. 3.9

216 out of 216 people answered this question



9f

From 1 to 5, how do you rate your relationship with the neighbours?

Avg. 3.1

216 out of 216 people answered this question



What do you like most?

Centrum

The people

Cozy and pretty area

Quite

Nice facilities

Safe, green, easy transport

It is quite calm

Caf  s

Calm, nature

cute houses, charming architecture

convenience

Securite

We have a garden-neighbour behind. We like them very much, the man gave us some apple or cherry in the summer, he gave some crunchy for my dog and

he can speak a little English, so we can easily talk.
Parks
They are very nice.
Pretty, calm, safe, close to the city centre
Calm with nature close
Green and quiet
close to everything
Has everything we need
Parks
Friendly people, activities for the neighbourhood, very central yet silent.
Residential
Accessibility
Lively of the city
Calm, clean, new
Convenience
being close to shops and the center
availability of parcs and playgrounds
People are friendly
Coziness
The cleanliness
Proximity of shops
It's quiet and safe
Friendly
It is calm
quiet
nature park nearby
Close to the city center with a lot of metro and tram lines
Calm, residential, nature around
Bike lanes
Talking to them
I have everything I need close by
Access to city center and parks
Calm, safe, with parking
Quiet
Bois de la Cambre
Quiet and cozy atmosphere
It's close to the shops and attractions. I can walk to everything of interest quickly or reach the tram in minutes.
It's only 10 min walk from the city center
Peace and quiet, beauty
Neighbors and closeness to everything
Safe clean relaxed
Close to city centre
Itâ€™s calm and safe

Its very green
Being part of the city but feels like a village
Buildings
That it is close to nature
The calm environment
My life
She makes delicious soup.
itâ€™s near to all supermarkets and sports
Clean, nice, upscale
Kindnesse
It has a bitnof everything, restaurants, bars, stores. Its not Ghent but is ok
It is calm, beautiful and safe
Organized and friendly
He is so friendly and kind
Nature
Beautiful place
cool
Its always clean and quaiet
Its safe and clean, beautiful architecture
The quiet atmosphere
Affordable and not too noisy
Calmness, People
Near to everything
Ability to move around freely
Clean,safe, calm
Its like a little town in brussels
Friendly commune staff, organized
Stores close by, proximity to ring
Families and quiet streets
I have access to the city, to the woods, to supermarkets, to the best fries!
Nature, bakery down the street, Nice neighbours
People are friendly
Green
quiet
Clean
Quiet
Study and working
Cleanliness
The place and the people
The operational government system as compared to where I am from and the quick access of the metro in BRUSSELS to get to your destination
Friendly people
Calm, safe
Transport Facilities

closeness to everything
Organized city
Architecture
Woodland walks
There's always something to do in Leuven
Green space, walkable, playgrounds, shops
Neighbors are friendly. Many initiatives for joint projects.
talking
Friendly people
Very residential
Proximity to greenspace and centrum
Calm, quiet, lovely, close to LLN and Wavre, close to E411.
The nature
Green areas and access to the city
The location
Charming
Green places
Leisure walks along the promenade area, beach, pier, shopping area, etc
The pedestrian areas
Village type of living
Fresh air
Very peaceful
Other families who are outsiders and speak English
Central to city attractions
Calmness
The location
Location
Different cultures, african market, indian restorant
Shopping
A lot of caffees and restaurants are close
A close community where we help each other
Near to Leie
Location
Central to the train station + close to nature
Markets and libraries are close
Calm
Safety
Quiet spaces and no loud interventions
close to amenities
I spend no time here? The housing prices
The charm of it
Close to colruyt
That is safe

Older residents
Peaceful
It's quiet
small grocery shops everywhere, good public transport and Vilo bikes
Quietness
Nature
Safe Nice quiet
The parks
Nature.
Location
It's close to the city center
Near centrum
There are many friendly students
organized, respectful
Multinationals
nature
Everything I need is within walking distance from my house
Closeness to everything
Clean, walkable, safe
Very safe
Location
Silent, Clean, Organized, Safe, Friendly small stores
UNESCO world Heritage
Calm and serene
it is cozy and a bit alternative
Ancient site
Quietness
Calm
Cleanliness
Peaceful, Friendly neighbors
The environment
I'm adventurous type of person
Safe and calm
Kind neighbors
Centrality
The center of action
You have that you need near by. After a while people tend to be more open with a not local.
It is close to everything, walking distance
Affordable
Community feeling
The cycle paths and the public parks
The silence in the streets and the parks close to my house
Coziness

Parcs
Green areas
The many parks and bars around
Student place, close to the centrum, st. Donatus park
Proximity to the train station, the center, but still inside the ring
Proximity to hospital, accessible to the ring and buses, easy to walk to center
Calm
down to earth people
Quiet and convenient
Central, parks all around
The hospitality
Everyone minds their own business
Safety
There is everything, it is closed to everything
Safe area
quiet
Quiet and calm, with a park nearby and It is close to the city center by walking
Itâ€™s better organised
art
I don't often socialize with my neighbours
Its central
Safety
They are very young and so we have the same needs and schedule
Safety and coziness
The forest
quiet
It's a cute little neighbourhood with small shops and lots of nationalities. Close enough to the city centre but far enough to be quiet.
Silent
Near to noord park, cheap markets
Peaceful

What do you like least?
Smokers
Nothing
Lots of cars and students
Uphill Road
Somehow the streets look dirty
Being too residential
The garbage collection system
Road constructions
transportation
student noise

Cleaning
Neighbourhoods
That noisy persons next to us. They are really annoying and make me feel bad, when I hear the mother to shout at the children and then how the children are shouting as well after they are shouting at their dogs and put them in their garden alone and they are snobbing and barking sooo loud. I feel really sorry for the dogs.
Traffic
Life is very boring in this neighborhood. I don't like the shops and services available here.
To much student housing
People leave dirt in playground. Bad parking and driving.
high levels of inequality
Parking
Bussy street
too many cobblestones :)
Too many cars
Traffic
The system for garbage collection exposed on the streets
All is good
Traffic
not very open community; not much interaction
unavailability of coffee, bar, restaurants
Cold weather
Nothing really
Nothing
Road noises
Most people who live here are seniors
Nothing I think
Understanding
none
nothing
Street harrasement and dirty sidewalks
No bakery near by
language barrier
Never came forward
The noise
Busy street
Nederlands!
Isolated, snobby
Streets full of teenagers when nearby high school starts and ends.
There's a main road in front of my building so the traffic can be a bit loud.
Cost of housing is more expensive
No social life. I.e Restaurants.
Trash on the road and fast drivers

Nothing
Dirty
Almost nothing for entertainment
Nothing
Little activity
Neighbourhood mentality
Not friendly
Christmas coming
The food and friendship.
Indian population is less here
Not much to do
None
Small public transport network, not access to a lot of international stores, could use more bars or other entertainment options
Nothing
Job integration
He is so curÄ±ous
Entertainment
When it too cold
no time for interaction
nothing, everything is ok
Dronk students, racisicim
It's far from the city centre
It feels like give up
Unfriendly
the unfriendly nature of locals
Boring:) cant have it all
Its a little bit far and a lot of traffic
Parking rates, public transportation
Parking
Crazy drivers
Very hard to meet your neighbors.
Driving to every place you need to go
Not much to do.
Snob people
lack of activities
No idea
People are nosy and a little hostile towards me
Wether
isolated
As of now none
Because of covid-19. The emptiness of the park
Non
Lack of some business

Individualism
the students
Parking space
Weather
Age group very old
Students parties in the middle of the night
Dog poo on the paths, a lot of traffic
Too many kots. Fewer single family homes
standing faar away
Nothing
Some neighbors are dirty
noise from the tram
Need to use a transport to go to the nearest supermarket, very little communication between neighbours.
Bad public transport
The house I live in
At the moment, a lot of constructions..
Nothing
Traffic
Far from relatives living in another city in Belgium
The dirt on the sidewalk
Pollution
Noise from the carnival once yearly.
Too quite. Average age is old
Lack of good healthcare
There is not enough green space
Real Estate prices
Nothing
Expensive
Not enough trees
Cleaning
Crowds, people not speaking english, drunk gangs yelling and hanging out all day
Language barriers
Near to the big road
Neighbors
Noise from trains and the very modern buildings
Too calm for student life
People are not welcoming
Isolation
Makes you feel lonely and unwanted
empty
Ugly
The expensiveness

Dirty
That everything closes at 18:00/18:30
Traffic and loud
Distance from city center
dirty, few car parking space, small green areas, people not very friendly
Nothing
Facilities
No relationship
The language
There is nothing to do.
Nothing, I'm extremely happy with my neighborhood :)
Nothing
Far from train station
It is difficult to find enough jobs
people are closed
Dirtiness
stores are far away
Park is not well light at night
Still a bit dangerous
Things being closed because of COVID
People are strangers
Facilities
Short time living here, nothing specific that I dislike
One of my neighbors is sensitive to noise
Far from the city
traffic and pollution
Too close to the Ring
Hill
Coldness of inhabitants
No communication
Too quiet
The food
Staying at home
Ordinary and sometimes boring
There are a few possibilities in the area, I plan to move to a larger city.
Busy
can be little bit over crowded
More activities that include the neighborhood to approach ourselves . Some people are still closed mind about migrants that they do not even notice that many of the things that they consume come from abroad. People tend to be racist also xenophobic. This neighborhood misses a Theater or other cultural approach more near by .
Roads and pavements are destroyed
Lack of organization
Trash around

Road, ring
No events for international, non Dutch speaking fellows
Too residential
Unfriendly neighbours
Disrespectful neighbors
Traffic
Sometimes noisy
distance to the large supermarket
Cycling uphill to get home; not enough shops around
Few places to go
dirty, irresponsible people who do not own the place
Bit boring
Traffic
The bicyclist
Being away from family and friends from Turkey
Expensive
The car circulation
Cleanliness
only students live there
It is not beautiful.
It's more congested than Linkebeek
people don't speak English
I don't often socialize with my neighbours
Its not very vibrant
Too small
Sometimes they are introvert
Too small
Lack of cultural spaces
loneliness
Dirty streets (sometimes)
Privacy
Honking and fast driving cars
Access to shops ,and services

What do you miss / would you like to add in it?
Food delicacy
Nothing
More restaurant surroundings
More coffee places and restaurants
Shops, cozy places like cafes, bookshops nearby, more take away food from world cuisine
Stores
More parks
stores

green areas
night life
Friendly
I wish we have a normal and younger neighbours. I would be great to have a good neighbour, and we can go around to each other, and we can learn easily french from natives.
Improvement to public spaces, including renovation of old architecture
Nothing
I don't really know how this could be improved in covid-times.
More young families
More observations from police for people to keep the neighbourhood clean and obey the traffic rules.
open green space
Closer to the sea
More mature. Better buses
Some more activities to bring the neighbours together
More green
A smaller scale, quieter area
Nothing
Good bakery and shops
Mountains and lakes
more spontaneous get togethers, more social interactions and curiosness/interest about each other
a nice bar (open whole day)
Hot weather, family
Nothing really
Nothing
Nothing special
Nothing :)
I miss having a lot of friends in the neighbourhood
Open
nothing
some food from back home
Lighting, more surveillance, more dine in restaurants
Social activities
Friendliness/welcoming
Socialising
Green areas
More speed bumps
Warmth injections in local hearts
More convenience store
Culture
City library
I'm new to Gent so I'm not sure yet. So far I just wish things were open/normal and I could experience normal Gent and live music. The options are in my neighborhood normally I think.

None
Coffee shops or restaurants
Something to make the cars go slower
Friends, family,
Clean streets, more green, less ugly stores
More shops, cultural activities, cafes,
A metro stop
More public benches
Parks
people interaction
Nothing specific
Nothin
IDK
Stores stay open longer, open sunday
None
Activities to do
More cafes and restaurants
More lively activities and shops
Visiting home
Instant appointment
I miss my parents and siblings
social mingling
gym can be closer
The weather, the friendly atmosphere
Convinient shops.
Some more young people, or laughter
More interaction with neighbors
Friends
I miss little chats with neighbours
More caf��s
Cultural activista, younger people
More social activities for kids, improve kids playground
Nicer people
Coffeeshop (after covid....)
More community-feeling activities.
Safe cycling paths in every street
Very little non European cuisines options are present.
Sun
more opportunities to meet people
Family
My friends and family back home
Holidays
social life

Back to normal lives(because of pandemic)
Having to see people hanging out
More talking with them
More stores
Social activities
more green inside the city
Sun and friends
Sun
Cinema
Maybe more places for the not so young generations
Nothing
Shared green space
speaking friendly honestly
I miss only my family
Busses on the weekends
There are no front gardens
Sea. :)
Better restaurants
More social interaction
Nothing at the moment
Nothing
Local friends
Nothing to add
Some green, trees
More nature
More sporting activities
More young activities
Better healthcare
Spontaneous
Opening Hours of shops from my country
Bars
Trees are always an after thought... pavements are finally done near Porte de Namur but not a single tree is planted (putting few pots afterwards is not the same)
More shopping
More plants and nature, more police to remove drunk people
More local shops for local people
A butcher next to my neighbourhood will be good.
Belgian integration
More caf��s
Better neighbor relationships
smiling faces
Friends
Interaction, something that makes you feel livelier

more activity
Less ugly buildings
A market
Bus stops
Parts of my culture
More green
More integration in surrounding neighborhood
More shops/café's
better green areas, more activities to improve the neighborhood spirit
Not sure I understand
Better facilities. Opportunities to exchange with other students living here
Open people close relationships
Miss my family
Sports field accessible to public by booking.
A Colombian restaurant
More places to park my bike
Nothing
More jobs
no
More greenspace, less cars
a cafe
Nothing at the top of my head
More parking spaces
I miss larger grocery stores for food
People more welcoming
Facilities
Nothing so far.
A larger kitchen
More hanging out spots
more areas to meet people
More shops
More supermarkets
Social life
Relationship
Happy environment
Nothing is missing
Nothing
A bit of sea touch
Cinemas, museums and other cultural places.
Nothing
More shops
International market. Be more comprehensive with migrants right away instead of taking 3 months almost to start opening up.
Green zones

Dedicated bike lanes, well designed road junctions
More community gatherings
Public swimming pool
More cultural events in English maybe
Some calm cafe/bars to hang out
Food
Respectful neighbors
Benches
Nothing
I like it the way it is...
More bakeries/shops closely
No
the sea :)
idk
Sea:)))
A bridge.
Family and friends in Turkey
More diversity
Tables for pic Nic
More light in the streets
laundry shops
Less constructions, more plants.
Social connections
more friends
nothing
More cafes
City culture
To have more interactions
More activities
A cultural center, scene
heating
None
I don't have anything in mind
My job
Public transport



9f

From 1 to 5, how do you rate your relationship with the neighbours?

Avg. 3.1

216 out of 216 people answered this question



9g

Are there parks, gardens, square in your neighbourhood?

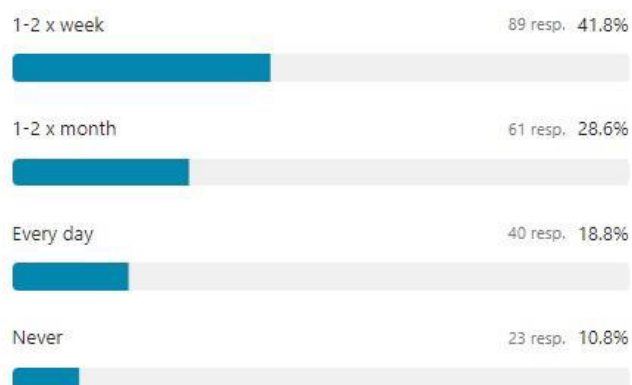
216 out of 216 people answered this question



9h

If you answered YES, How often do you go in there?

213 out of 216 people answered this question



How do you spend your time there? What do you usually do?
Playing with kids and walking
Talking
Walking
walk around
Walk around it
Reading, running, making phone calls
Walking
Walk around
walking, eating ice cream
reading, just walking
Seating and Reading
Everyday for walking
Walking with our dog, running
Playing with children
Playing with my children
Walking, taking photos, jogging
Walking or sports
Walking and Removing the garages people have left behind
walk
Walk
Walk, exercise
skip
Walking
Walking, playing with children
Walk.
I never go there
Playing with children, sport
reading, lunch, sport, just walking
accompanying children
Walking with our dog
Don t go there
Playing with my childreb
Sport
I go running
Bonding with my family especially for my son we bring him on the park to play
Just walking around
running
Sport with my dog

Reading, walking with friends
Kids playing area
Walk
Playing with my child
Walking, sometimes eating
Walking dog
Walk my dog, run, pick nicks
Playing with our child
Walking around or people watching. Sometimes enjoying a meal al fresco.
Walking
Walking my dogs
Playground
Walking
Play with my kid pr just walk around
Walk my dog
Walk or cycle around
Walking
Sport, children
Walk around with my son
Running, biking, or football
Walk with my son and with my husband
playing with my kid
Walking
Childs
Walking around, maybe grabbing some food
Exercise (walking or running)
Playing with Children
Walking with family,feeding ducks
Playing with my children
Eating , walking and playing
Walking
walk with family members
Walking
Taking walks and picnics
Just for a walk through
Playing with our boy
Walking
Playing with my children
Sports,walking
I play with my kid

Playing with kids, sport
Walking
Playing with kids, just walking around
Meditate, walk or exercise.
Sport, playing with children, walk
Kids play there
Playing with children walking
sport, walk, playing with kids
Walking and jogging
Walk the dog
Enjoying the nature ,drinking a coffe or eating something
i hardly go, if i go i do running
Never
I just stare and gaze around
Playing with kids
Running, walking
Playing with childrens
walk
Playing with kids
Walk
Walking
Love to have lunch or just walk around
Playing with my children, walking
walking with my family
Sport
Playing with my son
walking, playing with children
Walking, riding, drinking.
Walking
Playing with children or walking
Playing with children
Walk
Walking my dog
Leisure walks, enjoy the ocean breeze, watching fishermen catching fish, etc
Playing w childre and chatting w friends
Walking
Walking or picnicking
Just walking around, biking
We don't
There isn't any public space

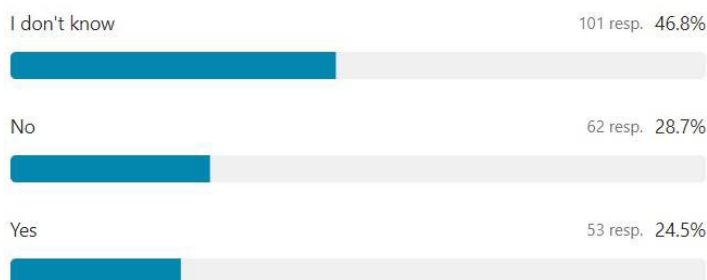
Walking and biking
Lunch and chilling
Walking, picnic, playtime
Walk, run
Walking
Dring coffee and taking a walkk
Walking
Sport or just walking
Walking
Reading, running
Walk with friends
walk around, meet with friends and hang out
Walking
just walk around
skip
Walk in the woods
Reading
Walking
Taking pictures, reading, listening to music
walking
Read, walk around, have lunch
Walking and running
walk, watch the nature, read and eat in the summer
Walking
Running, walking
Walking
Walking and reading
Walking
Sport and eating
Walking, meeting friends (in summer)
Running, walking
Walking, taking pictures
walking, eating lunch
Sit and enjoy
walks/runs
Playing with my dog
Walking
Eating.
Sport and walking
Sports

Walking, listening music, reflecting different thoughts
Walking
Eating dinner, walking
Walking and relaxing
10 min
Jogging, meeting friends
Never
Walking and exploring the neighborhood
Playing with my child
Just sightseeing if theres someone played in the basketball court
Walking
I'm taking my dog for a walk.
Just walk by or enjoy the place
Walk the dog
Walking
Relax
It's just a playground amongst the social housing area and where the buurtcentrum is located.
Walking
Just walk in the park, and when the weather is good reading
Wandering around
Running, meditation
Walking
Having coffee, reading, sometimes meeting friends, often just sitting
Reading, chatting with friends
Sit and talk during the summer evenings
Walking through the Botanical Garden and looking at the plants
Running
walk, run
Walk
Sports, picknick
Walking with my girlfriend
Walking in tempo
Skip
Run or walk or bike to work (alone)
Reading, meeting friends, exercise, picnics
exercise
Running or just walking while hearing music
Read the bible and take walks
walk around or read books

Sport
Meeting up with friends
Sport
Walking
Do some sports, biking, walking, just resting
Walking and running
have a espresso
Taking walks, seeing friends, eating/drinking
Playing football
Basketball, walk, to drink
Watching nature, fishing

✓ 10 Are there associations or groups of people who organize activities to help people get to know each other and/or to gather together?

216 out of 216 people answered this question



If you could design a park/garden/square in your neighbourhood, what would you definitely include in it?
Same as current design
chair table for eating lunch
A coffee place and lots of flowers and tables
Mini stalls where people can buy snacks, sit down and socialize, benches, definitely a pond.
No idea
More walking areas in parks and more international cafès in squares
Activities
community garden
skating field
Park
Just trees and herbs. Nothing more.
Trees, green space, redirecting traffic.
vegetables and fruits
A lot of benches and tables, playground, a smaller restaurant/bar, sports field, lake or fountains.
A bathing pond

Round tables not individuals benches to cause social interactions. Dancing area even if small. At least one permanent small cafe with drinks and books, and informing about events.
pedestrian and cycle separation
Children's playground
Chilling area. Hiking trails
The small river flowing underneath the neighbourhood and many trees.
Many plants
Benches, trees, water
Mix of leisure spaces with grass and water
Benches, games for kids
Lawn space, water, benches, picnic tables, playground
some small creek running through the garden; many trees for shadow and that generate the nice sound of trees in the wind; also some larger meadow where you could lie for sunbathing, ideally surrounded by trees; maybe even a small lake with a patio ; picknick tables with some BBQ spots where you could meet with friends
a coffee place so the parents could have something while the kids play :)
Vegetable
Something with trees, fountains, a pond, maybe a coffee bar
Kids playground
Fitness , musculation equipments
Benches, trees, a wide road for bikes and pedestrians
A chair and table so when people bring snacks they can use it?.
Tap water
bbq spot
workout stations
Sport spaces bathrooms and showers for summer
Tables and chairs
Ladies club
Benches
Lots of seating, stroller and wheelchair accessible, playground for all ages and abilities, water fountain, trees, public toilet
A space for homeless people; and free source of water to drink.
Benches
More trashbins, more benches, water fountains
Over head cover/roofing and structures/plants to block the wind to make being outside comfortable regardless of the weather. Plants and greenery. Running water features, maybe a splash pad for kids in the summer or even a water feature for all ages.
Garden
A cafe
Playground, a cafe
Grass, trees, flowers
And stage
More water fountains
A public gathering spot, like an amphitheater
Fountain

playground
Enough playing kits
More lights
I dont know no idea
some benches
Food vendors
Street
Just a nice open space, with benches, maybe a small lake and some food and drinks stalls
An indoor pool
Indoor playground
Bird houses in park:)
Barbecue area
Plan a mango tree , coconut and some vegetables from Cambodia
gym, outdoor health equipments
water fountain
Swiming pool, ice skating ring
A flower boutique
Gazebo garden
More interactive playing grounds
I don't know
I will include a toilet
Caf�s and public toilets, book crossing space
Bongaloos for staying and make barbecue
Kids playground, BBQ
Playground
Benches, tables, play area for kids, trashcans, flowers, shade/tree
Adult activities, sports maybe
Benches, Animation farm, playground, sports ground for adults, Basketball field, skate park
Live music option or speakers playing music
Playground and picnic tables
kind of little stage /place to dance or sing
Children's playground
Cafe to have coffee and something to eat
Flower
I would love a have a small fountain in the middle of the garden feel so relaxing
Basketball court
More activities for kids
Kids Toys
playground
Barbecue places
Trees
Picnic tables

Sufficient benches! More clean ponds and flowers, lots of flowers
Playground, benches, flowers
Wide open green space, many trees for cover and interest. Nontraditional seating. Playground equipment for climbing and swinging. Water feature.
pond,sitting plates,bridges,
Green
Picnic tables
more picnic tables and bigger playground
Big tables for share, roller skate parks, chess tables.
Benches and trees
Playing structures for children of all ages, and an area with picnic tables
Playing space for kids maybe
A sheltered place to sit; benches...
Benches and tables
Exercising machines
Trees, benches, bins
Public wc
An indoor sports arena
Bench and picnic table
A playground for children. A water feature.
Waterscapes
Flowers
Picnic tables
Waterplay Area
Children's playground, running lane, basketball net, a small coffee shop (kiosk) open all year around) benches..
Indoor playground
A lot of trees and benches to sit down and enjoy nature
Activities for children
Flower garden and a bench to enjoy the view
Lots of flowers and trees
Places to sit, activity for children, trees to sit by, a lake
Fountain
picnic benches
Playing stuff
an English translation of what the park is and what you can do there
benches
Greenery, some grass
Open green spaces
Events
Public barbecue place
Big swings
Benches to sit
A lake

big trees, barbecue, benches, smaller plants, open green area, water fountain, vegetable garden and compostor
Just a nice space to sit
Toilets, water to drink, places to sit
Tables & bbqs
I like them as they are
A meeting place for strangers.
I'm surrounded by parks were I live and I really like all of them
A pond, places to sit, trail for running/walking
Grass and sidewalks
Many trees, plants and flowers. Insect hotels. Books.
flowers
A lot of real trees, flowers, bushes
outdoor gym
More lights, space for dogs to run free
Fountain
Benches/places for ppl to eat and sit
A dog park
International area
Pond
More benches
Some art, sculptures, paintings...
Swings!
Trees
More public benches
Place for gym
Playground
Playing area for kids
Lagoons and live music
Attractions for dogs, outdoor gym, etc.
Something with water, fountain or something
A children swings
Hall for Concerts. Playground for kids. Receive all sorts of arts around it or abroad, because they do have but it is not so exposed or announced at the neighborhood. Weekends fresh market also with local & international food.
Grass, benches and kids swings
Kinetic sculpture or a contraption. Selfie point
Benches and bbqs
Seating items and a centre piece to define the space with.
Open gym
A table with benches for pic-nic or single chairs for people to read
Loads of trees
Fontain
Picnic area

Lots of trees, but also fruit trees, benches, and grass areas
Sitting group, human path inside the park to enjoy the nature, children play ground
A grill
Picnic tables and barbecues
Social connecting places
slack line or metal wire of that sort
Not parking spaces
Lake
A bridge above Schelde.
There's already a little lake and ducks, geese; fair enough
A water fountain to drink fresh water, benches
Green areas
exercise equipments for the elderly
Flowers and more trees
I couldn't add anything, the parks are so beautiful here
botanic garden
a pond
Some terrace space for cafes, a lot of trees
Fountain, playground, benches
Spaces for barbecue, sitting zones/tables for lunch, a covered patio for activities like small birthday party, if the place is big it would be nice to include some activities like treasure hunts for the kids, or flea markets of the neighborhood, or reading weekend where you can exchange books, or concerts for local bands
Lake with swans
Workout benches, fitness meter kind of thing
Lots of green space. A small body of water would also help, a bit like Parc Woluwe.
Swimming pool
Open air gym equipments
Water

How has Covid-19 affected your relationship with public spaces?
Feeling scared in open spaces
Actually is not bad we still keep contact
Not much. Less willing to go to city centre as walking with a mask is uncomfortable
not a lot
More time in parks but more scared of being alone in the parks
Less time in parks
We are at home almost all the time
Very badly..
yes
i use them more, to be outside more
have to avoid communicating with others
Walking/jogging in the Tervuren park

No affect. We went running, walking, hiking, biking regularly before covid and after covid as well.
I appreciate the local parks.
I am feeling scared to stay in open spaces
I am less likely to go outside and I have barely any physical contact with people other than my boyfriend.
I feel fine in open spaces, but I keep bigger distance to other people. Fresh air and nature gets the mind off corona
I spend more time in nature for relaxing after Corona
no life on the streets
More cautious in public spaces
Less time.
We have been even more outside than before, especially when children didn't go to school.
I take distance of people when walking by
More time in parks, help to relax
More in terms of not interacting with people at all in those spaces. A "good morning" is always welcome
Not much, I still go for long walks
More time in parks, less time in the city center
very big negative impact; less time in common areas and rather trying to get out of the city into woods/forest where there is less people
I don't think covid had any influence on this, we have two young kids and we go out as soon as the weather allows it
We don't go if lots of people
I walk more outside in parks/forests
Spending more time outdoor
Much Less physical activities :(
I am more careful about people but I still go walking or running every week
We don't go outside just only once or twice a month
Spending less time outside the house
didn't affect
I have run more in the park since covid 19 started
I spent a lot less time outside
Walking and biking around the area to try and get fresh air from time to time
More time outdoors
Less socializing
I spend less time in parks
More time in green spaces and squares.
Not much
More time in parks
Yep. I don't spend any time in the city per se, just open air spaces
I spend more time outdoors
I have spent more time in parks and gardens than ever before as there aren't many other recreational options or venues. Walking around the parks has become an activity of relaxation and enjoyment. I've started to really like watching birds and observing different plants I haven't seen before.
Spend less time outdoors

Generally, yes. But I am still able to walk in nature, which has been my saving grace
More time in playground but no playdates, no new contacts
Walking and cycling more
I spend little time outdoors
A lot! If its not for the parks then I wouldn't spend time out
Nope
No influence
I'm still going to walking.
not much
Always indoors
It was a bit difficult to meet people but the friendship didn't change..
Less time in parks
less time in parks and gardens due to winter and scared to go to indoor playarea due to covid
More time outside
Yrss
It hasn't changed it, actually i go more now
I go to these places always taking my precautions, but I keep going.
Scared to stay in open places
We don't see our friends often as before
Spend very less time in outdoor
I spend less time contacting or visiting in public places
Fear to travel in public transport, loneliness
Its not possible to just go out somewhere. Mostly we have to decide if we really need it
I walk and bike more often, i go to the forest more often
Spending less time in parks
It's preventing me to visit my family that I already have not seen in years causing me severe anxiety and depression. I absolutely love working from home having time to walk around and eat well. Talk to my elderly neighbours from the porch. Now they are desperate for company and talk to me and my bad Dutch.
The first period yes, but now as people are more careful, we feel ok
More walking
Walking and biking definitely helps me relax
More time in parks, it became the place you meet friends
More time in parks
The same
Less time spent in public spaces
Spent TONS more time in the Botanical Garden (almost everyday) in the first lockdown. Now still doing frequent walks when weather permits
I spend more time in nature (open spaces such as woods, fields, etc), walking, biking and running. I do spend less time or zero time in urban open spaces such as city centers, shops or walking around urban areas or even the Saturday Food Market.
Spending more time in nature. Not going to the Park of weekend too crowded
We don't go out to parks.

Spend more time outdoors
no football with my son / more walking
Spend less time in the park
I hardly go out unless to walk my dog or get groceries once per 2-3 weeks
Less with everything
isolated at home
Limited in everything you do
Negatively, no easy communication with strangers.
Didn't affect that much
Yes, it helped to get to know the environment, parks, but not the people
Feeling Isolated
i go more to the parks
I am not using them
Hard
Less time in public parks
Not really, I feel still safe
More time
Spend less time relaxing there but still spend time walking/biking
we are closed at home
I spend more time parks and gardens for walking and biking
Parks are more crowded than before
I am out more
Spending less time.
More time walking
More time walking or biking
Because of the lockdown, we spent more time like walking around
Privacy is gone. Everybody's walking so the place is not your own anymore.
Spend More Time in parks
Spend less time walking when it's crowded
We try go where there are less people and we go to parks early in the morning
Spending more time outside
Its ruined everything really but its here to stay do we as a people need to work around it.
I spend less time outdoor
Less time outside of the house wanting to avoid the virus. Concerns about people not wearing masks or not wearing them inappropriately. I think Belgium's mask rules not requiring them for children under 12 are in denial of the science of COVID.
I spent more time in parks or waterfronts in summer time
No picnic possible
I spend less time because sometimes is full of kids and their parents and I prefer them to use the space for them to play and relax
Spending more time outdoors
Spend more time in the park but enjoy less trying to keep the distance from people
Sad

I generally go out less, I don't feel comfortable in public spaces
Yes, too many people ignore safe distancing
I can't meet much people. Distance between people. Lose of human contact. Masker makes hard to see face expressions.
I spend less time
I spend much more time, since it helps to get some fresh air after being inside all day
Iâ€™m scared to spend time outside, even if I do go out on a walk I canâ€™t seem to enjoy it to the fullest
less time outdoors
Less time
yes
I go outside less
Walking in green spaces with friends in order to see them
Less time in public spaces now, but because of the cold. During the first lockdown I was going more to the park.
Spend less time outside
Less time outside
Less time in parks
Less time spent outside and more time locked up in my room. Plus i cannot participate in many physical activities or meet new people
Yes, I spend more time in open spaces than before
spend more time walking in the neighborhood and parks nearby. going to bigger parks/green areas outside Koekelberg in the weekend because i feel better/more relaxed/happier in green areas. Biking more in the city and not use the car, to exercise. Passing by streets where i wouldn't go before, because i'm trying to know better my neighborhood and the ones around. Feel safer because I get to know the places i was afraid of before (and because i'm teleworking i can go during day time when there are more people outside).
Hardly go out
I spend more time in open spaces but with the rain is not so easy to do
Went more often to parks
Walking through green spaces helps me to relax
Less time.
I spend more time in parks than before
I think I walk around more
No affection
I have explored more parks during the pandemic.
spend more time
Its difficult to meet anyone
no
I spend much more time in open spaces than I use to
Less time outside
Iâ€™m using public spaces more because of Covid - there is nothing else to do
I use them as a escape from the lockdown monotony
Less to no time in public area
Covid-19 did not change my life style much.
More time

I spend very less time outside
I go less out and I look more for parks and nature
More time in parks and gardens
More time outside
Enjoying the open spaces, but still I couldn't go all the time
Indoors
I spend more inside the house
Joining long queue to shop
The effect of the pandemic is really bad because even if you want to go out, it's forbid because your health and life will also be lost if you do not listen.
Im mostly indoors alone
Mostly my free time I spent in my backyard.
It definitely helps in relaxing and it's a good plan
Yes
It increases the distance between people (the few that we already have) .
Spendign less time outside
Yes
Yes not going as often due to risk
More time to walk but less courage to stay seated in one place or get together with people. I just pass through wherever.
More time in parks
I definitely spend less time outside home or in public spaces with many people
Not much
Less outdoor activities
I am closed at home
I spend more time in green places
Yes. Less often visiting park
I spend less time in public spaces, but still go for frequent walks. I don't like being in crowds of people anymore
I spend less time in public spaces because I spend more time working
Yes
green places are the saviors
More time in parks
Spend only time outdoors
More time in the park
I spend more time in parks
No real change given that you are still allowed to visit those places.
I spend more time outside walking
Spend more time in green spaces to relax
i spend more time there
YES !
Me personally I go on with my day to day business
I spend more time in parks and gardens, but I also don't go out that much.
you spend more time in parks doing sports

I spend less time here
Green spaces help with mental health, spending more time in parks
It helped me to enjoy them more since the alternative is to stay locked at home, while big green places helped me a lot to reconnect with the nature and the surrounding world
Actually, I start to spend more time in the parks, gardens, forests, and other in the city
Less available
any affection
I spend way less time outside. I used to go outside everyday for extended periods. Now I go max. 2-3 hours per week.
Less time
Nothing much becoz i have been almost like living quarantine since i lost my job in 2018
Staying away from public spaces

Which activity/ties taking place in public spaces and currently forbidden do you miss the most?
Christmas market
Nothing
Restaurants and bars
festival
Seat with others in the park
Gathering with people
Going to caf��s
eating out
going to restaurants
music festival
Drink coffee with friends
National days festivals, running races, dog lessons
Cultural events, gatherings, reasons to go out are mostly cancelled
Travelling
concerts
Being able to do things with friends and colleagues
Social events and gatherings
open bars and restaurants
Caf��s and eating out
Bars and coffee places
Patersholfeesten
Eating out
Picnics , general interaction
Going to restaurant
Eating at restaurants/caf��s
concerts, drinking beers together in the evening, BBQ, sports
go to a restaurant or a bar with friends
Gathering friends and family
Caf��s and concerts

Going to the gym, restaurant, bar, dancing place
Just to be with more than 4 people
Shop for toys , cant buy my son a toys cause most shop now is close
Visiting family and friends
nothing
large group picnics
Picnic with my friends
Restaurants
Sitting in cafes and restaurants
Gatherings with friends
Meeting with friends
Concerts
No answer
Drinking in parks
Cinema, open air gatherings
Music or concerts
Live music and being able to meet my peers from classes.
Picnic
Restaurants
Organising a birthday celebrations for kids outdoors
Concerts, festivals,
Going to a bar
Fairs, cultural activities
Kerstmarkt
Bars
Going to the pub's and speaking, drinking with friends.
concerts
Shopping
I miss playing football and why not for a during with friends
In the park
Socializing
Shopping
Eating and drinking out
Exercise grupo class
Carnival, events and outings
Barbequ in woods
Get together
I want to learn Dutch ,learn to drive a car and visit friends
musical nights
bowling
Restaurants, bars, cinamas, concerts, Christmas markets
Swimming
Swimming and going to a cafe with some friends

Drinking beer in the bar
Music
Eating out
Picnics, terrasses, sports at the gym,
Walk in nature
Theaters, indoor swimming pools
Cinema
Coffeeshops and cafes with friends
Concerts in the city centers, festivals, and national events such as carnaval binche, etc.
Sports in a group
Kids playing together
Music festivals
music concert
No idea
Meeting people
Everything
gym
Close Social interaction
Swimming
Restaurants
Walking, Swimming and playing with kids at the parks
get together with more people
Bar, cantina, restaurant
Pet market
The pubs
Concerts, festivals
Monthly gathering at community table for evening drinks
having picnic
Drinking coffee with my friends
Going swimming
festivals
Drinking at a bar.
Rommelmarkt
Socializing
Meeting friends, Picknicks
Walking in groups
Cinema
I am not aware of current restrictions in public spaces
Sit down for coffee/drinks w friends
Sitting on bar terrace
Visiting cafes to meet friends
Walking around in the cities
Gatherings in homes, but would not want to do it until everyone is vaccinated

anyway and we have reached herd immunity.
Gathering with friends in big groups
Picnic and restaurants
Going to bars
Meeting others freely and without face mask
Meeting friends and family, concerts, marathons...
Coffee shop
Caffes, rastaurants, having my friends over
Being in a large crowd of people together.
Sitting and learn together in the class
Going to the movies
Playing soccer and having beers with more than 4 people
Picnics
bars
Gym
Moving freely without being judged
cinemas
Anything that involves being within 2m of people
Open air shows
Partying
Going to a bar
Music festivals and carnivals
Gather with friends and drink beer in the park. Concerts and yoga in parks.
Nothing much
Having coffee with friends or eating with friends
Caching up with other friends
Almost all of them
Sports
Small concerts, parties, food festivals
Playing sport, meeting friends
Gathering with lots of people
Concerts.
christmas market
Meeting and talking to people without masks
afterwork drinks
Going out for dinner at a restaurant, working out at Yoga studios and Basic fit
Concerts
Restaurants and bars
Swimming, group gathering
Group interaction
Going out with friends for lunch or drinks on weekends.
Walking with more than 4 people
Walking around in the city and visiting cafes with friends

Music outside
Swimming
Picknick
Meeting with friends
Parting
Going to restaurants and crowded places
Going to the restaurant
The shopping center and as well as theme park
Going to work since it is my only social connection
Going out to a restaurant, cinema, etc.
Markets
Christmas market
Concerts
Going to bars
Choir practice, university lectures, church services
Fitness
Going out to caf��s and restaurants. Outdoor exhibitions
Festivals
Meeting friends and sports
Markets
Futsal
Concerts
Gathering with friends
Chatting with a group of friends... picknick in a large group
live music, dancing,
Food and beer festivals
Concerts, festivals
cafes
Going to restaurants
Concerts,
Horeca.
Music festivals and concerts
Dancing
Running with a group on Saturday mornings
picnic
Going to a bar and traveling around.
I used to go for dance classes and I can not anymore
going to the library
cultural activities
Having a drink at cafes
Meeting other people
All the activities that include gatherings together, like markets, party, concerts etc
Some activities with many people in it, excursions in the forest for example

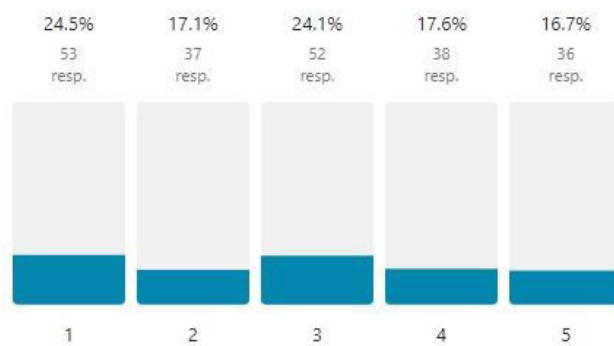
Partying, concerts and dancing
have a pint at the pub
Public eating/drinking, team sports
Basketball player ground
Gym
Sightseeing in different parts of the country

15a

...from 1 to 5, how hard was it to obtain the documents necessary to live here?

Avg. 2.8

216 out of 216 people answered this question

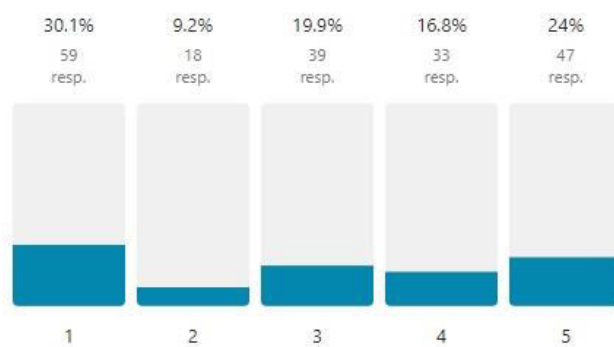


15b

...from 1 to 5, how hard was it to find a job?

Avg. 3

196 out of 216 people answered this question

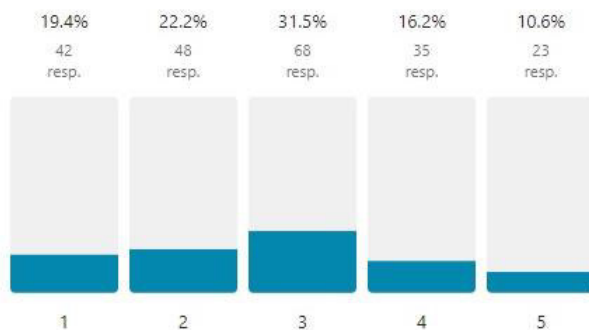


15c

...from 1 to 5, how hard was it to find a house?

Avg. 2.8

216 out of 216 people answered this question



15d

...did you feel more accepted or rejected?

Avg. 2.7

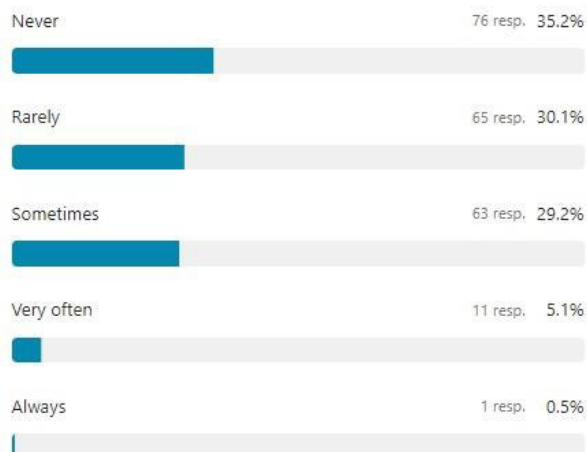
216 out of 216 people answered this question



✓ 15e

....have you experienced hostile situations?

216 out of 216 people answered this question



Can you say a bit more about it?
Some renting companies didn't want us to check apartments because we weren't Belgians
Getting answers from official places takes a very long time
If i don't speak Dutch i fell
When I arranged my registration, in the town hall they were really hostile with me, they dont speak with me becouse i didnt speak french, they just ignore me totally. I have been here for 2 weeks, thats why I didnt speak french yet, and I tried to other language I speak English, German, Italy but they dont speak at all any other language except french. They were really rude.
Often people don't take me seriously even though I speak fluent dutch. Sometimes they are condescending with me.
Not knowing the language can sometimes be a hindrance in engaging with people although many speak English
In shops, public transport, bars and cafes, and public events I don't get enough help or at least some friendly behaviour. Sometimes I have to apologise for something unimportant and where you expect an apology you hear nothing. Eye contact is barely possible because people evade social contacts with strangers. Only if they're drunk they will start talking but about some racist topics that they don't even see it as being mean.
not against me but in close proximity of violence against others
Just the police once in Brussels was quite rude
you can feel how people judge you if you do not speak fluently Dutch; also sometimes they judge based on where you are from; in general I have the feeling that Belgian people sometimes feel threatened by foreigners (such as they take their job away, their money, etc.)
it happens 2-3 times people saying "sorry, we only speak Dutch here"
Odd looks, comments for speaking French
Non decent remarks, jokes regarding foreign people (isolate case= 1 person)
Sometimes they look at you weird if you don't speak Dutch, that's why I talk to my husband in Dutch when we're outside, I don't feel comfortable when others think that I can't speak Dutch
just some weird men shouting on one night as me and my friends were walking home
The supervisor of the commune told me if she wanted to she could cancel my marriage because I was not european. I am always told I want to drag attention by the way i dress, dance or talk
Bad experiences with police & people who refuse to speak English
Difficult
I was discriminated on the street. A random guy shouted at me that I should leave the country.
Some instances when I was a student several years ago
Racist and especially because of language. And the surprising thing is most of the raciest incidents came from Moroccans who should be more friendly.
No matter what you do or how hard you try, you are always a foreigner. People get hostile very quick for no reason and you are the one best expected to "understand" that
Even though I speak Dutch I get an answer in English
Not hostile but definitely unwelcoming.
Culture clashes
People look at me more than normal, some people have talked to me disrespectful and respective. Also someone people are pre dispose to not

understand me even though I speak Dutch
Some people have no respect and client service is useless
Mostly due to the language barrier
Linguofascism, discrimination because I haven't yet learned Dutch, also discrimination in finding apartments
When ppl realize you don't speak the language they can be rude sometimes or even if they speak English they will continue to speak in Dutch regardless you explain to them you don't understand.
Frequent bag checks in supermarkets, always doubtful looks inside shops
Sometimes I can see in some people not happy to be in the same place with you
People (specially elderly people) giving me condescending looks when I wasn't doing anything wrong, people whispering something bad about me but since I didn't fully understand I couldn't defend myself :(for example once I was speaking my language and I heard someone saying with a condescending tone of voice "ew spaans"
I'm white so they do not know I am a foreigner at first glance but the moment I speak my poor Dutch most people end up becoming either very rude or exited and walk to talk about my cultures. For me about 60% it is negative, for my black friends it is 90% the case. Luckily it is only slightly negative. Could be worse or violent, and that is never the case.
Not much
I have been told on some occasions to go back to my country by some neighbours.
Rude experiences with some Flemish men, very unprofessional and impolite
I have been told "you are EU nationality" "you don't have experience in Belgium."
When you make mistake talking their language they behave you like shit
the owner of our house is a lot concerned about us
People are just rude when I say I do not understand Dutch and I also notice people tend to be more hostile towards me when on my own versus when with my Belgian partner
mostly at grocery stores or markets, the way people look at you is weird, either they are not happy with their lives or they are not willing to accept migrants as part of their society
None
One time I was trying to ask for directions at Aalst and the guy was like I should let him be he wants to smoke
Because of a language barrier people are mean
Victim of racism on bus stop
in restaurants, service is sometimes hostile
Language
Neighbour noise issues
Aggressive racial slurs in public places by adults
Even my parents in law insinuated that I was a prostitute. They never asked anything about my life or about my parents. Only cause I'm from Brazil they guess I come from poor conditions
On the train, a woman angrily said in Dutch that my family and I were not speaking in Dutch (we were only speaking to each other) and glared at us.
Nothing really offensive. More like not wanting to integrate or talk when we lived in a small village south of Leuven.
People are not that interested in foreigners

An older man I met at a cafe complained I didn't speak Dutch and said it is actually Flemish and not Dutch
Attitude of some
Some people joked that I come here to take their jobs
The locals are very untrusting and unfriendly. They will not attempt to help you if your French language is not perfect.
During the search of house, I had phone calls ended before I explained myself because I spoke English or broken Dutch
Hostile attitude in WalloniÃ« due to not speaking French
Drunk people yelling at me (I couldn't understand), and people getting in my personal space to ask for money. Once a guy followed me and was asking for my number, this situation never happens when I am with my husband. I am now scared to walk alone in Brussels at night. Once I bought food for dogs and some human food for a guy that was begging outside the shop. He was very hostile and knocked it over with his hands, yelling at me. I guess he wanted money for alcohol or cigarettes, and not food. I felt very bad for the dog that was with him, poor animal
I don't speak Flemish very well, so have been criticised
In the shop, when I can't speak good Dutch.
Men from other cultures being disrespectful
I came across racism and ignorance over my culture a few times
Hostile is a strong word, I would describe it as cold and lack of empathy. I feel like I am unwanted when I walk on the street and keep receiving weird stares from people because of my body and my skin colour even though I respect all the safety precautions during the pandemic. It makes me feel very insecure about myself.
Administration violence, I would say
Racist housing agency manager
Shop workers arguing with me to show them my bag.
At job treated like an outsider, you don't understand so I will do it my way to take advantage
I had a very abusive housekeeper in a student residence.
On a couple of occasions I have encounter people who associate Colombia with drugs and Pablo Escobar, which is extremely annoying. Also once, someone got upset because I didn't speak dutch perfectly.
Once a woman was complaining because I put my bike in front of her house. She complained more and more even though I said I was sorry and I was already crying. Another time a man grabbed me by the arm and didn't let me go because he wanted me to go with him to his house to have sex
someone asks me to go back to "china"
Annoying aeroport checks on my nationality is all I can complain about. I am Italian and white, but I am often mistaken for North African.
Cold interaction
Landlord saying that because I am Spanish I won't pay the rent or that the Government doesn't allow to rent a room to foreigners.
Rude shop assistant when they understand my Dutch language proficiency is limited.
Lack of freedom
It depends on the people
Language
Some people still see you as a foreigner
Once I have been called a baby and a shitty person just because I was asking

for my package from the DHL point which happens to be a flower shop as well, on a Valentines day. The owner of the shop made fun of me and commented something to other customers in french, and all started laughing at me.
The big problem is the communication problem when you don't know the language.
I had a couple of racism related incidents
People being xenophobic for non Eu countries specially. If you do not speak the language you may find harsh as well to feel included. In my point of view (I forgot to mention before), it should have more support for those eagle to learn the language. Sometimes we do want to learn Dutch but or it is too far, or quite expensive for student expenses, or the time available it is not manageable due to the schedule of the classes.
Some commes about stereotypes of muy country
No one is ready to help. 'I don't know' is a common answer!
Discrimination
A dentist was a bit hostile because I dindt speak dutch
Rasist people
Dealing with public administration is the most stressful, especially because some public service employees refuse to speak english, although they know it. Navigating all the administrative procedures make is really hard. I once stayed for a week without residence card because they didn't want to react. It's hell! If I leave Belgium,this will be the reason why!
Never
Always with people who happen to have little patience with my limited language skills. Mostly with white, middle aged flemish people, or young middle eastern men
General 'you are not Belgian' attitude
Uber driver got me somewhere out of my address
the Commune of Schaerbeek and the police officer did not renew my residence card on time for no apparent reason. I was stuck in the country for 7 months. Even paid a lawyer to help fasten the process. Police office would come to check my address when I am at work and did not approve my address for months. I called her everyday to explain or set an appointment, she didn't cooperate. She gave up after 3 months. It was a terrible experience. I still remember the frustration. Civil servants at the commune were also not friendly, even though I had a job and my situation was completely legal.
problems with the neighbour (flooded our living room, make noises at 3 am, etc)
Sometimes if you don't speak the language is more difficult.
Just happened twice in 12 years
A gÃ©nÃ©ral impression of being excluded, e.g. any relationships with students ended once the course or programme ended, some landlords do not want Africans in their houses...
People getting annoyed of me speaking french
from Belgians
Speaking French is not a good idea in Leuven haha
Catcalling in Brussels is definitely bad for my mental health.
Rudely confronted when not abiding by certain social norms
The people may be a bit introvert outside workspaces so it is difficult to interact

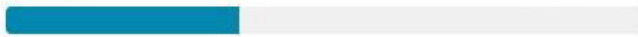
they hate me cos I am not a real local
I dont go out late or stay late, dont use drugs
People are not very trusting here,and hard to get to know

✓ 15g

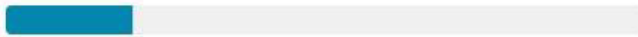
...did the Institutions help you?

216 out of 216 people answered this question

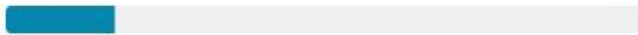
Sometimes 79 resp. 36.6%



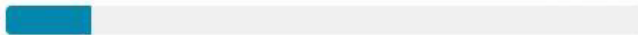
Very often 43 resp. 19.9%



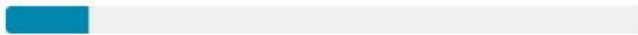
Never 37 resp. 17.1%



Always 29 resp. 13.4%



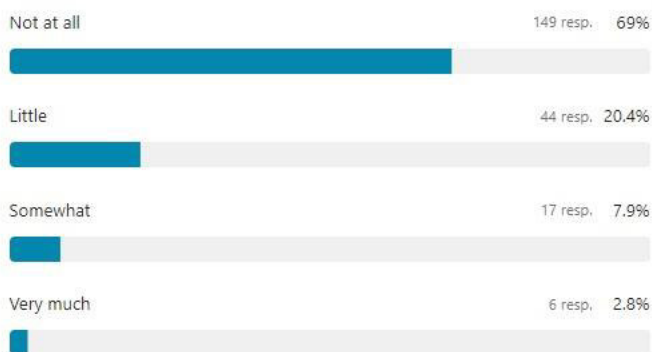
Rarely 28 resp. 13%



✓ 16

Have you ever felt or still feel scared crossing or staying in parks, public gardens, squares in the city where you live?

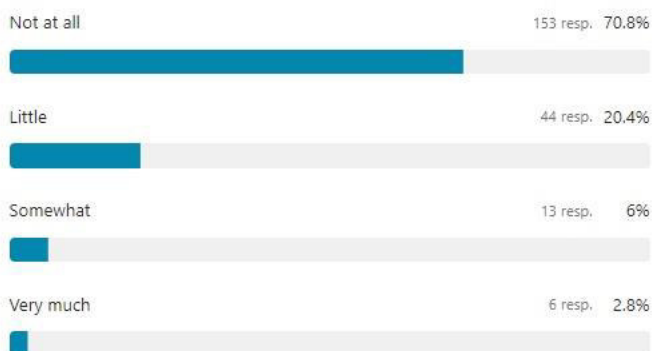
216 out of 216 people answered this question



✓ 17

Have you ever felt or still feel scared crossing or staying in parks, public gardens, squares in your neighbourhood?

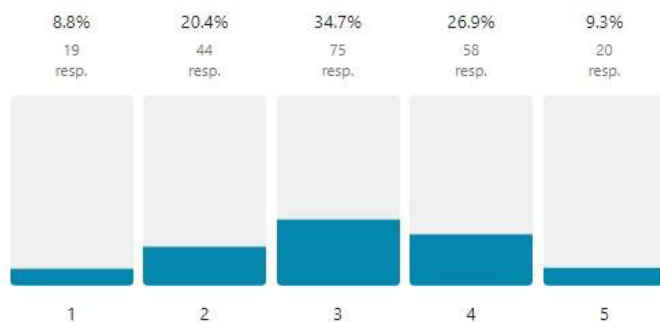
216 out of 216 people answered this question



19

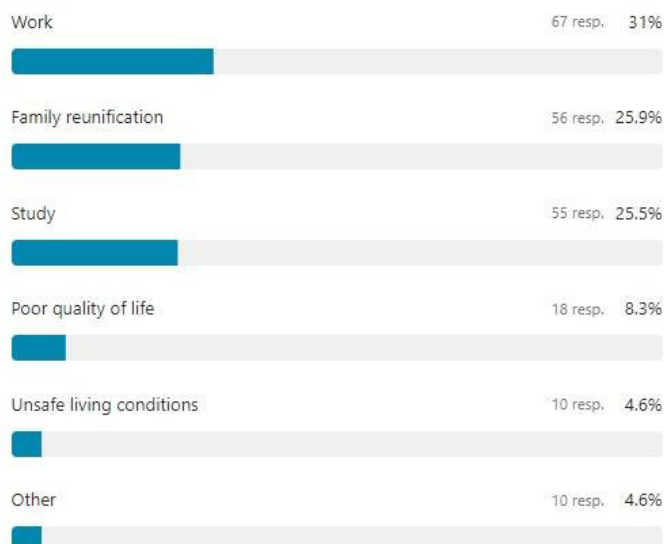
Read the following statement: 'In Belgium I feel at home'. How much do you agree? Avg.

216 out of 216 people answered this question



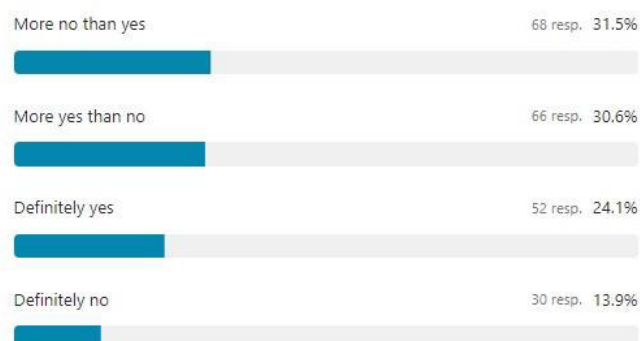
✓ 20 Why did you leave your homeland?

216 out of 216 people answered this question



✓ 21 If living conditions were good, would you leave Belgium to return to your country?

216 out of 216 people answered this question



Why?
I like Belgium more.. life is hectic but more organized and very less pollution
I love my country and miss my family there
Not feeling likw belgium offers the ideal setting for a family life i wish to have.
My boyfriend is here
I miss my family
Availability, good quality of service, social reasons
Because Belgium is home now.
I feel home in Belgium
my family is here already
because of friends, family and culture - i miss my home country
The totalitarian regime is killing people.

Because my country
We dont plan our life in Begium for a long time. After 3-5 year we would like to returne in Hungary
More family here
I feel like that Belgium is my country
Because I think that I will never feel at home in Belgium. I don't have a lot of meaningful relationships here. I know some people who I could hang out with (in pre-covid times) but the general mentality of Belgian people is just too different from mine. As an expat I also think that it is way harder to be successful at work or to be taken seriously.
I miss my home country and my family
Life is short and I prefer to spend my life somewhere I can have fun, especially in terms of friendship. Belgium is a country where you immediately feel it is not a home by the time you arrive to the airport, a lot of security check, no or barely noticable smile from officers, taxi drivers, bus drivers, people in the street. Too much regulations and paper work for just creating simple bank account and follow your residential permit. Many strict faces at banks, city halls, shops, parks, pedestrians. I prefer to live in a country that people don't see you weird if you smile at them and say hi in the streets. I prefer to live somewhere where people do not see you as a burden to society but as a useful member of the society. Even if you are here in Belgium legally and with work permit and pay taxes,you are still seen as someone who stole their jobs. Talking and social interaction is avoided most of the time and emails, paper works, and letters are still the main communication methods. There is lack of trust and that causes lack of mutual respects. These problems cause a big gap between different groups of people and social integration is difficult. Hence, Belgium never feels like home or even second home. So if the situation in my country gets better I prefer to go back and serve my own people.
The headHead quarters of my organisation is based in Brussels
My job is there. Good neighbours there
Better job opportunity
Turkey has its beauties as well. If I could find the samen work-private life balance in Turkey, and can convince my partner to join me, why not...
I really like being able to walk and bike everywhere (we don't own a car) and I love the architecture and atmosphere of Leuven
Want to experience living in different with cultures
Stay close to family and friends
I like the charm of Belgium (Leuven specifically) and the pedestrian and bike accessibility to many places
Belgium per se is alright; the social security as well as insurance system and health system and education system are definitely good. However, there could be more structure in governmental issues or bureaucracy; Also I still do not feel 100% welcome here at times, for example sometimes at certain doctors
My husband and I are not from the same countries. I am Bulgarian and he is Italian. He would not come live in Bulgaria. Belgium is a neutral ground for us, also we have good jobs here.
My partner is here
In a relationship
I left my country by choice not by necessity.
Itâ€™s a good country to leave, but Iâ€™ll definitely never feel home here. My homelandâ€™s always gonna be Peru
My husband also want to live in my home country so maybe soon we can live in my home country
Because my family is there
Home is always best

My husband needs to understand how it feels like being the foreigner and I want him to be a bit more panamanian the way I am a bit more belgian
I miss my family a lot
Comfort and happiness
My family likes to stay here
I love my country
Quality of life is better for raising a family here. Stronger safety net
Warmth and helpfulness and respectfulness
Family
It's boring and safe in terms of social security
More job opportunities for my husband here and used to living abroad myself.
My family is primarily in the US and wages are higher there for my husbands field.
It is a beautiful country
I love Belgium and it has way more to offer
We are settled here
Better weather!!
My family, culture, weather
Language, even ingles is better received in latinoamerica than in my currently town
Weather is better and more social life
I still have more ties to it than to Belgium
Because my family is there.
Because I do not like the system in my country
Too cold here
I'm getting used to live here and trying to learn the language
No job yet
because I moss my parents and extended family and they cannot come here for a longer period due to tourist visa
Belgium is nice
Family missing
I have a family here now and a job, integration goes both ways so i know i need to put effort as well into integrating to the culture and society
Because I have my husband here
Job Opportunities are more, no language barriers
Because there is my country. My family my friends are there. And better weather :)
We came here temporary
Here more peaceful and security
Question not clear
becous of the friends and family
Because I think the food, wether and nature is better there
I love my country
My people are friendly, open and warm. And more so we have the same culture, they are not offended by my personality and I do not feel like I am just wrong around them. If I could have this quality of life in my own country I would not stay here. Not that Belgium is bad, I am quite happy here, I would just be more happy with my family and what I know.

Because I like the experience of living here. Meeting new people, doing new things, visiting new places feels very good.
To feel at home
I say yes, but with little children now, I am more keen to stay in Belgium. I know they will have better opportunities in Belgium than in Cameroon
Sea, sun, people are more welcoming, services work well, better medical care also. I know it sounds crazy but I've encountered some of the worst doctors in Belgium!
There are my house, big family, climate
Social support from the state to unemployed people/more sun/ less restrictions
Schooling system
I miss my family but I would prefer to stay in Belgium for the healthcare and schools and infrastructure (and proximity to other lovely European places)
I came here by choice. In home country my life was very good it was just very different than here.
Home is where I come from. Speaking my language in daily life makes a difference
I'm increasingly more integrated here
Because it is more sunny and bigger and nature is wilder
closer to family
Belgium is a good country to live in.
I feel Australians are more welcoming of different cultures
I am married with a Belgium guy,
I had good life back home as well, no issues there.. due to family reunification I had to come here as my spouse doesn't want to go back
I already love to live here and you as a person you are secured in terms of health and financial compared to my country
Its government structure is well organized
I'm already 18 years abroad and my country has different mentality of people.
Because here is safe, and I am happy with my job
So many things inclusive family reunion, culture difference, hospitality
it is warm and my family is there
I like to live here.
Warm in general. People, Heather,
Irish people are more friendly and welcoming than Belgians
I like to live in Belgium
I am happy, children are settled
That's personal
I loved here and I would like to share my experiences
I like to live Belgium
Because of the weather and social life
I like my life in Belgium.
To get a better job
We've decided to make this place our home for us and our children.
The surroundings for children are nicer here, I find
My children grew up in Belgium; we now run support services for them. If they choose to live in Belgium, we stay here
To be close to relatives and friends
I have a son with special needs living in Belgium

The quality of life is good here and I don't think my husband could find a job in Italy
Belgian boyfriend
Adjustment to new situations as a person gets older wouldn't be so easy.
I want to experience an adventurous life
The US has much better healthcare, more to do, and friendlier people.
I don't feel home here
Got used here, have my friends here
Because all my family and friends are there
Home is home
I miss the sun and the warmth of my country
Be close with family
At home I felt so much safer, and there was no language barrier. I am learning French and trying to speak it all the time, but people that work in shops won't help. They see I am trying, but they still talk super fast and show irritation that I don't understand. This makes me feel like I don't belong at all
I've been in Belgium for 20 years, there is nothing for me in the UK
I need to adapt again with my life if I come back to my country
I feel at home
I'm only here for studying
I can't feel at home in Belgium yet and I would rather have the type of friendships I had back in Turkey
My boyfriend is here
Closer to parents and friends
because they make me feel like I am an outsider and can never be part of their social construct. It feels very inhumane and derogatory.
Family and friends
Not speaking Dutch is hard. Your form doesn't take into account the big difference francophone vs Dutch - I will move to a French-speaking part of Belgium
I miss my family
Experienced lots of stress in Belgium
Belgium is a nice country to visit, but a boring one to live in
I'd like to help my country's people and economy
Much better living quality
Family and friends
Because I would be next to my family and friends, with a culture that I relate more to.
Am married to a European.
Because I have my family there and I think that to remain in Belgium is important to know the language, something that I don't know
Family Friends
I miss my family
I would rather value a more ambitious and inclusive ecosystem
Life quality is way better in Belgium than in Colombia. Specially if one day I decide to start a family.
This isn't really relevant, of course I can go back to the NL
I don't like life at my home country
I miss my family too much! But my boyfriend lives here. That's the only

reason why I still live here.
I feel more included at home
My country is more green, more welcoming. Its just even harder to get job with a salary which would allow you a proper living
Belgium has a lot of problems, but Italy has more
It is difficult to make friends in Brussels as everybody seems to already have their little group
Living costs are the same, and exposure and opportunities are bigger in BE
Family
No safety, jobs, or possibility of good future in my home country. Very unsafe for women
Family and friends
I am a type of person that is pursuing carrier doing research. IMO research is more successful when collaboration and ideas are shared with other people all around the world.
I go where the best job opportunities are
That's my home
To be closer to my family
I like my life in Belgium - friends, partner, colleagues
Food
The country is economically collapsing and unstable political situation
I love the country
Every helps that you will be needing are provided here in belgium than in the philippines so practically its still better to live here.
Because I have a child who have Belgian nationality.
It is not home here. I do not feel belong.
I have all my relatives there.
I like it here. Despite not having adapted. I feel I can make a life here
I love the discipline here
Because I feel home since that I arrived here, even though somethings or people can be quite complicated, even though I LOVE my country Brazil, I feel that here is place where I choose to live. I love the climate. I love the culture
I like my country more
Miss the warmth and caring of the people for each other.
Like the lifestyle in Belgium better than home country
The society is very friendly and kind but they're very hard to make actual friends with.
Weather and social conditions
I found more opportunities in here than in birth country
All my family and most of my friends are there
Family
People is nicer and more open
There are no opportunities for me there
I like the freedom here. For example related with clothes. In my country, Indonesia... more and more peoples encourages woman to wear closed clothes or even hijab. In Belgium, I can wear what I want without risk of harrasment. The other reason, there are more nice public space here than in Indonesia.
I find it difficult to associate with the music scene in Belgian. I find most of my colleagues in the culture sector to be ego-centric, blissfully unaware of

their racism/entitlement, and small-minded
Life is more relaxed here and social benefits and salaries are better
Living in your home country with decency is really the best.
I got a life here, my partner is Dutch, we have a son etc. and, I made good friends and workwise there is more opportunities for my field.
I miss the weather, the food and my family
All family and friends are in turkey
Cause for my Belgian girlfriend is almost impossible to follow.
Family and friends
Just to feel accepted and valued.
I have nobody anymore there
My family/ friends are in my hometown but the privileged location of Belgium in Europe
better social services and transport
Because Belgium has a better quality life than Spain
I finally find my purpose here and I must fulfil it
The political situation is awful in my country and I am ambitious and I want to live in Europe
Because I miss some components of my life in my hometown
Its a beautiful, vibrant, interesting and dynamic country. Unfortunately the socio economic situation is terrible and unsustainable
Not sure
Because there is no country like home country!and there is family there
I miss my home and family
I disagree with my country's mentality and politics
Birthplace is not replaceable
Because i don't fit
Not safe to go back
Why would i stay here if my family is well settled and dnt have to worry if someone falls sick, or frm where to get the money for the medical costs
Because i miss some of my family