



## Case Study // Round Table SDG 11: Financing the transition to sustainable cities and communities: challenges and opportunities

### Urban renewal projects Flanders

**Belgium (region Flanders)**

*Level: subnational*

#### Summary

In 2002 the Flemish government launched the interdisciplinary instrument of the urban renewal projects. Through an annual call, cities can propose projects for which they can receive grants and professional support from experts from various policy domains. Sustainability in its various dimensions – social, ecological, economical – lies at the core of this instrument. Further particular attention must be given to climate neutrality, mobility, spatial quality and core compaction, family and child-friendliness, green-blue features, as well as balance between private and public spaces, coproduction with various urban actors, new forms of economy, energy and affordable housing.

#### Situation

Cities are facing several challenges dealing with hyper diversity, digitalisation, energy transition, the struggle for urban space, new collective arrangements, urban congestion, air quality. Urban renewal projects should have a leverage effect on the surrounding urban and other areas. The instrument – and the Flemish urban policy in general- acknowledges cities as the main place where societal challenges manifest themselves first and most concentrated. Therefore, the instrument advocates an innovative and sometimes experimental approach of modern-day urban challenges.

The number of cities that can make an appeal to the instrument of the urban renewal project is limited, namely the 13 Flemish (biggest) central cities and –partially - Brussels, as well as 20 smaller cities that can be referred to as the provincial cities or towns. Together the central cities represent some 25 % of the Flemish population.

#### Strategy

The instrument of the urban renewal projects is more than just a financing instrument for the cities. Cities can participate in the annual call for projects by sending a proposal in which they describe the project's definition, the way it corresponds to urban challenges, the innovative character of the project and the way it functions as a lever for the larger urban area or the city as a whole, or as a potential example for other cities. Each year a jury, composed of academic and governmental experts, selects 3 or 4 projects. Throughout the whole process of realisation the cities receive guidance, input and recommendations from these experts (in the fields of architecture, urban and spatial planning, economics, housing, social inclusion, urbanism). There are approximately 9 million euros available for supporting urban renewal projects.

Besides the actual realisation of urban projects, the urban renewal instrument also entails a more conceptual part: conceptual grants are also allocated for projects aiming at developing innovative ideas and concepts that respond to modern day urban challenges.



### Results and impact

- Before 2002, many inhabitants left the city. After 2002 this process has been reversed. Cities attract more people and because of new integrated investments Flemish cities have become more attractive and pleasant to live in.
- Throughout the whole process and support of the government cities have managed to increase their capacity in mastering and controlling urban projects (capacity building)

When it comes to sustainability and contributions to climate-friendly measures the following projects - among many others - deserve to be mentioned:

- Ostend: Stapstenen voor Stene (Stepping stones for Stene)
- Eeklo: Hartwijk (Hart District)
- Genk: La Biomista
- Antwerp: Nieuw Zuid (New South District)
- Ostend: Oosteroever (Eastern Bank)
- Sint-Niklaas: Lobbenstadmodel (City Lob Model)
- Antwerp: Scheldekaaien (Scheldt Wharf)
- Vilvoorde: Watersite
- Genk: Kolenspoor (Coal Trail)

### Challenges and lessons learned

One has to try to find the right balance between realisations in the short-term, mid-term and long-term. It is not always easy to reconcile these different scales with the high ambitions cities cherish. Until recently, cities were obliged to engage in a process with private investors: a minimum amount of 30 % in the total project costs were to be carried by private partners. This obligation does not exist anymore. However cities are encouraged to involve private investors (as well as citizens and other urban actors or organisations).

Given the long duration, the high ambitions and the intertwining of the projects it is not always to keep the focus. However, the instalment of a quality chamber, which consists of the urban renewal projects' jury, has to guarantee that the projects live up to the original ambitions and standards set from the beginning.

### Potential for replication

Until now, 61 projects have been selected (from 2002 onwards). Since the projects are rather large scale projects many of them are not finalised yet. The potential example that projects can have for other cities is one of the criteria by which the jury is guided by in the selection process.

### Contact

Name: Stijn Van Wolputte  
Organisation: Agency Internal Affairs, Urban Policy Department