

LIVING STREETS NEWS

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EDITORIAL



Dear reader,

Imagine your neighbour knocks on your door: “Hi, how are you? Do you have a few minutes? I have an idea I want to share with you...”

Imagine that we could temporarily transform our street into a beautiful green meeting place for the neighbourhood? We would remove the cars, just for a few months, replace them with all kinds of infrastructure one can think of and see what happens? What do you think?”

With these kind of questions and vague but concrete dreams hundreds of citizens triggered the imagination of their neighbours in more than 30 Living Streets in Ghent and beyond. What started as a two-street initiative has, after 4 years of experimenting, resulted into a huge wave of Living Street experiments.

Ever had the burning feeling of “What if I could choose to redesign the street I live in instead of letting others decide it for me?”

Then this Living Street News Issue is something for you. Whether you are a policy maker, a mobility expert or a committed citizen, the idea of Living Streets should trigger your imagination. Then continue reading and find out what Living Street Experiments in Ghent are all about, why they are happening and how they came about. Trust us, it will inspire you to TIY – try it yourself, reclaim your own street and get to know your neighbours and then do it yourself! ●

The volunteers of the Trojan Lab



THE LIVING STREETS LET US DREAM OF A SUSTAINABLE AND SOCIAL FUTURE

Thanks to Living Streets, citizens can work together to create a street of their own. They are working in a new kind of relationship with city officials, local organisations and business people to create their dream street. After dreaming and coming up with ideas, the residents roll up their sleeves, unroll the turf, set up barbecues, create meeting places and so much more.

The Living Streets project explores and develops new ways of collaboration among citizens, municipal services, companies and many more city stakeholders. They’re doing this by challenging each other in a smart way in terms of thinking, acting, understanding one another and learning.

It puts co-creation into practice to find creative solutions for social challenges.

It is an experiment: successes and failures provide lessons for anyone keen to continue building Living Streets. For the citizens, a Living Street functions as a common project and as such an impulse for dialogue and dynamics with their neighbours, other street users and the city. During the experiment, they look for answers and solutions to problems that arise while organising the Living Street. Knowledge, experience and concepts are tested in a learning-by-doing approach that will make life easier in the unfolding sustainable and sociable city. ●

Living Streets are living laboratories in which desirable streets of the future can be envisioned with a threefold objective:

- 1** Experimenting with the sustainable mobility of the future;
- 2** Creating a new approach to urban space;
- 3** Reinforcing social links by multiplying interactions among citizens.



ABOUT THE TROJAN LAB

The Living Street is an initiative by the Trojan Lab, with the support of the city of Ghent and various private partners and organisations. The Lab connects collaborating citizens, businesses, city services and organisations in Ghent to bring about a new way of city governance. The group is in charge of the Living Street project in Ghent, a pilot initiative in Europe. The Lab -through its unique approach- demonstrates that structural changes are possible and that experimenting and envisioning are solutions which can take away humans' innate resistance to change. This approach can help to achieve sustainable, sociable and climate-neutral cities in a better, faster and co-creative way. ●

www.labvantroje.be/en



THE POWER OF 'WHAT IF'

We discovered the power of 'What if?' and how this simple question helps people to consider and envision what is needed to create a more pleasant and liveable environment. Some people have big dreams, others more concrete ideas and others still tend to see constraints. But most people combine a bit of everything, resistant to huge changes but tolerant of small ones, but most of all to experimentation when they are respected.

Dreams vary among residents and streets. And where dreams vary finding compromises is key. In general these dreams relate to the desire to have a safer place for children to play and meet and to transform the mainly grey, car-centred and anonymous streets into more liveable, enjoyable and colourful places.

The dialogue that arises amongst citizens is key. By identifying each other's needs and dreams, a mutual understanding is created and this can lead to a plan for their Living Streets that enjoys widespread support. ●

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We get a sense of nostalgia. We used to spend a lot more time on the street in the past. Now I can sit on my doorstep again like I used to and chat with the neighbours.

Yves, citizen of the Karel Antheunisstraat - first Living Street in Ghent



LIVING TOGETHER



In a Living Street, long-lasting bonds are forged between the residents and across the boundaries of ages and cultural backgrounds. Building something together connects people, as does discussing different opinions about the neighbourhood or the future. These intense connections lead to various continuing projects to increase the quality of life in the neighbourhood. Projects to make the streets more lively and sustainable continue and gain strength. ●

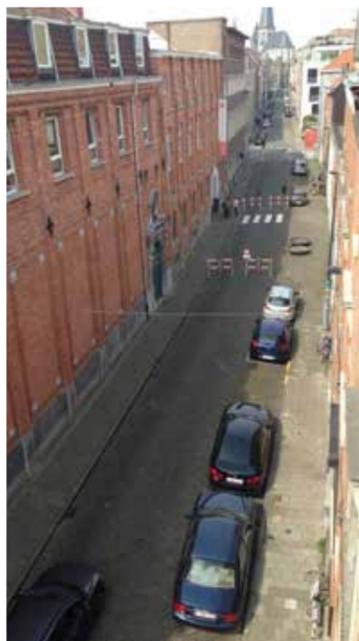


JOINING FORCES

Triggered by the question ‘What if?’ residents start the process of creating their Living Street.

Frontrunners in the street involve their neighbours. The people from the Trojan Lab network then guide these initiators through the process and link the people in the streets with all kinds of partners in their network.

The implementation of Living Streets is only possible thanks to the experimental space created by the city of Ghent. Many civil servants and politicians are helping to make things possible. Throughout the Living Street trajectory, intensive dialogue is needed between the City and residents of the streets. Insights and advice from officials are included in the process. ●



IT ALL STARTED IN 2012

The project began when the City of Ghent asked a group of citizens to imagine a sustainable future for the city. Their vision can be found in their agenda for the future, ‘The Trojan Bike’. ‘We realized that a vision alone would not change the world,’ say Dries Gysels and Pieter Deschamps from the Trojan Lab in Ghent. ‘To make it really happen, we launched concrete experiments such as the ‘Leefstraten,’ or Living Streets, and tried to make our dreams of the city of tomorrow visible today.’ ●

THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING IS IN THE EATING

Once there is a well-supported plan, residents themselves start constructing and redesigning their streets. They also take care of the maintenance of their Living Street as well as codes of conduct for these novel infrastructures and spaces.

The appointed neighbourhood parking area is put into operation and residents start testing sustainable alternatives for their own car usage. Residents seek concrete solutions for all kinds of situations that arise and adapt where necessary and possible.

Living Streets also function as living labs for innovative products, services and even academic research. Multiple city departments learn from this experiment: centralised waste collection, participation processes, sustainable transport facilities and so on. ●



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The local school, the residents and the youth club had a common dream of connecting the street and the park. Thanks to the Living Street this dream became a reality.

Pieter, Citizen – Living Street Wasstraat

MAKING THE UNUSUAL USUAL

By truly creating something, we ensure that the dialogue is about something concrete. Abstract concepts such as sustainability, mobility, living together, co-creation and so on really come to life. Discussions about Living Streets are about true experiences. You may not be a fan of

the Living Street, but you can't say that it's impossible. One of the main strategic questions of this experiment is how we can organize our daily lives differently. The stories of the people in the Living Streets show us how it can be done. ●



THE IMPORTANCE OF CO-CREATION

European cities today face challenges in urban planning and other social issues (job creation, climate change, land use, immigration, etc.) but are also the testing grounds for solutions.

At the same time, local authorities are no longer perceived as the only party expected to solve complex issues faced in cities. More than ever, local authorities, businesses and residents need each other to find creative solutions by challenging each other in a smart way about how we think, act and learn. We believe that a fundamental property of a city is that it houses many people from different backgrounds, from companies and within government administrations ready to join forces and search for these solutions. Through the Living Streets project, we bring the energy and creativity of these people together and will make 'The City of Tomorrow' visible today. ●

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The Living Street might sound like a nostalgic concept, but it is actually very forward-looking. It goes back to basics of communication, a good chat, and takes that as the starting point for pushing the neighbourhood forward. It is the foundation of sharing, working together and helping one another. It's what's called forward to basics. It's not nostalgia, it's the future.



Tom Palmaerts - trendwatcher



DIALOGUE IS THE STRENGTH OF OUR SOCIETY

Mayor Daniël Termont

Mayor Daniël Termont is a dyed-in-the-wool fan of participation. *“I am convinced that the future will be made in and by cities, not by nations. Not in the town halls, but through co-creation with citizens, organizations and entrepreneurs. Co-creation that leaves room for conflicting opinions, followed by a dialogue that*

fosters new insights. We can only reach creative solutions to civic challenges by working together. For that to happen, as a government we need to give people the freedom to experiment.”

For years, the municipality of Ghent has been giving this freedom to all kinds of initiatives, with positive results: Ghent abounds with neighbourhood initiatives and street festivals, and citizens build intelligent apps with open data published by the city. A new concept like the Living Street has also been given the space to prove its worth.

What else does the mayor of such a creative city dream of? *“I would love Ghent to become the most child-friendly city of Flanders. A city in which parents don't hesitate to let their children play in the street. Living Streets show that this is not utopian.” Still, the mayor recognizes that this is not always straightforward: “Cooperation requires time and effort. Time that we are often not used to investing anymore. Living Streets purposefully provide everyone with the time to find their place in a new dynamic. I believe this emancipates our city – from its finest capillaries, the streets – to deal with urban challenges like poverty, refugees and social isolation. We are on the right path. Hopefully, we will continue along it for a long time, beyond 2018.”* ●



Every country, every city, every neighbourhood and every street has its own challenges. We hope that this issue of Living Street News will generate new dynamics between government officials and residents. We would love you to share your new insights and experiences at ideas@livingstreets.eu.