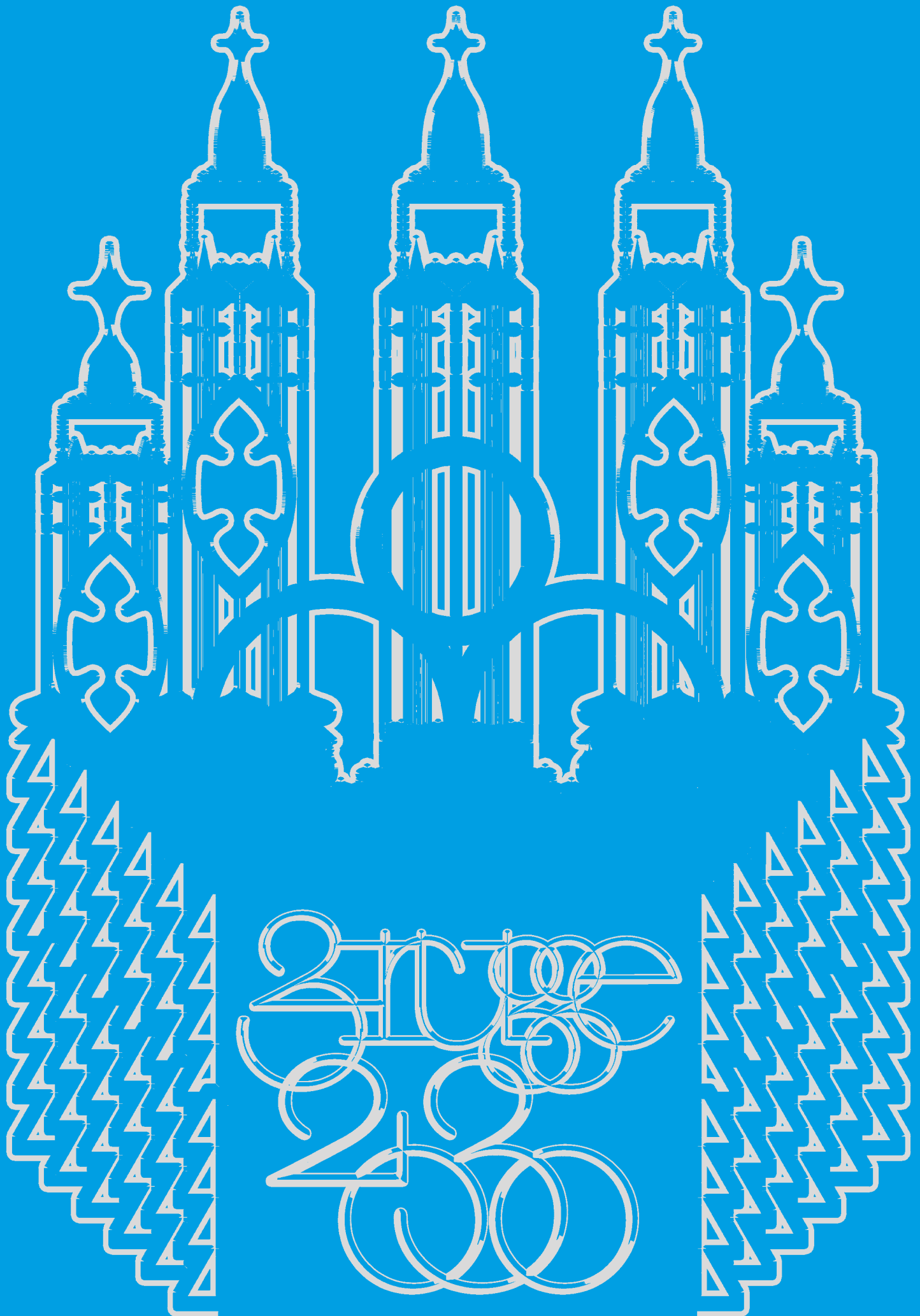




2025
2020

the art of
Conversation

Table of Contents & preselection questionnaire

Prologue | Let's get this conversation started

5-7

Q1: Why does your city wish to take part in the competition for the title of ECOC?

Q2: Does your city plan to involve its surrounding area?

Q3: Explain briefly the overall cultural profile of your city.

Q4: Explain the concept of the programme that would be launched if the city is designated as ECOC.

Introduction 8-9

Vision Statement: 10

Welcome to the art of Conversation

Q5: Describe the city's plans to strengthen the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors, including the development of long term links between these sectors and the economic and social sectors in your city.

Q6: What is the artistic vision and strategy for the cultural programme of the year?

Part 1 | Our Artistic Strategy and the Broad Outlines of Our Programme 11-17

A. Bruges' cultural strategy

Q7: Describe the cultural strategy that is in place in your city at the time of the application, including the plans for sustaining the cultural activities beyond the year of the title?

Q8: Explain succinctly how the cultural programme will combine local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative and experimental cultural expressions?

B. Pilot projects and the broad outlines of the programme for 2030

Q9: Give a general overview of the structure of your cultural programme, including the range and diversity of the activities/main events that will mark the year.

C. Our long-term strategy and the audience development framework

Q10: How is the ECOC action included in this strategy?

Q11: Explain your overall strategy for audience development, and in particular the link with education and the participation of schools.

D. Monitoring and evaluation of Bruges 2030

Q12: Outline briefly the plans for monitoring and evaluation.

Part 2 | Capacity 18-23

A. Overview of the cultural sector in Bruges

Q3: Explain briefly the overall cultural profile of your city.

B. A shared cultural infrastructure as a foundation

Q13: Please confirm and provide evidence that your city has or will have adequate and viable infrastructure to host the title.

Q14: Explain how the ECOC will make use of and develop the city's cultural infrastructure.

Q15: In terms of cultural, urban and tourism infrastructure, what are the projects (including renovation projects) that your city plan to carry out in connection with the ECOC action between now and the year of the title?

C. Political support and commitment are assured

Q16: Confirm and supply evidence that you have broad and strong political support and a sustainable commitment from the relevant local, regional and national public authorities.

Part 3 | The European Dimension 24-26

A. Europe as a compass

Q17: Give a general outline of the activities foreseen in view of promoting the cultural diversity of Europe, intercultural dialogue and greater mutual understanding between European citizens; highlighting the common aspects of European cultures, heritage and history, as well as European integration and current European themes; featuring European artists, cooperation with operators and cities in different countries, and transnational partnerships.

B. For a broad European and international audience

Q18: Explain your strategy to attract the interest of a broad European and international public.

C. In partnership with other European cities

Q19: To what extent do you plan to develop links between your cultural programme and the cultural programme of other cities holding the ECOC title?

Part 4 | Organisational Structure 27-28

A. The existing and planned governance and implementation structure for Bruges 2030

B. From cultural governance and good governance to new governance

Q20: Please give an outline of the intended governance and delivery structure for the implementation of the ECOC year.

C. Gradually moving forward: analysing our strengths and our weaknesses

Q21: What are the main strengths and weaknesses of your project? How are you planning to overcome weaknesses identified?

Part 5 | 30 for 30, Our Pilot Projects 31-45

A. Own Projects

B. Collaborations

C. Projects supported

D. Visit to

E. Opening celebration ECOC 2030

Q9: Give a general overview of the structure of your cultural programme, including the range and diversity of the activities/main events that will mark the year

Part 6 | Radical Facilitation 46-49

A. Collaboration with the local cultural ecosystem

Q22: How has the city involved, or how does it plan to involve, local artists and cultural organisations in the conception and implementation of the cultural programme?

B. Collaboration with the social sector

Q23: If your city is awarded the title of European Capital of Culture, what do you think would be the long-term cultural, social and economic impact on the city?

Q24: Explain how you intend to create opportunities for participation of marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

C. Cooperation with society and civil society

Q25: Explain how the local population and your civil society have been involved in the preparation of the application and will participate in the implementation of the year.

D. Collaboration with the economic sector

Q26: If your city is awarded the title of European Capital of Culture, what do you think would be the long-term cultural, social and economic impact on the city?

Part 7 | Finance 50-52

A. The city's budget for culture

B. Operational budget for our ECOC year

Part 8 | Tourism Capacity 53-54

A. Visiting Bruges

Q27: What are the city's assets in terms of accessibility (regional, national and international transport)?

B. Overnight accommodation

Q28: What is the city's absorption capacity in terms of tourists' accommodation?

Part 9 | Marketing and Communication 55-57

Q29: Please provide with an outline of the city's intended marketing and communication strategy for the ECOC year.

Q30: How does the city plan to highlight that the ECOC is an action of the European Union?

Outro | Dear reader 58-59



Prologue | Let's get this conversation started

A conversation between Europe and Bruges

Hello Europe, pleased to meet you. We are Bruges. A city with a small-town feel and a global appeal steeped in European history. A UNESCO World Heritage City that links its rich past to the present through art and culture. A city that continually sets out to surprise its 119,500 proud residents and eight million visitors a year.

Why does Bruges want to become European Capital of Culture in 2030? (Q1)

Because we believe that with our chosen theme, 'the art of Conversation', we will be able to make a difference. Not only for Bruges, but for other European cities too. What we want is to inspire people, organisations, cities and countries to embrace the art of conversation. Talking to each other has never been more important, because our world is advancing at an unrelenting pace.

That's always been the case, hasn't it? Just take one look at history and you will see countless examples of how tumultuous society can be.

Agreed, but the challenges we're facing today are certainly quite extensive, both in number and intensity. Climate change, poverty, diversity, artificial intelligence, online connection but offline isolation, alienation, an ageing population, people fleeing their homelands, pressure on the quality of education and healthcare, polarisation and so on.

Talking can create connection between people. United we stand, divided we fall. But do you think that art and culture can play their part?

Yes, because we see art and culture itself as a form of conversation. Talking is what we need to do to face all these challenges, and yet the ability to hold a good conversation that is deep, searching and driven by genuine interest and empathy is something we seem to have lost at some point between the internet revolution, globalisation and the pandemic. If there's anything that brings people together, forms a connection between them and touches their soul, it is art and culture. So the answer to your question is a resounding "Yes".

How exactly would you approach that in 2030? Will it be a conversation between art connoisseurs?

Well, that's exactly what's so great about it. We're not talking about something we might roll out six years from now, we're already doing it! Since spring 2023, we have been immersing the people of Bruges in our theme for Bruges 2030. By implementing thirty pilot projects that explore the theme from different angles in variety of art forms, we have already reached many residents and visitors, including a lot of people for whom art was quite far removed from their everyday lives, thanks to our collaboration with sociocultural organisations. So, what we're doing is working! Based on those pilot projects, we were able to draw some valuable lessons. And with those lessons learned, we're now taking the next step: to reach even more people and get even more people talking to each other.

An asset for the city of Bruges, I'm sure. But what about the surrounding area? What about the sub-municipalities and the nearby towns and municipalities? How will they be involved? (Q2)



Bruges, of course, is not limited to the historic city centre the tourists frequent. We are already dedicating our efforts towards bringing about a shared conversation, a shared story that inextricably binds us together, not only with our eleven sub-municipalities but also with the towns and municipalities that are included since 2022 within the Flemish reference region of Bruges. Those are Beernem, Blankenberge, Damme, Jabbeke, Knokke-Heist, Oostkamp, Torhout, Zedelgem and Zuienkerke. Together with Bruges, the region is home to some 285,000 inhabitants.

Our aim is that our activities should increasingly take place on a supralocal scale. The enthusiasm to share knowledge and to collaborate is there. Moreover, from 2027 onwards, we will be able to obtain structural funding from Flanders for this purpose, which should give our plans an even greater boost.

As you yourselves have said: the city centre is already a huge tourist attraction today. Are the people of Bruges expecting to welcome even more visitors?

That's a fair question. We certainly don't shy away from that conversation. It was even the subject of one of our pilot projects, 'Brieven aan de Stad' (Letters to the City), but more on that later. For years, Bruges has been heavily committed to finding the right balance between liveability for its residents and the city's allure for visitors. And that's been a success, because the triennial citizen survey, City Monitor, showed that of all city centre residents in Flanders, the people of Bruges enjoy living in their city the most and are the proudest of it.

We want to keep it that way. One of the core elements of our candidacy is our collaboration with the surrounding area. Because if we invest in a diverse range of cultural programmes in the surrounding cities and communities, visitors will have even more reasons to explore much more than just the historic city centre. We have so much to offer that has yet to be discovered. So it's a win-win situation, for the residents of Bruges as well as for the region surrounding us.

Bruges has been European Capital of Culture before, hasn't it? Isn't it therefore a bit greedy to want the title a second time?

It's true that Bruges held that title back in 2002 and as a city, we got a lot out of it. In that sense, you can view our candidacy for 2030 as a powerful dialogue between the past, the present and the future. In 2002, we connected our rich past to contemporary and innovative projects, events and exhibitions. That successful ECOC year acted as a catalyst for additional investments, both in infrastructure and in cultural dynamics. As a result, the number of people visiting the city has risen sharply over the past two decades. And we ourselves have adopted an increasingly professional approach.

2002 was a very important year for Bruges, but that doesn't mean we're being greedy by setting our sights on 2030. Our intention is that Bruges 2030 will give back to the people of Bruges and the surrounding area. To everyone, young and old. And, very importantly, we want to give something back to Europe! To all Europeans. Something that connects us and therefore strengthens us all.

We've talked about your rich past and your groundwork in the present. But what about the future? What could a second ECOC year add to the future of Bruges?

Our strength is that we can immediately zoom in on what really matters – bringing people together through art and culture. Our infrastructure is already in place and our artistic ecosystem also forms a solid foundation, so we can dedicate one hundred percent of our efforts and resources to cultural dialogue, to the art of conversation. This means that we can contribute towards a future in which, by joining together, people can tackle the major challenges faced by our society. By using arts and culture to provide leverage.



2030 won't simply be a copy of 2002?



Absolutely not. The world has changed. Bruges has changed. And our demographics are still changing every day. For example, we are welcoming increasingly more new Belgians, creating an interesting shift in ethnic cultural diversity. We in Europe are no longer living in an era of change, but in a change of era. Art and culture have a crucial part to play in starting the conversation and in standing together in the future. 'the art of Conversation' forms the common ground for us all, well beyond 2030. Can we put this in a more ambitious way?

Yes, please do.

Bruges wants to inspire people across Europe how to talk to each other again. By utilising our distinctive cultural mix of heritage, innovation and social relevance, we want to take the lead and inspire other European cities, creating a ripple effect.

We see the journey we have taken and are describing in this bid-book as an inspiration. This document is alive. It's a manual or a blueprint even, because other cities will be able to benefit from our principles and ideas and take action. 'the art of Conversation' is a concept for our ECOC year that transcends our city and can be used widely.

Let's just relate this to the situation that exists today. How is Bruges establishing a profile for itself in the cultural domain? (Q3) You are mainly known within Europe for your heritage. How will that give rise to a cultural dialogue? Tourists come to see your medieval buildings, to cruise along the canals and to stroll through the city's characteristic streets.

That's right. We are already widely known as a UNESCO World Heritage City. And that's precisely why tourists are so surprised to learn that there's much more to discover here. Today, Bruges is home to around twenty professional cultural organisations, over two hundred associations that are active in the cultural and sociocultural domain and numerous artists, performers and collectives. They, for their part, have done anything but remain stuck in the past.

The activities of each of these players are unique, and yet at the same time each is connected to the others. The disciplines, the organisations and the people are connected and form a close-knit network that is committed to making Bruges a vibrant and versatile city of culture. The foundation is already in place – generosity. We will use our concept of 'the art of Conversation' to encourage and further consolidate collaborations in our city and region.

So the concept of the programme you intend to launch when you become European Capital of Culture 2030 is ... (Q4)

... this. A conversation. The art of conversation. Ever since the spring of 2023, this concept has been both our goal and our toolbox. And we are so imbued with it that it also acts as our guide in this bid-book. A great many artists and houses of culture create in order to foster connection. But to reach all residents and visitors – the young and the elderly, the rich and the poor (or disadvantaged), people of colour and white people, working-class people and intellectuals, art connoisseurs and those who'd rather see a football match – we must first connect in order to create.

Understood. So what's next?

We would like to take you through what the past year-and-a-half has brought us and the lessons we have learned. To show you what Bruges is capable of being and what Bruges wants to be. And how we intend to shape 2030.

Ready to dive in?



When was the last time you were amazed?



Introduction

The theme 'the art of Conversation' formed the goal and the toolbox of our artistic, cultural and sociocultural initiatives for one year-and-a-half. During this pre-selection phase, we didn't just search, research and philosophise: we have been very busy. Through experimentation and by trial and error, we determined our vision, our objectives and our strategy. We organised pilot projects on our own initiative, entered into collaborations with a variety of partners and facilitated initiatives that already incorporated the art of conversation. For us, 2030 has already begun. In a 'laboratory' that just happens to coincide with the boundaries of our city.

We realise that our approach is rather atypical. And the result is that we have also put together this bid-book for the pre-selection phase in an atypical way. We will answer all the questions but, here and there, in a different order, so we can guide you through our story more effectively. This bid-book can therefore also inspire other cities to incorporate 'the art of Conversation' into their own programmes and activities.

Our viewpoint and approach provide a unique opportunity to use the designation of European Capital of Culture 2030 as a means of digging deeper. Of demonstrating the enormous impact that art and culture can have on the well-being of a society. We can take this opportunity as a key regional city on the eve of significant demographic upheaval to explore how art and culture, as drivers of conversation and interaction, can meet this particular challenge, which many European cities will be facing in the coming years.

As was already evident from the conversation we had in the prologue, the necessary investments that Bruges is going to make between now and 2030 have almost nothing to do with creating new, additional infrastructure. So what will we be investing in instead? As a result of all of our conversations as part of Bruges 2030, it became clear that we need to focus on the software rather than the hardware.

- We will encourage creation, by providing mental and physical white space in the city and the region and loosen up the preconditions for the use of the physical white space.
- We will help the cultural sector entrust the keys to their premises to others on a more regular basis by recruiting committed networkers who can supervise and guide these processes.
- We will focus even more intensively than before on cross-sector consultation so that 'the art of Conversation' is able to break through the walls and partitions that exist between sectors in our city and our region.
- We will optimally adapt our existing infrastructure for shared use.

With an eye towards our ECOC year, we will offer additional resources and support to cultural (and sociocultural) organisations, artists and cultural collectives. One way we will do that is by significantly expanding and reshaping the city's funding apparatus. We will provide grants to incentivise projects that will give both 'the art of Conversation' and Bruges itself a cultural boost. Issuing accessible and widely disseminated open calls will enable the artistic programme to be filled by a wide range of participants. The Open Call Bruges 2030 we organised during the preparatory phase may be regarded as a powerful precursor to this. We intend to continue working this way. The first offshoot involves our plans to establish a Fund for European Voices of Inspiration.

Bruges will also continue to invest in a stimulating environment for artistic and cultural creativity. Among other things, we will put in place an events desk to proactively assist organisers in the development and realisation of their projects in public spaces. And although we won't be investing in new bricks-and-mortar projects much between now and 2030, we do actually need flexible spaces to share and to inspire each other. We aim to expand the number of creation spaces in Bruges by repurposing existing historic sites.

We will also continue pursuing this line within our own organisational structure. We will create a team to broaden and strengthen networks, to connect neighbourhood and district initiatives, schools, healthcare institutions and entrepreneurs with the cultural and sociocultural sector and develop valuable ties. A team that will be given the time and space to stimulate the conversations that we are still putting off too often, even in this day and age.

The cultural sector in Bruges is not an island. For the past 20 years now, the wall separating culture from other sectors has already been crumbling bit by bit. And by 2030, we want to pull it down completely! Because one of the key aspects of our ECOC year is the concept of social cohesion. In that regard, culture is not the end goal, but a means of connecting people and giving them a voice. Of course, that will not stop us from developing a spectacular, celebratory programme with artistic interventions that will stay in the hearts of our residents and visitors for years to come and with initiatives that encourage ongoing conversation.

**We can't
wait to take
you through
the art of
Conversation!**

Vision Statement: Welcome to the art of Conversation

When launching our preselection campaign for our ECOC year, we published a vision statement on 'the art of Conversation'. Our artistic vision and strategy for the cultural programme for 2030 are based on the elements from that text. (Q6)

Our world is progressing at an unrelenting pace. Climate change, poverty, a society of many peoples and cultures, a hyper-diverse patchwork, artificial intelligence we can barely get a grip on, mass populations and an increasing lack of space, online connection yet offline isolation. An exodus from our cities, an ageing population and an erratic real estate market. People fleeing their homelands, for all sorts of reasons. And then the desire for sufficient green space, accessible art and quality education.

Topics galore on which to base Bruges' application to become European Capital of Culture 2030. But if we ever want to address those challenges and benefit from the opportunities, we need to talk. To have a conversation about deeply held truths, light-hearted moments and intense emotions. With one another, but also with ourselves. At some point between the internet revolution, globalisation and the pandemic, we seem to have lost the gift of conversation. But if there's anything that brings people together, forms a connection between them and touches their soul, it is art and culture.

That is why the theme of Bruges 2030 is 'the art of Conversation'. This theme will be our guide when drawing up our application. Bruges has committed itself to initiating conversations about the issues that await us in the run-up to 2030. Our aim is to encourage dialogue between people, between organisations and their members, between towns and cities and rural areas and between the past and the present. After all, what is more valuable than a meaningful conversation?

We want to give people that gentle push to start a conversation with a stranger. To supply the right question to break through the silence between a person and their loved one. To hold a debate in which all opinions are valid and people can and dare to look each other in the eye instead of venting their rage on their keyboards. We want to bring together everyone's thoughts about the lack of space and be open to new insights from others. We want to celebrate individuality and talented people in our society and discover how they can touch the lives of others.

Bruges 2030 wants to set all this in motion, and much more. We create in order to connect, but we must also connect in order to create. During our candidacy, we embrace 'the art of Conversation' both as a goal and a tool. We are putting together a dossier, in which as many Bruges residents and visitors as possible will get involved in the conversation. The projects we launch will not only foster dialogue, but will themselves emerge from conversations.

This candidacy is both for and by residents of Bruges and its visitors and is founded on the conversations they want to have and on the questions they wish to ask and answer. Artists, cultural players, residents, tourists, children, the elderly and everyone in between. Whether you have grand visions or minor frustrations. Whether you are an outspoken talker or someone who listens in silence. Whether you enjoy culture with a capital C or find your own unique cultural outlet in soccer, skating or Frisbee. Whether you like theatre or fairs or both. Whether you are struggling, physically or mentally, or losing yourself worrying.

Whatever form it may take, a conversation is always enriching. And a European Capital of Culture that celebrates and embodies this is, by its nature, a triumph.

Part 1 Artistic Strategy and the Broad Outlines of Our Programme

A. Bruges' cultural strategy

Since 'the art of Conversation' will act as a common theme that forms part of the programme of all cultural players in Bruges in 2030, we will first give a brief description of Bruges' current cultural strategy, and will explain how we will also continue our cultural and sociocultural activities beyond 2030. (Q7)

Bruges is a city of culture through and through. Investing in culture is a fundamental part of our city council's policy (see also Part 7). The goal? To put Bruges even more firmly on the cultural map. In Flanders and Belgium, but also in Europe and around the world.

Our cultural strategy relies on four core elements: the interaction between heritage and the arts, paying attention to creation, accessibility and the regional experience.

Interaction between heritage and art

What is the main reason why most visitors come to Bruges? To experience the architectural heritage within the city's medieval texture. The historic city centre – which contains monuments such as the Belfry, the Basilica of the Holy Blood and the many characteristic squares and canals – forms a unique architectural ensemble. The dedication to this architectural, archaeological and landscape heritage is part of Bruges' DNA.

Whether we are talking about moveable, immovable or intangible heritage, uncovering the soul of Bruges' heritage even more is one of our core missions. In order to achieve this, we can take advantage of an inexhaustible source of stories and insights: the Bruges Collection, - a collective name for the entire range of heritage collections with a European appeal managed by Musea Brugge, the Bruges Public Library, the Bruges City Archives and Bruges' churches and monasteries -, and the monumental buildings in which it is preserved and displayed.

Musea Brugge has a rock-solid European reputation for the high-quality presentation of collections and international loan exhibitions. This overarching organisation in charge of thirteen city-owned museums in Bruges brings together institutions such as the Groeninge Museum, the Gruuthuse Museum, St John's Hospital, the Folk Museum and the Belfry. Their combined collection of more than 85,000 objects includes art from the 14th to the 21st centuries. In 2022, the Government of Flanders designated Musea Brugge as a Flemish cultural heritage institution, a title reserved only for museums operating on a European and international level. In terms of documentary heritage, Bruges is home to iconic world-renowned collections.

For example, the Public Library of Bruges brings six centuries of Bruges book history and literature to life and the City Archives of Bruges – which holds documents dating back to 1280 – is considered one of the most important archives in Europe.

Our intangible heritage is also alive and well, with the Bruges Carillon, the Procession of the Holy Blood and Pageant of the Golden Tree as the city's international standard-bearers. As a result of the 'Handmade in Brugge' label, a strong community has been created, in which more than 100 craftsmen and women are now breathing new life into traditional crafts.

In Bruges, there is a strong tradition of interaction between heritage organisations and the major houses of culture (Concertgebouw Brugge (Concert Hall), Kaap, Cultuurcentrum Brugge (Cultural Centre), Brugge Plus, etc.). Collaboration has been successfully explored several times in the past in response to exhibitions or citywide projects. Bruges' rich layered heritage - movable, immovable and intangible - is also the starting point for new artistic creations.

In the programme for Bruges 2030, we intend to continue this momentum, and the BRUSK exhibition hall (opening 2026) will play a key role. In BRUSK, Musea Brugge will organise innovative and topical exhibitions on ancient, modern and contemporary art. It will be the place in which to combine together Bruges' magnificent heritage collections in a progressive way with a contemporary cultural experience and with national (and international) multidisciplinary art.

Over the last quarter century, Bruges has given contemporary architecture its rightful place in the further development of the city. Concertgebouw Brugge, the BMCC (Exhibition, Meeting and Congress Centre), the State Archives and soon BRUSK, for instance, are successful examples of contemporary iconic architecture. And yet a heritage city often conjures up images of stasis or even rigidity. That's certainly something we are aware of. But thanks to the strong interaction between heritage and culture, we are creating a profile for Bruges as a city that utilises art as a means of creatively engaging with the city's stories and heritage. Of testing out new ideas. Of making artistic dreams possible. By means of our cultural strategy, we are constantly encouraging innovation. We never consider heritage, art and innovation as separate worlds, but rather as communicating vessels that form part of a broad approach towards culture.

In other words, combining local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative and experimental cultural expressions (Q9) forms part of our city's cultural DNA. And not only today, but also in 2030 and for a long time to come.

Creation front and centre

Creation is the core of culture. During the run-up to our ECOC year, we will be working to put Bruges on the map as a place of creation in Flanders, so (young) makers and creators no longer leave the city and the region to pursue their creative ambitions.



How will we achieve that? By keeping an open mind. A mindset in which the creators themselves are at the helm, take initiatives for themselves and, above all, work together extensively. Across sectors and in a way that transcends artistic disciplines.

We will of course include Bruges' houses of culture – with their established range of concerts, exhibitions, literary events and theatre, circus, film and dance productions – in this. During our ECOC year, we will strengthen their dynamic and high-quality programmes, with a focus on in-house productions and creations. The Concertgebouw Brugge (Concert Hall) will play a pivotal role in this as the European house of the arts for music, contemporary dance and sound art. With De Batterie, Bruges is home to a participatory art practice that has gained significant project experience over the years. And in the De Tank studio workshop – which is home to 50 resident artists – the local visual arts scene is blossoming. We will also utilise their expertise to support, encourage and facilitate creation in Bruges. In collaboration with Cultuurcentrum Brugge (Cultural Centre), Brugge Plus, Cactus Muziekcentrum (Music Centre), Musea Brugge, Kunstencentrum KAAP (Arts Centre), Het Entrepot Youth Centre, the City Makers Community De Republiek and other cultural organisations and collectives, we will enliven Bruges as a breeding ground and a hotbed of creation.

***“Our dream for 2030? That all the film organisations in Bruges can work together to create one big film festival, so we can bring together fragmented knowledge and talent and share or resources. By working together, we can also vigorously pursue the social angle and reach new target groups.”
— Hannelore Geldhof, MOOOV***

What is more, we would like to make the case for more art interventions in public spaces, so that a wide audience can come into contact with art in a highly accessible way. Successful formats, such as the Bruges Triennial and Beaufort, have shown that visual artists and architects worldwide are eager to engage with Bruges. This is a unique position that we want to encourage even further by ensuring more flexible procedures and by providing quality support from the event organisation Brugge Plus, which came into being as a result of Bruges 2002, and from other houses of culture.

Accessibility

From the AMOK Festival to Konvooi. From the Reiefestival to Mirage. From Bomboclat to Cirque Plus. From the MA Festival to Cactus Festival. These cultural events attract a wide audience and invite you to experience Bruges differently. For us, it's therefore also important to continue providing established players with new impulses and to help new valuable players roll out their festivals and events. We want to make arts and culture accessible and attractive to all, so that everyone can experience the power of connection they provide.

We will continue to invest in innovative programming in public spaces. Bruges has a whole host of high-profile venues at its disposal. From historic sites and cosy squares, parks, forests and open countryside to an (inland) harbour and a beach. We will choose locations with a low threshold for learning about art and creation, and programmes that are appealing to local, national and European audiences alike.

A regional experience

Bruges will function as the cultural hub of and for the region. That is the ambition we are working to achieve together. We will continue to prioritise disseminating culture in the neighbourhoods and sub-municipalities of Bruges and will actively involve the nine municipalities that surround our city. Starting in 2025, the ten cities and municipalities will go through a participatory process together to establish the framework for more structural cultural cooperation. In 2023, a 'Preliminary Policy for supralocal cultural activities in the Bruges region' was drawn up around four themes (focusing on cultural encounters, sustainable interaction between nature and culture, a region-wide programme for children and youth and reinforcing heritage activities). The process will concretise this starting note and connect it with the programme for the cultural year 2030. For us, both are communicating vessels.

With regard to cultural dissemination, Brugge Plus continues to take the lead, assisted by a network of partners. This city-run non-profit organisation is the silent driving force behind many large and smaller-scale cultural projects, such as Film on the Beach (in Zeebrugge) and the Light Festival (in Lissewege). In addition, Brugge Plus is working hard to ensure that a robust programme of activities is provided in the districts of Bruges under the banner of 'Uitwijken'. For this, the non-profit was presented with the 'Prijs van de laagste drempel' (Lowest Threshold Award) by the Netwerk tegen Armoede (Network Against Poverty) in 2017.

In short, we aim to make partaking in culture possible for all citizens of Bruges, including those living in the municipalities surrounding the city. Working together to bring about a cultural programme that combines strength with accessibility will enable us to achieve that. In that regard, a firmly embedded system of inter-municipal, supralocal cultural cooperation will provide even more opportunities from 2027 onwards.

***“We made the conscious decision to focus on doing, not just thinking, in this pre-selection phase.”
— Dalilla Hermans, Project Coordinator of Bruges 2030***

B. Pilot projects and the broad outlines of the programme for 2030

This past year, we have rolled out thirty pilot projects that put our theme ‘the art of Conversation’ into practice and enabled us to build support for our ECOC year.

For us, these pilot projects form a core part of the pre-selection phase, which is why you can also find them in the middle of this bid-book (see Part 5). The purpose of the projects was to test the vision, strategy and objectives underlying our concept in the real world. They also helped us to sharpen our focus on the value that conversation generated by art and culture can provide and on where challenges still remain. For us, doing was the most important thing. Along the way, we gradually examined Bruges’ existing cultural strategy and following a critical review, formulated eight areas of focus. These then became the eight pillars around which we worked and will continue to work. Those eight pillars emerged from the conversations we had and from the lessons learned after conducting the thirty pilot projects.

In the descriptions of the thirty pilot projects, you will see that each project focuses on at least one, and often several, of these eight pillars. You may notice that we do not mention sustainability as a separate focus. In the run-up to 2030, thinking and working sustainably in everything we do seems self-evident to us. We no longer have the luxury of designating sustainability as a point or pillar in its own right.

Focal Points

These are the eight focal points or pillars that we are including in our renewed cultural strategy today, in the coming years and a long way beyond 2030:

- **Cross-pollination between art, heritage, culture and society**
Because art, heritage and culture are constantly interacting with society and the complex social issues that concern people.
- **Attention to undervalued voices**
Because the voices that are often drowned out today deserve to be included and because their words will enable us to more and more people in our story.
- **A diversity of cultures**
Because the uniqueness of each culture incites reflection and inspiration and can bring a wind of renewal, and because connecting cultures strengthens and enriches our community.
- **A highly engaged region**
Because we strengthen each other by sharing our skills and knowledge and joining forces, across city and municipal boundaries.

- **A European perspective and mindset**
Because all European countries share a history and a future and we want to face that shared future from a positive mindset.
- **Creation as the heart of art**
Because creation is not only the starting point of every form of art and culture, but also the inspiration for new works of art and culture.

- **Attention to (cultural) education**
Because we want to share the passion for art and culture with young people as a means of connecting generations.

- **Shining a spotlight on young talent**
Because the fresh eyes of talented young people spur innovation and keep art and culture dynamic.

The description of our pilot projects and the ways in which we plan to roll them out more widely in 2030 already provides a sample card showing the way we will structure our cultural programme for 2030, with a very diverse range of activities and events. (Q9)

‘The art of Conversation’ is not a theoretical concept but is something very tangible. With a small team, we gave ourselves just one-and-a-half years to initiate as many conversations as possible. That allowed us to turn this bid-book into a kind of manual. Anyone who browses through the pilot projects will undoubtedly be inspired to implement ‘the art of Conversation’ themselves. What is more, the reader will also discover what lessons we drew from each experiment and how many opportunities for conversation are waiting to be used.

Our ultimate goal for 2030 has always been to be the city that got Europe talking again, as we ambitiously expressed in our conversation with Europe in the prologue. Since May 2023 and as an experiment that would already enable us to reach that goal for Bruges and its surroundings, we have organised many initiatives on our own, have worked with partners on projects and events and have supported existing initiatives that already sought to develop and promote ‘the art of Conversation’, for example by providing funding or by helping with grant applications.

In addition to our pilot projects, we brought together cultural and sociocultural partners at various sector events and scheduled one-on-one meetings to exchange ideas. Finally, we regularly went out to meet with potential future partners in order to present ‘the art of Conversation’ and our approach to them. You can read more about each pilot project starting on page 31.

All of these projects are steeped in ‘the art of Conversation’. That’s why we came up with them and implemented them. It’s also why we will use them as raw material when developing our programme for 2030. In a limited period of time, we have already loosened many tongues, so imagine how much further we could go if our city was named European Capital of Culture in 2030!

Whereas nowadays, we’re often still bumping up against our own limitations, have had to keep certain pilot projects smaller in scale than we originally dreamed

and had sometimes hoped for more enthusiasm or participants, we have the potential to make even bigger leaps forward in the coming years. We have already launched a number of initiatives to reach people who frequently fall through the gaps in the cultural net, though this wasn’t always as successful as we envisioned. And yet there are still more target groups we want to give greater ownership, even more topics and issues that have remained unseen and additional organisations and associations that have yet to find their way to ‘the art of Conversation’. So the main lesson learned is that all this has given us a taste for more. To experiment more and build a stronger network. To deepen and multiply our good practices and enable the art of conversation and conversation as an art to spread much further.

What did this preliminary process, this experimental phase, prove? That our ambitions and aspirations for 2030 are both achievable and necessary. And that Bruges residents and visitors, our society and, by extension, the whole of Europe are yearning for connection. For ways to express themselves. To listen and be heard. We may have lost the art of conversation at some point, but we’re actually rather keen to rediscover it.

C. Our long-term strategy and the audience development framework

By carrying out our thirty pilot projects, Bruges has done much more than come up with a concept on paper. We have actually already rolled out ‘the art of Conversation’ during the preparatory phase. That’s how strongly we believe in the necessity of our concept. It also directly demonstrates the way we will integrate the European Capital of Culture actions into our long-term cultural and artistic strategy. (Q9) Because the action and the strategy are already closely intertwined. Between now and 2030, we intend to make those connections even closer, so that they reach their peak in 2030 itself. Our aim is that by then, the concept we adopt will have penetrated right down into the cultural (and sociocultural) fibres of Bruges, so we can consolidate it in subsequent years.

Is Bruges actually ready for this cultural transformation? Wholeheartedly yes! Our initiative is based on strong interaction between the existing cultural players, well thought-out activities, robust support policies from the city and collaborations with social organisations and neighbourhood initiatives. What we’re going to do now is overlay the unifying layer of ‘the art of Conversation’ on top of that foundation. That way, we will not only be able to respond purposefully to changes within society and keep our finger on the pulse of the region but we will also be able to reach people we can’t reach at the moment. This will enable us to be, and remain, a lively, dynamic and innovative heritage city. A city that tomorrow will still be culturally relevant to every resident and every visitor.

“What is the most important conversation for 2030? As far as we’re concerned, that most important conversation is the conversation between all cultural and sociocultural players about the relevance of art. And about the relevance that the cultural sector as a whole can have in a changing world, in which we’re regularly under attack from an ideological angle. We must continue to be relevant to all of society, not just to a niche of art lovers. Art must no longer exist on an island. Let’s have a critical conversation with ourselves as a sector, while also letting go of our own ideological gaze.” — Bart Geernaert, De Republiek

From the sector-specific meetings and one-on-one conversations we had with cultural (and sociocultural) organisations, it became clear that the art and cultural sector in Bruges fully supports the city’s candidacy to become European Capital of Culture. There are already many ideas – from the embryonic to the highly specific – about how ‘the art of Conversation’ can be applied to existing initiatives and annual events, and can also be used to set up new projects for 2030. Over the next few years, we will continue to schedule conversations and consultations so that by 2030, we can surprise everyone with a great programme that is completely suffused with ‘the art of Conversation’.

How confident are we that our concept will last until 2030? Well, for the Bruges City Council, 2024 is the last year of the current municipal legislature. Soon, a new city council consisting of a Mayor and Aldermen will take office for the period 2025-2030. Our ECOC year will form an important guideline within the policy programme of the new executive team. The city council will make full use of culture as a lever in order to create a sustainable and connecting city, where it is good to live and work. Even though we’re about to experience a change of the political guard: the fact that culture is so deeply embedded in the DNA of Bruges and our vision is widely supported means that we are actually in a strong position.

But that doesn’t mean to say that our cultural strategy is rigid. It evolves along with our city and with the society we live in. By implementing ‘the art of Conversation’ as a common thread, we will be able to improve and optimally facilitate the necessary debate around important social evolutions in and around Bruges, such as diversity, sustainability, ecology and the regional reflex. Of course, additional themes may emerge. We are living in an age that is changing, switching and accelerating at lightning speed, but rarely slows down.

Fortunately, our concept is flexible and we can dynamically apply it to any challenge that crosses our path. Because one thing is certain: in any version of the world as it might be in 2030, the art of conversation will still be essential. By harnessing the connecting power of conversation, we will make important changes within society a subject for discussion by means of art, culture and heritage and create much-needed connection in a troubled world.

Based on the eight pillars of our dynamic concept and with a thoughtful and substantiated marketing and communication approach as a foundation, we are elaborating our audience development strategy, which includes collaboration with education and the participation of schools (Q11).

Audience development via sociocultural organisations, community workers and intermediaries

“Getting social engagement on the agenda of organisations is crucial. Why do many organisations struggle with it? Is it out of ignorance? Or are they unsure how to get started? Support is going to be needed in order to expand this in a structural way.” —Bart Hollevoet, Brugs Netwerk Vrijetijds participatie

The conversations we initiate with all audiences will form the starting point of our audience development strategy. By collaborating with sociocultural organisations, community workers and intermediaries to set up a programme on the topic of ‘the art of Conversation’ that is tailored to the target groups we want to reach, we will be able to lower the threshold considerably.

We will go to the target groups, listen to their needs and desires, work out a programme that is tailored to them, and then receive direct feedback which we can learn from for the next event or initiative. Or we may reverse the roles by giving them the opportunity to work out a programme for themselves and we will then provide them with support. We applied both approaches in our pilot projects and they proved to be successful. We were already collaborating very effectively with the various neighbourhood committees, among others. We want to continue expanding these collaborations. The goal? To increase our audience with people who currently have too little involvement in our cultural programme. Because diversity and inclusion will form an essential part of everything we do in the context of Bruges 2030.

We would also welcome the opportunity to extend this principle to the other European Capitals of Culture in 2030. We want to enter collaborations with sociocultural organisations from Cyprus and Montenegro in an effort to introduce people in disadvantaged situations to Bruges. In many cases, people in such situations do not have the opportunities and resources to travel or get to know the culture of another country. It would fit very nicely into our concept if we could work together to make this a reality for them. Collaborations of this type with other European countries that are keen to work together will also be possible, of course.

Audience development through ambassadors

We believe very firmly in the role that ambassadors can play in order to make ‘the art of Conversation’ more widely known. And we view that ambassadorship very broadly, with a specific focus on both well-known and lesser-known art forms and forms of cultural expression.

The major cultural players will incorporate the concept as a common thread in their programme in any case and are already able to reach a large audience via their own communication channels. But having big names and well-known artists take on ambassadorial roles means that more attention can also be given to niche projects and smaller or more unknown initiatives. What is more, we will look for ambassadors outside the conventional cultural circuit. By collaborating with well-known faces from popular culture, or just lesser-known people who have a lot of influence on a specific target group, we will expand our reach, including to target groups that are more difficult to access.

Audience development via education

“Bruges will need to reconcile a growing older population with the desire to attract young people as well. A dynamic connection between the two will be essential, and we must not use fear and control as the starting point. We believe that young people are entitled to their place in the city.” —Stefaan Lambrecht, Strategische Cel Stad Brugge (Strategy Unit of the City of Bruges)

We view the importance of artistic and cultural experiences at an early age as a key element within our ECOC year. For a city like Bruges, with its firmly established secondary education sector and thriving higher education institutions, the opportunities are there for the taking. Moreover, there is no higher education in the arts in Bruges, which offers possibilities for the run-up to 2030. We will therefore set off full steam ahead to develop initiatives linking culture and education that are regional in scope.

Our primary partners will be the schools themselves, the public libraries and the community and cultural centres of the ten municipalities located inside the reference region of Bruges. We will invest in a joint thought process that will lead to a Cultural Education action plan for Bruges 2030. We will do this for pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education.

We are working with the part-time arts education sector and are following a tailor-made road map leading up to our ECOC year. The academies, conservatories and other educational institutions are important drivers of cultural expression and creation. For children, adolescents and also for adults. We aim to bring about collaborative working and artistic cross-pollination, utilising ‘the art of Conversation’ as a tool and a goal. Creative exchange projects with students from Cyprus

and Montenegro therefore are an avenue we would like to explore.

Our pilot projects from the preselection phase are already providing us with a good foundation. Open Book was a successful literary event for students in 5th and 6th years of secondary school that we will be repeating once a year, with a special, European-themed version to celebrate 2030. Kunst & Kader (Art & Frame) and The Big Talk also gave us lots of ideas about how to address difficult topics with young people in an age-appropriate way, in collaboration with the education sector. And an initiative such as the Day of Happiness during our ECOC year can also shine the spotlight on teachers, a profession that deserves our appreciation and recognition. Even an open call for artistic projects on the topic of ‘the art of Conversation’ specifically for schools or for pupils and students is one of the possibilities.

Our marketing and communication strategy, which obviously plays a major role in our overall audience development strategy, is discussed in detail in Part 9 entitled Marketing & Communication.

D. Monitoring and evaluation of Bruges 2030

Our monitoring and evaluation plans (Q9) rely on collaboration at all stages. In keeping with our theme ‘the art of Conversation’, we always go the extra mile to ensure a spirit of open consultation. During the preparatory phase, we continually engaged with cultural players, sociocultural organisations and other stakeholders. We will carry that open communication forward during all subsequent phases, including for the purpose of monitoring and evaluation.

When we develop the Bruges 2030 organisation as a separate entity during the next selection round, the Cel Cultuurbeleid (Cultural Policy Unit) will continue to be involved in all important steps of the decision-making process. Based on their strategic insight – both with regard to the workings of the local cultural sector and the city council – they will continuously monitor and evaluate the course that has been set for our ECOC year.

Because our work is based on a concept consisting of eight clear areas of focus (see page 14), we will also focus on these points in our monitoring and evaluation. In a later phase, we will set targets and establish a system that will allow us to provide answers to questions such as:

- Are we reaching enough disadvantaged and underprivileged Bruges residents?
- Is there sufficient response in the neighbourhoods, sub-municipalities and the surrounding municipalities?
- Are focusing enough on young talent?
- Are our panels, juries, teams of experts ... sufficiently diverse (in gender, age, roots and colour)?

Is the answer to any of these questions negative or are we not reaching our target? Then we will of course look for possible solutions to put that situation right. One asset we have in that regard is the close, unified network that the arts and cultural sector in Bruges has already become today. Alignment and coordination are our underlying values. Participation and involvement are the key words. We help each other, work in a complementary way and act as a sounding board for each other. We will coordinate this strategy with Visit Bruges, which has a tradition around setting up surveys and evaluations at major city events and has a qualitative feedback tool. After all, it is crucial that we evaluate the impact, both short- and long-term, of all the initiatives we take.

In 2023, the Brugs Cultuur Overleg (BCO - Bruges Culture Consultation) was established, a cultural consultation platform for Bruges that has its own coordinator. We will align our application for our ECOC year with the activities of the BCO as much as possible. By interacting with this platform and the learning networks that then emerge from it, we will continue to map out the course for our ECOC year. Monthly consultations with the BCO will provide a regular opportunity for monitoring that ensures that all cultural and sociocultural partners are involved.

For our plans with regard to the monitoring and evaluation of the financial part and our KPIs in relation to marketing and communication, please refer to Part 7 and Part 9 in this bid-book.



Part 2 Capacity

A. Overview of the cultural sector in Bruges

Bruges has a rich and varied cultural sector, in which unique actors from different disciplines bolster and support one another and form cultural communities that are continually growing. We would very much like to take you with us on a tour of this cultural ecosystem. Along the way, we will also name the sociocultural and social organisations we are collaborating with and we will take some time to consider the city's major cultural events. We put together this overview by taking a culture-wide approach that disregards the boundaries between individual disciplines.

Cultural practices as a foundation

Culture lies at the core of how we live together in Bruges. From people who feel the urge to express themselves creatively to all kinds of cultural encounters. This is where the creative bedrock of Bruges takes form.

- A broad network of more than 200 cultural (and sociocultural) associations that invite their members to experience culture or to express themselves creatively and artistically. From amateur arts to theme-based associations.
- Countless Bruges residents creating artistic work, either together within one of the organisations listed above or below or as individual artists, performers and collectives.
- The **Sociaal-Culturele Raad** (SCR - Social-Cultural Council) and the **Brugs Cultuuroverleg (BCO)**, both of which are consultative bodies in the field of culture and the arts.
- **FMDO Bruges**, the Federation for Global and Democratic Organizations, which supports ethno-cultural associations and promotes the participation of immigrants.
- A network of both public and private community and neighbourhood centres, providing neighbourhood-oriented activities, social services and meeting places for local residents.
- Numerous celebration-based and neighbourhood committees that create a feeling of connection in streets, districts and neighbourhoods.

Professionally run cultural organisations and houses of culture

The close-knit professional cultural sector, more than half of which is able to rely on structural funding from the Flemish Government, secures Bruges' position as a lively and versatile city of culture.

- **Anima Eterna Brugge**, an orchestra with members from all over Europe with various conductors that is committed to historical performance practices.
- **Avansa Region Bruges**, an organisation for many types of sociocultural activities and projects under the motto 'together for better', with a focus on diversity, sustainability and inclusion.
- **Brugge Plus**, an organisation that brings life into the city and its neighbourhoods by organising high-quality projects and events.
- **Bryggen Bruges Strings**, a contemporary string orchestra that chooses to update and experiment.
- **Cactus Muziekcentrum**, a music club for various contemporary music cultures.
- **Cinema Lumière**, a cinema with a range of high-quality films on offer and collaborations with local organisations.
- **Circusatelier Woesh**, a circus community that organises circus lessons, workshops and projects.
- **Concertgebouw Brugge**, a Flemish art institution with national and international performances of classical music, contemporary dance and sound art, and also in-house productions, resident artists and festivals.
- **Cultuurcentrum Brugge**, a cultural centre that presents international, national, regional and local companies and artists in the field of performing arts, circus and the visual arts.
- **De Batterie**, a participatory arts studio that interacts extensively with the fields of education and welfare.
- **De Republiek**, a platform that brings together various social and cultural projects based on the premise that "together we make the city".
- **DO**, an event organiser that keeps young people of Bruges awake, rooted in nightlife.
- **Erfgoedcel Brugge**, a network organisation that protects and unlocks Bruges' lesser-known heritage.
- **Handmade in Brugge**, a dynamic community centred around artisan craftsmanship.
- **Het Entrepot**, a creative sanctuary and cultural haven for young people with space to create, party, rehearse, experiment and pursue initiatives.
- **KAAP**, an arts centre that presents, creates and reflects on music, dance, literature and visual arts at various locations.
- **MA Festival Bruges**, a European leader in festivals for early music, with a focus on innovation and talent development.
- **MOOOV Bruges**, a global film festival with local accents.
- **Musea Brugge**, an internationally operating museum group with a diverse collection that is active at thirteen locations.

- **Public Library of Bruges**, a stimulator of reading and learning culture at 12 locations and a heritage library with a rich collection of manuscripts and old prints.
- **Bruges City Archives**, the memory of the city, with twelve kilometres of historical archives.
- **Wolinski**, a comedy club combining cabaret and curiosities.

Special events and initiatives in Bruges

The number of events and projects that are organised in Bruges is endless. Here is a list of recurring events with special content or supralocal appeal.

- **AMOK**, a biennial 10-day festival of music, words and performance.
- **Bach Academie Brugge**, an annual festival for local and foreign Bach lovers.
- **Carillon**, living intangible cultural heritage from the Belfry with an annual programme of concerts.
- **Beaufort**, a triennial art tour along the Belgian coast, including Zeebrugge.
- **BLVRD**, a bimonthly magazine for young people.
- **Cirque Plus**, a three-day European outdoor circus event, supporting young talent.
- **Dans in Brugge**, a collaboration between Concertgebouw Brugge (Concert Hall), Cultuurcentrum Brugge (Cultural Centre) and KAAP with a focus on contemporary dance, with annual international programming and the festivals December Dance and Bits of Dance.
- **De Tank**, a studio for (young) visual artists.
- **Docfest**, a festival dedicated to dialogue and depth around contemporary social issues through documentaries
- **DORP**, a DIY festival where young people have the opportunity to organise, make or do something themselves.
- **Exit**, a monthly cultural magazine from Bruges.
- Genre-specific film festivals such as **Razor Reel**, **Kuma Anime Film Festival** and **STOM!**
- **The Procession of the Holy Blood**, a centuries-old historic procession included on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage.
- **The Lab**, an open print studio and audio studio for experimentation with image and sound.
- **Iedereen Klassiek**, an event in Bruges city centre dedicated to classical music.
- **Jazz Brugge (Jazz Festival)**, a biennial jazz festival.
- **JEF**, a youth film festival and educational programmes.
- **Jeugdboekenfeest**, an event focusing on children's books, young adult literature and the joy of reading.

- **Jong Volk**, an online content platform for young people in Bruges.
- **Konvooi**, a biennial multidisciplinary arts festival for young artists in Bruges' industrial port.
- **Krikrak**, a family festival that makes the very young discover art and culture.
- **Lissewege Festival of Light**, a trail of fire, light and sound in the historic village of Lissewege.
- **Mirage**, a festival in public space that mirrors local creativity to national and international artists and performers.
- Outdoor film screenings, such as the **Fayard Pop-up Cinema** and **Film on the Beach**.
- Outdoor music festivals, such as **Bomboclat**, **Benenwerk**, **Cactus Festival**, **Party at the Park**, **Red Rock Rally** and **We Can Dance**.
- **The Pageant of the Golden Tree**, a triennial historical parade.
- **Playtime**, a biennial festival connecting gaming and art.
- **Prisma Queer Arts Festival**, an arts festival focusing on queer stories and experiences.
- **Reiefestival**, a triennial arts festival on and around the Bruges' canals.
- Street art routes **'The Bridges'** and **'Legendz'**, which give a new look to Bruges.
- **The Bruges Triennial**, featuring contemporary art and architecture in the historic heart of Bruges.
- **Uitwijken**, a mobile house of culture bringing free-of-charge art
- **Villa Bota**, a work and experimentation location focusing on radio, video and other media forms.
- **Weerwoord**, a platform for new voices in comedy and spoken word.
- **W.E.R.F. Records**, the house label of the KAAP arts centre that grew from jazz into a presentation platform for the rich and creative Belgian music scene.

Important friends

We would also like to present a fascinating compilation of organisations from adjoining sectors that exert an inextricable influence on Bruges and are partners of cultural organisations.

- **Architecture studio Dertien12**, which brings a creative voice around urban development in the form of meaningful architecture.
- **BruggeNaarMorgen**, a community on a path towards a climate-neutral and climate-robust Bruges.
- **Brugge Studentenstad**, the point of contact and event organiser for higher education students in Bruges.
- **Bruges Food Lab**, a network associated with and the driving force behind a sustainable food strategy.
- **Brugs Network Vrijetijds participatie (Bruges Leisure Participation Network)**, an organisation signposting people towards leisure activities and providing help and advice to people with a limited budget on the subject of leisure activities.
- **Howest, VIVES, KU Leuven and the College of Europe**, institutions of higher education.
- **HuisvandeMens Bruges**, which organises the provision of liberal humanist services, in which no subject is taboo.
- **JeugdDienst**, supporter of youth work in the city.
- **Jeugdhuis Comma**, a home base for young people in Bruges to find an outlet for their creativity and entrepreneurial spirit.
- **Komerbi Brugge**, a youth welfare organisation that strengthens social cohesion and integration by means of cultural activities and get-togethers.
- **Lokaal Mondiaal Brugge**, a city service focusing on diversity and inclusion.
- **MaM, Mind and Makerspace**, Howest University of Applied Sciences' creative space for thinkers and doers.
- **Modulair Bruges**, a platform aiming to provide a smart way of filling vacant spaces by match-making entrepreneurs, owners and creative startups.
- **Dienst Monumentenzorg en Stadsvernieuwing**, supervisor of the proper management of the immovable heritage in the UNESCO World Heritage City of Bruges.
- Educational partners **Stedelijk Conservatorium Brugge, Stedelijke Academie KSO, Academie Deeltijds Kunstonderwijs** and **Metronoom**.
- **Tuin van Heden Bruges**, a co-creative future project of Visit Flanders in which St Godelina's Abbey and the monastery of the Capuchin Friars Minor will be given a new future.
- **Turbo Bruges**, a coach and sounding board for young entrepreneurs and start-ups.

- **Raakvlak**, consultancy and public outreach around archaeology and immovable heritage.
- **Refu Interim Brugge**, an organisation that provides opportunities to newcomers by helping them find temporary work.
- **Snuffel**, a youth hostel and hang-out for young people, which has its own stage and programming.
- **YOT**, an experimental facility for ideology and a space for perspective.

B. shared cultural infrastructure as a foundation

Bruges has an extensive estate of protected historical buildings and an adequate, well-developed and viable cultural infrastructure with which to organise the year, if it is awarded the title (Q13). Between now and 2030, we intend to utilise this interplay as a means of developing models that can be used in order to activate new meeting places in the city. This is yet another way in which we can implement the concept of 'the art of Conversation'. We will lower the barriers impeding access to the available cultural infrastructure and open it up to new audiences. As far as Bruges' extensive religious heritage is concerned, we are busy developing new forms of cultural and sociocultural engagement. We will also take the opportunity to carry out renovation projects as a means of future-proofing our core infrastructure.

Building upon twenty years of robust investment

Bruges has invested heavily in cultural infrastructure during the past two decades. In the run-up to Bruges 2002, we completed the Concertgebouw Brugge, the restoration of the Koninklijke Stadsschouwburg, the construction of the Magdalenazaal, the creation of De Groenplaats and the expansion of Het Entrepot as a creative haven for young people.

And once 2002 was over, we successfully maintained that momentum. We completely renovated the Gruuthuse Museum and Museum Saint John's Hospital, and we set up new cultural centres in several sub-municipalities: Daverlo in Assebroek and Xaverianen in Sint-Michiels are already there and the Scharphout site in Lissewege is in preparation. In the meantime, we also have a new BMCC (Bruges Meeting & Convention Centre) and a heritage depot De Erfgoedfabriek (The Heritage Factory), with 7,000 square metres available for collections relating to the city and the region. The city council also co-invested in the thorough renovation of De Republiek and the culture hall at Snuffel Hostel. The latest addition is the new concert venue at Cactus Muziekcentrum. The revamp of Het Entrepot's site is also in the works.

The year 2026 will see the opening of an ambitious new museum project, with the new BRUSK exhibition centre, which will have two large exhibition halls (due to open in May 2026), the BRON research centre (due to open in November 2025), the renovation of the Groeninge Museum and the construction of a new museum park (both of which will be ready by 2030).

The city council has therefore realised long-term investments totalling more than 100 million euros in value. As mentioned earlier, no additional large-scale infrastructural project is set to be carried out between now and the year 2030. We want to continue converting existing infrastructure into shared meeting and creation spaces, so that they too can be used to facilitate 'the art of Conversation' in the true meaning of the phrase.

Overview of the available cultural infrastructure

The cultural infrastructure in Bruges is very extensive. On the one hand, it is made up of city-owned infrastructure and, on the other, of infrastructure owned and developed by the cultural organisations, often with the support from the city council. Due to the good cooperation that exists between the houses of culture, there is an open attitude towards the shared use of infrastructure. Between now and the year 2030, we intend to take further steps to develop cooperation models for that purpose. More shared use is paramount. At the same time, we want to encourage houses of culture to have the courage to hand over the keys of their premises to new groups of users. Here is an overview of a number of important locations:

City infrastructure

- **Cultuurcentrum Brugge** is the collective name that encompasses five performance halls and various exhibition spaces in Bruges. The Koninklijke Stadsschouwburg (Bruges Royal Municipal Theatre - 650 seats) is the flagship, but thanks also to the Magdalenazaal (381 seats), Theaterzaal Biekorf (232 seats), Daverlo (232 seats) and De Dijk (240 seats), the cultural centre has a well-equipped infrastructure of venues with stages of various dimensions, located throughout the city. Exhibitions are held in the Burghers' Lodge, the Bogarden Chapel and the Stadshallen (City Halls). The spaces that form part of Cultuurcentrum Brugge are used to provide in-house programmes of about 125 activities per year, but they are also made available to cultural (and sociocultural) associations, non-profit organisations and commercial organisations. Together, these venues account for more than 500 events and activities each year.
- **The Bruges Public Library** operates through a network of twelve branches – a main library and eleven branches in the sub-municipalities. This operation is complemented by services provided at home, in prison and via library points hosted by partner organisations. With a direct reach of 36,000 borrowers per year, the Bruges Public Library is the most accessible meeting place and a major cultural disseminator in the city.
- **Musea Brugge** is a group consisting of thirteen museums that presents world-class art and heritage at iconic historic sites. In the museum quarter, five sites are a stone's throw from each other: the St John's Hospital, the Church of Our Lady, the Gruuthuse Museum, the Arents House and the Groeninge Museum. Around the Market Square, the cluster of three iconic monuments forms a unity in terms of collection and experience: the Belfry, the

City Hall and the Liberty of Bruges. In the Quiet Quarter, the Folk Museum is the central hub and is surrounded by the Sint-Janshuis Mill, House Gezelle and the Church of Our Lady of the Pottery. The realisation of the BRUSK exhibition hall and the BRON research centre, as mentioned above, is in full swing.

- **The City Archives of Bruges** is the historical knowledge centre of Bruges that manages around twelve kilometres of archives.
- For **Uitwijken**, Brugge Plus invested in a mobile house of culture. Converted vans and trucks are used as stages, bars, reading corners or movie corners. Together, they form the core of a wide range of cultural activities in the neighbourhoods of Bruges.
- **House of Time** was created by the architectural collective raumlabor as a social-artistic project as part of the Bruges Triennial 2018. In this unique place with its indoor and outdoor studio, yurt, kitchen in a bunker, various containers and plenty of outdoor space, Brugge Plus is continuing to expand its operation through creation, craft and encounter and by paying increased attention to vulnerable individuals.
- The youth site **Het Entrepot** offers a comprehensive infrastructure for various events and creative activities. Its large multi-purpose event space with capacity for 1,200 people is surrounded by a versatile, 1250-square-metre outdoor space and skate park. The building also houses open studios, rehearsal rooms and two dance halls.

The infrastructure of cultural organisations

- **Concertgebouw Brugge** is a renowned cultural venue, thanks to its excellent acoustics and leading architecture. It includes the Concert Hall (1289 seats), the Chamber Music Hall (320 seats), artistic spaces, rehearsal rooms and meeting rooms.
- **KAAP Arts Centre** operates in three locations, two of which are in Bruges. Their headquarters De Groenplaats is currently undergoing alterations in order to improve artistic and production qualities, including creating space for artistic residencies. The De Werf site serves as a rehearsal and creation space for music and theatre.
- **Cactus Muziekcentrum** has a large concert hall with a capacity for 700 people and a café that can host smaller, intimate concerts for up to 150 people.
- A variety of activities come together in **De Republiek**. At the centre is the Grand Café, surrounded by workspaces for creative entrepreneurs and meeting and event spaces. Cinema Lumière operates four cinema auditoriums there, with a seating capacity from 45 to 172 people. De Republiek also operates and shares about six locations in the city as a platform for creative start-ups, craft makers and sociocultural associations.
- **The Avansahuis** in the sub-municipality of Sint-Pieters functions as a hub for civil society, and contains studios, meeting rooms, a teaching kitchen, a café and a large multi-purpose room.

- With **De Tank**, Het Entrepot provides workspaces for artists to create and experiment. The current base of operations is the Blydhove site in Assebroek, where there are fifty studios and where De Tank-community also organises exhibitions, workshops and events.

- **Snuffel** combines facilities for backpackers and budget travellers with its own cultural infrastructure (concert hall, workshop spaces, exhibition space), for Bruges residents and visitors to the city alike.

- With its concert hall and workshop spaces, **Jeugdhuis Comma** is an important incubator and showcase for young talent.

- The **Stedelijk Conservatorium (Municipal Conservatory)** and the **Stedelijke Academie KSO, Academie Deeltijds Kunstonderwijs (DKO - part-time art education)** both open up their classrooms and workspaces to other users.

- **A network of art galleries** focuses on contemporary and modern art.

- **Local venues** in party halls, pubs and record stores.

The use of historic sites as cultural presentation sites

Bruges has a dense concentration of religious heritage sites in and around the historic centre. On several occasions, these **churches and monasteries** have served as temporary venues for concerts, theatre and exhibitions. In the run-up to our ECOC year, we want to develop new models to enable this valuable heritage to be used as permanent places of creation and presentation. In that regard, we will build upon the pilot project De Tuin van Heden (Bruges), which by 2028 will enable two monasteries to be reused in a way that combines cultural, natural, heritage and food experiences. These processes concerning the repurposing and ancillary use of religious heritage locations promise to be inspiring for other European heritage cities as well.

After years of restoration, the **Provincial Court** reopened its doors again in April 2024. The province of West Flanders will further develop this image-defining site as a meeting and conference location and as an open building and as a source of inspiration. This will provide opportunities for collaboration as the programme for our ECOC year is developed further.

With a continued focus on infrastructure optimisation

A lot of Bruges' cultural infrastructure is located in protected historical buildings. An ongoing point to consider is caring for this historic heritage on an ongoing basis and carrying out modifications where necessary. Between now and 2030, we intend to future-proof two key sites. There are also two clear priorities as far as welcoming tourists is concerned.

The Groeninge Museum is one of the core locations of Musea Brugge, as a showcase of the collection of fine arts from the Southern Netherlands from the 14th century to the present. It is Musea Brugge's only location purpose-built as a museum and it opened its doors for the first time in 1930. The city council wants to make the building ready for the future by updating the technological installations, the security system and the visitor experience in the museum. This will require a thorough renovation of the building envelope, including a connection to the new BRUSK exhibition hall. The renovation of the Groeninge Museum forms part of the master plan to create a new museum district.

De Biekorf dates from the mid-1970s. This complex houses the Public Library, a performing arts hall and the administrative offices of the Cultural Centre. It is the most accessible of Bruges' cultural venues. Half of Bruges residents are members of the library and many thousands of people visit the building every week. Less visible is the rich book collection that is kept there. Work is being carried out to make the building's technical installations, such as the heating, roofing and sanitary facilities, more durable and more adaptable, so that the building can be used as a cultural hub in the Saint James's Quarter. A reading café will be built on the ground floor, which will link the library, the cultural centre and the surrounding cultural players (the conservatory, De Republiek and KAAP) together. Upstairs, the heritage collection will be made visible in the Heritage Studio, where changing exhibitions and other public activities will take place.

Visit Bruges is strongly committed to welcoming tourists and to the related infrastructure. Between now and 2030, there are two priorities for optimisation. First, the redevelopment of the **drop-off zone for buses** on the Kanaaleiland, in which a general upgrading of this important gateway to Bruges will be linked to improved traffic handling and more appropriate visitor management. And secondly, the establishment of a new central **reception area for visitors**, where we will offer a contemporary and personalised introduction to Bruges using state-of-the-art digital technologies and inspiring content that responds draws as much inspiration as possible from 'the art of Conversation'. The Arents House, a picturesque country house right in the Museum Quarter, is the dream location for this.

And the potential use of iconic sites

For a UNESCO World Heritage City like Bruges, taking thorough care of our valuable architectural heritage is beyond question. In recent years, restoration plans have been prepared for two iconic sites: the stadshallen and the Beguinage. We regard the our ECOC year as an ideal opportunity to explore the potential of both sites as cultural meeting places.

The Stadshallen (City Halls) and **the Belfry** are in good condition overall, but further building maintenance is imminent. We aim higher than a superficial restoration. We want to bring the building up to date and get it ready for contemporary purposes. The Belfry

Tower and courtyard are among the busiest places in the city centre of Bruges, but the interior spaces of the Stadshallen are currently underused. We want to make the Stadshallen a central and dynamic place in the city's cultural life once again. Reopening the four entrances to the courtyard will blur the boundary between the street and the halls.

The Beguinage was recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site. In 2025, this 'city within the city' – with its iconic white houses and its courtyard with trees, church and gates – will be 800 years old. The site bears witness to an extraordinary history of strong and vulnerable women: beguines, nuns and lay residents. At the same time, the Beguinage remains a living site where people live and traditions are honoured. The city council has developed a master plan for this exceptional site, based on five building blocks: a sheltered place with its own rhythm, a safe haven for women, caring and solidarity, entrepreneurship and craft, and spirituality, rituals and music. Our ECOC year will provide a benchmark for the realisation of this master plan.



C. Political support and commitment are assured

Bruges can rely upon broad and strong political support and sustained commitment from the relevant local, regional and national government bodies. (Q16)

The city council applied to become the European Capital of Culture in late 2022. Local political support for the city's candidacy is, of course, an essential starting point. The council released funds for the pre-selection phase in order to carry out an intensive pre-selection process, including the appointment of additional temporary staff.

Local elections will be held on 13 October 2024. We will then have a new city council for the period 2025-2030. The submission date of this bid-book on 2 September 2024 therefore occurs at a particularly pivotal moment. Without anticipating the actual composition of the new city council, the bid-book was presented at an additional meeting of city council members on 23 August 2024. After the presentation, they were given an opportunity to ask questions. They then endorsed the plan of action. The city council anticipates funding of 20 million euros if Bruges is elected European Capital of Culture in 2030.

On a regional scale, we are developing our ECOC year in direct interaction with the nine surrounding municipalities that make up the Bruges reference region. In the pre-selection phase, we went through a substantive preliminary process and all municipalities signed a letter of intent for further cooperation.

Since 2018, the Flemish provinces no longer hold any powers in the cultural domain. But the province of West Flanders will of course remain an important partner if Bruges is chosen to be the European Capital of Culture 2030. Collaborations in the areas of tourism, accessibility and mobility will play a primary role in that regard.

Belgium has a federal state structure. Culture is the responsibility of the communities. The Flemish Government already expressed its commitment to the Flemish candidates (Bruges, Ghent, Kortrijk and Leuven) to provide funding of 25 million euros if the candidacy of one of the cities in Flanders turns out to be successful.

In 2030, Belgium will be celebrating its 200th anniversary. In May 2024, the federal government took the formal decision to reserve 15 million euros over a five-year period (2026-2030) for the city that is effectively crowned European Capital of Culture.

Part 3 | The European Dimension

A. Europe as a compass

With our strategy and programming for Bruges 2030, we will promote Europe's cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and greater mutual understanding among European citizens. In doing so, our aim will be to emphasise common aspects of European cultures, European heritage, and European history and integration as well as current European themes. We will do this, among other things, by highlighting European artists, by collaborating with actors and cities in different countries and by focusing on establishing transnational partnerships. (Q17)



Retrospective: Bruges, the cradle of the European identity

Thanks to its location on the North Sea and its membership in the economic alliance known as the Hanseatic League, Bruges developed as an economic hub in Europe from the 12th century onwards. In the centuries that followed, the city continued to grow into a trading metropolis. A city with a European feel that attracted merchants, brokers, artists and bankers from all over Europe. In the 15th and 16th centuries, Bruges therefore became one of the largest, most prosperous and most influential cities in Europe. Its Gothic city palaces and imposing churches reflect that wealth to this day. The city also flourished as a breeding ground for art and culture, where painters, miniaturists, musicians and other artisans met. As early as 1423, for instance, a chamber of rhetoric was founded in Bruges, quickly followed by other societies that documented life in the city through writing. 'the art of Conversation' is thus fully in our genes.

After a period of decline, Bruges took on a new lease of life at the end of the 19th century. Its Gothic heritage was rediscovered and restored, after which the city took its first steps towards tourism. The construction of a new seaport also brought about an economic revival.

The special care we have taken to preserve our heritage led to the city being awarded the honorary title of UNESCO World Heritage City in 2000 and to the inclusion of the Bruges' Procession of the Holy Blood on UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009. This brief history and list of awards demonstrates that Bruges forms one of the birthplaces of European identity. It is no coincidence that the College of Europe, a post-graduate institute specialising in European policy, was founded right here in Bruges in 1949.

In 2024, Bruges is a habitable city that is strongly committed to achieving and maintaining a balance between living, working and relaxing. An engaging city, where people can enjoy living together in a safe and healthy environment. A caring city that values social cohesion and embraces increasing cultural diversity. A sustainable city that is taking steps towards the realisation of a climate-neutral future by 2050. A city on a human scale which, as a 15-minute city, invokes a feeling of home and brings people together. And last but not least a smart city that utilises its historical uniqueness as a means of encouraging us to continue working together to create a city for the future.

Looking ahead: building connections in today's Europe

Our rich history within Europe – and the fact that we have been linking heritage, culture, art and innovation for many decades – provides us with plenty of starting points to add a strong European dimension to our activities in our ECOC year.

European culture is based on unity in diversity. What makes our culture so rich is that it has always left room for different opinions and points of view. Centuries of dialogue have also helped shape European culture as we know it today. With 'the art of Conversation' as our theme, we approach European culture as a living process, with new voices constantly joining in and taking part in the conversation.

Our pilot projects focused on undervalued voices and the diversity of cultures within Bruges. Our intention is to take the lessons we learned from these projects and implement them on a European scale. We will enable voices that are often drowned out in Europe and will make connections between different cultures across national borders. In other words, we will use 'the art of Conversation' as a means of creating connections between the different cultures (and sub-cultures) within Europe.

With our ECOC year, we aim to add a new chapter to Bruges as a cosmopolitan city, by inviting artists from all corners of Europe to engage with the city and the region. We will be both hospitable and welcoming, so that unity in diversity achieves its fullest potential. With this in mind, we are setting up a Fund for European Voices of Inspiration. Artists from Europe will be able to sign up to come and create in Bruges, in response to the main strands of 'the art of Conversation'.

Highlighting the layers that form part of European identity

Over the course of history, Europe has had to redefine its position in relation to other continents and world powers again and again. The ability to change and adapt therefore lies at the heart of our European identity. At the same time, European culture has remained a foundation that brings EU citizens together in all their diversity. By using 'the art of Conversation' as a foundation, we will seek to reflect the many layers that exist within European culture. We will use our European culture as a conversation starter in order to engage in a dialogue with a wide range of artists from across Europe.

For many visitors from other continents, Bruges is one of the stops on a tour of Western Europe. In our ECOC year, we want to use this unique position in order to further highlight our European identity, by making Europe visible in the streetscape at various locations in the city. In doing so, we will not only touch upon historical events and urban impressions of European inhabitants in the past and present, but will also emphasise fundamental European values such as freedom, solidarity and respect for diversity and current European themes such as migration and climate and Europe's relevance in the world. To this end, we will work together with the Europahuis Ryckvelde, a training organisation based in Bruges that translates European themes on a human scale, with the College of Europe and with the association Eutopia.

Bruges wants to be a frontrunner in the European Green Deal. With the BruggeNaarMorgen climate plan and the Ruimte Brugge policy plan, ambitious targets have been set to make Bruges climate-neutral and climate-resilient. The local climate debate and actions are already being reinforced through cooperation with sociocultural organisations. In this respect, we are already committed to the core values of the New European Bauhaus concerning urban development (beautiful, sustainable and inclusive). Bruges is also an active member of the EU network CrAFT-cities, which seeks synergy between sustainable urban transition and sociocultural actors. By continuing to address these and other tracks, we ensure that sustainability and climate awareness are at the heart of our ECOC year.

A driving force behind artistic collaborations

Our approach, which involves using 'the art of Conversation' as a tool as well as a goal, offers tremendous opportunities for European collaborations, including on an artistic level. In this regard, we're not busy reinventing the wheel: conversations about and facilitated by art and culture are being generated all over Europe today. Our project coordinator Dalilla Hermans experienced this for herself during her visit to the European Parliament.

In the time between now and our ECOC year, we intend to actively seek out good practices, inspiring artists and exciting cultural and sociocultural initiatives in Europe. Through residencies, exchanges and by organising transnational debates and symposia, we will bring talent and potential not only to the surface but also to Bruges, using our Fund for European Voices of Inspiration as a central tool.

B. For a broad European and international audience

Within the framework of Bruges 2030, we are developing a strategy to attract the interest of a broad European and international audience. (Q18) As a charming heritage destination with a quality cultural programme, Bruges is already a strong European brand today. Each year, our city welcomes more than 8 million visitors, 1.1 million of whom also stay overnight. In that regard, the city council is focusing upon sustainable tourism and it continually strives to achieve a balance between visitors, residents and business owners.

Our candidacy for European Capital of Culture 2030 will continue to build on this strategy, and we will encourage overnight tourism, while aiming to extend the length of time that visitors stay in the city. A mainstay of this initiative will be a strong and layered programme that links our cultural assets to innovation and a focus on cultural diversity.

By including the wealth of nature in the Bruges region in our story, we will expand the breadth of experiences available and will work to ensure that the pressures of tourism on the city centre do not become excessive. From the coast and the polders to extensive forests and majestic gardens and parks, we will seek to

establish locations of natural beauty as new cultural anchor points, meeting places or stages for cultural performances. By offering thoughtfully mapped out bicycle and hiking routes, we will provide visitors with a special experience, without placing any additional burden on our nature in the form of motorised traffic.

So, as European Capital of Culture, we would seek to further expand the prevailing view of Bruges and to be a city that connects, fascinates and inspires people. The 2023 Arts Cities Survey indicated that 87% of overnight tourists in Bruges like to interact with local residents. And our 2023 residents' survey indicated that 74% of Bruges residents would like to tell visitors more about what the city has to offer. In keeping with 'the art of Conversation', we would like to interact with visitors to Bruges as if they are temporary residents of our city. Within our programme, we will focus on projects and activities that enable contact between temporary and permanent residents and that will therefore lead to authentic experiences.

As we develop this strategy further, we work closely with Visit Bruges, Westtoer and Visit Flanders. Together, they have already marketed Bruges very effectively and have established its position in the market. Utilising their experience will enable us to develop our strategy even further between now and our ECOC year. Using 'the art of Conversation' as our guide, we will work together to develop the right European story for a variety of audiences.

C. In partnership with other European cities

Bruges is a highly connected city that is active in several networking organisations on a European and international scale. For example, we are part of European networks such as Eurocities, the Commission of Hanseatic Cities, the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, the City Destinations Alliance, ECCAR (European Coalition of Cities Against Racism) and CIVITAS (sustainable and smart mobility). Bruges is also part of the ESN (European Social Network). On a global level, we are extremely active within the Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC), Circular City Declaration (circular leader cities), EU CrAft-network (sustainable urban transition) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). We have been working with the city of Ebolowa in Cameroon since 2020 on the creation of a sustainable cocoa and chocolate chain. Bruges has also already formed a partnership with the city of Kopychyntsi in Ukraine. Over the past decade, Bruges city council has also engaged in a diverse range of European cooperation projects, seeking relevant answers to local challenges from dialogue with other European cities.

Within the cultural programmes of Bruges' arts and cultural organisations, we are already providing a stage for a wide range of European artists and ensembles in numerous disciplines, including music, dance, circus and literature. For instance, the Budapest Festival Orchestra is an annual guest at Concertgebouw Brugge and, under the heading 'Close connections', they also work systematically with symphonic orchestras from Rotterdam, Cologne and London. Musea Brugge also operates as

an international museum group that forms part of a strong European network, the members of which work together in order to stage leading exhibitions.

Our ECOC year forms an ideal opportunity to be much more than an acclaimed presentation platform for European art and culture. We will put creation at the heart of our programmes and will provide opportunities for European artists from a diverse range of disciplines. To that end, we will invest in residencies and in the aforementioned Fund for European Voices of Inspiration. Based on 'the art of Conversation', we are also developing a programme that will include plenty of opportunities for artistic interaction between local, regional, Flemish and Belgian talent and European artists, collectives and ensembles.

We will link our cultural programme to the cultural programme of other European Capitals of Culture. (Q19) In the pre-selection phase, we already sought contact with the candidate cities in Cyprus as part of an initiative carried out in cooperation with the other candidate cities in Belgium. In collaboration with Larnaca, we have already rolled out an pilot project: the conversation starters card game (see also page 32) has been translated into Greek and is being used to further shape the programme for their candidacy.

During the build-up towards our ECOC year, we are aiming to bring about a dynamic cooperation with the European Capital of Culture in Cyprus and possibly Montenegro. In the first half of 2026, we intend to take some time to get to know each other's cities and operations better, so that we can invest in the creation of valuable one-on-one relations between cultural organisations. We are convinced that this particular 'the art of Conversation' can genuinely work.

But the cooperation will not stop at the European Capitals of Culture. As we said, we want to use 'the art of Conversation' as an operating manual so as to inspire other European cities to start implementing our principles and ideas. We will initially be looking at cities with a similar profile. Medium-sized heritage cities with tourist appeal, growing diversity and acting as a central location for the region. In our ECOC year, we therefore want to set up a satellite operation in a network of European cities, in which a mobile team will visit those cities to help translate the 'the art of Conversation' toolbox into the specific context of that city. The goal? To create momentum in at least ten sister cities. Momentum that we can continue to build upon long after 2030.

Part 4 | Organisational Structure

In this section, we will explain our governance and implementation structure in the pre-selection phase, while looking ahead to the structure we have envisioned for the selection phase and for our ECOC year. We will also explain how we want to move from cultural governance and good governance to new governance. (Q20)

A. The existing and planned governance and implementation structure for Bruges 2030

Pre-selection phase

When, in late 2022, Bruges applied to become European Capital of Culture in 2030, the city's Culture Policy Unit took charge of directing the candidacy, with organisational support from Brugge Plus. They report to a political steering committee, chaired by the Mayor. The Cel Cultuurbeleid is a city department responsible for advice, support and coordination within Bruges' cultural ecosystem. Brugge Plus is the municipal non-profit organisation that was originally established to organise Bruges 2002. In 2003, the decision was taken to continue these types of cultural and touristic activities and initiatives, with the central goal of organising large-scale events and projects that add value to the cultural experience in Bruges. Nowadays, in 2024, Brugge Plus has 45 permanent employees and 15 temporary employees.

“Culture is ingrained in our lives. Sometimes, it seems as if culture is something that can simply be ‘put away’ or ‘reduced’. But that isn’t possible, of course. Culture is part of us. As a city, Bruges provides a strong cultural programme in which there is continued investment. Brugge Plus wants to help ensure that both policymakers and the public continue to see the relevance and value of culture.” — Bram Gilté, Brugge Plus

In order to get the candidacy for 2030 off the ground during the pre-selection phase, Brugge Plus recruited three temporary staff members: project coordinator Dalilla Hermans, project officer Marthe Soete and communications officer Silke Bomberna. They took up residence at the Cultural Policy Unit, where they formed the Bruges 2030 team, together with the cultural policy coordinator Steven Slos, policy adviser Lothar Casteleyn and culture coach Bart Vanduyver. The mission of the project coordinator and the support team was to develop the central concept and explore its content by means of pilot projects (see Part 5).

Selection phase

During the selection phase from November 2024 to December 2025, we will continue rolling out 'the art of Conversation' on a large scale. When doing so, we will rely on the lessons learned from the pilot projects. In this phase, we will also develop a dedicated organisational structure of our own. The Cultural Policy Unit will remain closely involved in the cockpit, but the direction will be determined by Brugge Plus. As an integral part of the basic operation of this municipal non-profit organisation, we will develop an ECOC 2030 subteam, in which we will link the expertise already present within the organisation with the additional, temporary roles.

To arrive at a final bid-book, we will put together a team of three conductors: a business conductor, an artistic conductor and a network conductor, all of whom will be supported by a full-time project assistant. In the back office, we will provide an administrative and logistics assistant. The communications officer will be retained. Lastly, we will invest in a relationship manager who will build on our partnerships – political, economic and media-related. That way, we will arrive at a solid core of ten people, who, based on the central concept of 'the art of Conversation' and in close consultation with the cultural ecosystem of Bruges, will draw up the bid-book for the selection phase. Alignment with local cultural players and the further development of regional cultural cooperation will continue to be important pre-requisites in this regard. The Cultural Policy Unit will also play a part in following through on this initiative.

In early 2025, a new city council for the period 2025 to 2030 will take office. During the selection phase, the Mayor will continue to chair the steering committee, surrounded by aldermen and official experts. The three conductors will put together an operation consisting of four steering committees: an artistic steering committee for the arts, an artistic steering committee for heritage, a business steering committee and a network steering committee. In addition, we will work with a supervisory board, as a layered participatory body with strong representation from different areas (cultural, social, economic and political) and levels (local, supralocal, provincial, Flemish and federal). The name 'Bruges 2030 Conversation Council' matches perfectly with 'the art of Conversation'.

Successful candidate city for the ECOC 2030

If Bruges actually becomes the successful candidate for ECOC 2030 (the decision for which will be announced in autumn 2025), there will still be an opportunity to establish a separate non-profit organisation for Bruges 2030. But first of all, we want to thoroughly investigate whether this mission can be continued from within Brugge Plus. If so, this will allow us to make maximum use of the expertise that exists within that organisation during the ECOC year.

A shared approach from within the cultural ecosystem of Bruges will be paramount, we will seek to adopt an agile and innovative structure. In the 2026-2030 phase, the purpose of the non-profit steering organisation will be

the central coordination and realisation of overarching programming and large-scale events. When putting together the final programme for our ECOC year, we involve all professional cultural organisations based on their individual areas of expertise. Co-ownership will be the key word. Along with the power to manage a suitable budget.

B. From cultural governance and good governance to new governance

“Art is so interesting because it is a reflection of society. And it is precisely that reflection that we must not let go of. In that regard, we won’t simply be focusing on high art forms or on well-known artists only. Our work will also be anchored in Bruges itself, where the achievements of the city’s socio-artistic organisations must be included to a much greater extent. Based upon actual participation. Not on the fringes of the cultural programme, but as a full component of it.”

— Anne De Loof, De Batterie

As we continue to expand our organisational structure, we want to link cultural governance with new governance. Taking ‘the art of Conversation’ as a starting point, we will place participation and dialogue at the heart of the formal structures and consultation models that we develop. Consultation not only between the city council and the houses of culture, but also between the cultural sector and related sectors, such as education, the social sector and the economic sector. We want to invest in completely new consultation models in which opportunities for dialogue are utilised to the best possible advantage. We will link this with a new form of leadership by prioritising the role of conductor, as opposed to implementing an operation with managers or directors. In short, it will be an organisational structure that rests on many shoulders. Shoulders that will work together to make a difference for our ECOC year. Completely in the spirit of ‘the art of Conversation’.

And what is the basic requirement for this form of new governance? Good management. We will be applying the ‘Culture Governance Code’, as established by the Fund for Cultural Management. This will be our guiding framework as we continue to expand our organisational structure in the selection phase and if Bruges is selected as a successful candidate. Taking this code as our starting point, we will set out a new governance-model, the ground rules of which we intend to retain in the form of consultation models and structures in the period beyond our ECOC year. We will carry out a review in 2031, after which we will also share our insights with other cities on a European scale.

C. Gradually moving forward: analysing our strengths and our weaknesses

We took a critical look at the strengths and weaknesses of our project and thought about how to remedy the weaknesses identified. (Q21)

If we look back at the pre-selection phase, the first strength we can point to is the trajectory we have adopted. We chose to establish a central concept – ‘the art of

Conversation’ – relatively quickly and we then explored it as a methodology by carrying out pilot projects. We then turned findings obtained from that approach into the broad outlines of our bid-book for the pre-selection phase. A bid-book which, as already mentioned, also seeks to be an inspiration for other cities that want to use art and culture to make the challenges faced by society a topic of discussion.

As a second strength, we are able to highlight Bruges’ rich cultural sector and the unanimous support that exists for our candidacy. Right from day one, cultural organisations, socio-cultural associations, artists and collectives adopted an open mind and shared their thoughts with us. In doing so, they each therefore made their own investment in the success of this candidacy, as they were partners in the pilot projects and contributed to the content of this bid-book.

A third strength is the Bruges city council, which has a notable heart for culture. The cultural sector appreciates the financial efforts the council makes and the artistic autonomy it gives. What is more, it is a huge plus that the city council remains ambitious.

As a fourth strength, we can point to the interest and enthusiasm that exists in the nine surrounding municipalities. In the coming years, each of them wants to invest in more fundamental cultural cooperation. In that regard, our ECOC year will act as a milestone that we will work towards together.

A fifth and final strength we would like to mention is the rock-solid international appeal that Bruges already has. As in the period leading up to and during Bruges 2002, we see the our ECOC year as a distinct opportunity to further strengthen our international cultural image. And simultaneously redefine that image based on the new paths we are taking and the distinctive choices we are making.

The weaknesses of the project we have pursued so far lie in the organisational and business areas. In the pre-selection phase, we made content exploration a priority, so there was less focus on laying out the operating outlines of our business structure. At the start of the selection phase, this will be paramount. Brugge Plus will embed our candidacy within a solid organisation. As an agile centre of expertise for large-scale events, they are the perfect organisation for that purpose.

A second weakness is the fundraising strategy. In the pre-selection phase, we have not yet taken sufficient steps in that regard. In the selection phase, we plan to recruit a relationship manager. That person will be able to draw upon strong political and economic relationships in order to develop a viable fundraising plan as an integral part of our final bid-book for the selection phase.

We regard the lack of an overarching supervisory board as a third weakness. Due to the specific political context – with local elections taking place one month after the submission of this bid-book – we decided not to fully deploy our strategic alliances with economic, political and social partners on a local, supralocal, Flemish, Belgian and international scale until the selection phase has begun. As explained earlier, we will do that by instituting a Bruges 2030 Conversation Council.





Part 5 | 30 for 30, Our Pilot Projects

A. Own projects

Conversation Starters

What? On 18 August 2023, the people of Bruges woke up to a city full of inviting questions on flags, posters, banners and street tags. These conversation starters in Dutch, Bruges dialect and English launched our candidacy for our ECOC year. The goal? To initiate conversations between people. As many as 500 Bruges residents agreed to hang up flags and banners overnight and write tags in chalk paint on the streets, from the city centre to the sub-municipalities.

‘Wat heeft jou vandaag geraakt?’

‘Wo zieje gie preus ip?’

‘What do you believe in?’

Why? To help kick-start conversations between people. And to create connection, overcome distance and break through lonely silences, in an era that's making it increasingly easy for us not to talk and thereby alienate ourselves from each other. This pilot project therefore perfectly embodies what 'the art of Conversation' is seeking to achieve. Because the questions revolve around social issues that often find answers at the interface with art and culture, such as wonder, emotion and recognition.

The result?

- a strong feeling of cohesion as a group during the night of 17 to 18 August as a result of working towards a common goal
- lots of engaging conversations between strangers thanks to the questions that appeared overnight
- what we learned: intervention in the public sphere can be enormously effective and you can sometimes achieve large-scale results by using a simple idea
- we also learned how important media coverage can be as a means of increasing the visibility and impact of our initiatives and the candidacy itself

In 2030? We will roll out the same initiative in 2030 using physical media that can last an entire year and ensure that this action is also carried through into the digital domain. We will offer people the chance to formulate answers to questions – online and offline – and turn this into a large art project that extends throughout the region. We will consult with local and European artists to see if they would like to provide designs for conversation starters and art installations that will invite conversation.



**Video
Conversation Starters**

Kunst & Kader (Art & Frame)

What? On 11 November 2023, Armistice Day, we invited young people to the studios of youth hub and radio station Villa Bota to create art together and learn about the situation in Israel and Palestine. While the young people painted, drew or wrote using the materials we provided, they received information from experts about the history of the area and the role of the media in forming opinions. Afterwards, there was a panel discussion involving people with Israeli and Palestinian roots. The young people then had an opportunity to chat over a meal.

Why? Because we sense that in turbulent times, it is more important than ever to put 'the art of Conversation' into practice. In doing so, art lowers the threshold and brings concerns to the surface in a natural way. What is more, the combination of talking and creating also helps lower the threshold to creation itself.

The result?

- an opportunity for about forty young people, including from the Komerbi organisation that supports and assists socially vulnerable young people, to ask their questions and express their doubts
- what we learned: the combination of creating art and having conversations creates an atmosphere of openness and makes conversing with others easier

In 2030? We will make Kunst & Kader a regular part of our cultural programme. Any organisation or cultural establishment that has a social issue to 'contextualise' can use the methodology as a means of enabling art and conversation to interact.

Open Book

What? An afternoon of literature, music and spoken word for 5th and 6th year secondary school students from Bruges, involving 500 students in total. We discussed the essay *De theorie van de 1 of 2* (The Theory of 1 or 2) by Ish Ait Hamou. The author himself came along to talk about his book. Some well-known people from Flanders shared their experiences reading the essay. The Bruges-based spoken word artist Nina Everaert performed new work inspired by the essay, and the music was provided by Twolfnol, a local school band. We resided in *The Joyful Apocalypse*, a work by the Traumnovelle collective as part of the Bruges Triennial.

Why? Because reading and literature are increasingly under pressure among young people and we wanted to find a way to encourage young people to read and to talk about what they have read.

The result?

- every spot was full, as demand proved greater than the very ample supply we had provided
- the added value of a unique setting that contributed to the magic of this afternoon
- the lesson folder we put together about the book, was well-liked by the teachers
- a very pleasant experience for the writer
- a methodology we could provide to schools as a means of getting young people talking about books

In 2030? We will make Open Book an annual celebration of literature that is specifically intended for school students. By getting additional partners, such as libraries, cultural centres and bookshops on board, we can open up the initiative to the region and the broader educational network. In 2030, we want to organise an XXL version of Open Book, by selecting a book that is relevant in a European context. We will then invite the author along with a European panel to interact with the young audience.

Mirage: It's Bigger Than Hip Hop

What? We took over one festival day during Mirage, an event organised by Cultuurcentrum Brugge (Cultural Centre). Mirage is an adventurous festival that highlights the abundance of artistic talent in Bruges which is mirrored against talent from the rest of the world. Bruges 2030 has chosen to organise a festival day and night dedicated to hip hop. Hip hop has been alive and well in Bruges for decades. Hip hop culture has spawned a huge number of collectives in Bruges, which provide epic party concepts and legendary cyphers. Many key figures in the hip hop scene of the Low Countries have their origins in Bruges. Conversation and interacting play a key role in this art form. At 'It's Bigger Than Hip Hop', we paid tribute to the four elements that characterise hip hop as a culture: MC'ing, DJ'ing, breakdance and graffiti. From a graffiti station and break-dancing battle to a DJ workshop and lots of performances, both loyal hip hop fans and people for whom the whole culture was new were able to experience the love of hip hop.

Why? Because with 'the art of Conversation', we want to give attention to the diversity of cultures. And because hip hop is the music style par excellence that elevates conversation to an art.

The result?

- a successful event that enabled us to reach families with young children as well as younger and slightly older nostalgic hip hop enthusiasts
- workshops that introduced children to new disciplines, such as graffiti and DJ'ing

- a tribute to a culture and genre of music that has a rich history in Bruges
- what we learned: the concept of 'community' is not only linked to a person's cultural background, age or geography, but also to certain art forms

In 2030? During our ECOC year, we will extend events of this type to other cultures, genres and sub-genres that have a presence in our city and will be keen to include artists from all over Europe and beyond in our programmes.

Let's Talk 2030

What? We concluded our events with a big free public festival in the Magdalenazaal (Magdalena Concert Hall). Everyone was welcome to come along and relive what we had accomplished during the past year under the banner of Bruges 2030 and to dream together about the future. We organised workshops, provided artful interventions, a panel discussion and installations to encourage conversations, and gave people the chance to enjoy music and spoken word during WeerWoord XL. The initiative as a whole was then brought to a close with a celebratory party.

Why? With this event, we wanted not only to look back on our achievements, but also to increase community involvement and gather inspiration for future plans for Bruges 2030.

The result? Let's Talk 2030 created a lively interaction between the community and the Bruges 2030 initiative and provided an opportunity to exchange ideas and make new connections. It also strengthened the support for our cultural and creative initiatives in the city.

In 2030? By 2030, we aim to have built a thriving cultural and creative community that is centred around collaboration and participation. Our events will continue to serve as platforms for dialogue, creativity and innovation. We want to make a lasting impact by embedding our activities in the community and in the city of Bruges itself.

Bruges 2030 Card Game Launch at Signaal

What? For one day, the Bruges 2030 team took over Signaal, the radio festival for young people. We laid on all kinds of initiatives around the subject of 'the art of Conversation'. For example, we invited the artists Brihang and Wannes Cappelle for a conversation about art and their lives. It was at Signaal that we used the 'Bruges 2030 Conversation starters' card game for the first time. When creating the game, we put together thirty questions that are designed to lead to a good conversation.

We also spoke on air with teachers who were attending a workshop on happiness in the workplace and with local DJs and organisers about nightlife. Fascinating, expanding and engaging! In addition, we funded free meals throughout the full duration of Signaal, which lasted ten days. Each night, a different Bruges-based association took control of the kitchen. At each meal, we put some card games on the table in order to initiate surprising conversations.

Why? Because Signaal is all about connecting and conversations play a major part in that. By means of these initiatives, we successfully created connections with different cultures (and sub-cultures), young voices and the education sector.

The result?

- a card game that sparked a lot of conversations in an approachable way and has since found its way to numerous associations, organisations and individual residents
- some big names in pop culture who attracted additional publicity for our project
- fruitful new insights, thanks to the platform we gave to educational initiatives
- an alliance with the educational system in the Bruges region

In 2030? We certainly intend to strengthen our collaborations with the wider educational sector and with artists from popular culture even further during the run-up to 2030. By sharing the microphone or even just by passing it around we will significantly extend the reach of 'the art of Conversation'. By using this card game, we also create gateways to other cultural initiatives that may have a slightly higher threshold.

Answer to the question 'What law would you introduce if you could?' from the card game *"My proposed new law would be called 'the Cappelle Act'. Everyone would be given a piece of lawn and would only be allowed to mow it by hand. Anything that is normally mowed with a noisy lawnmower or tractor would therefore get a chance to run wild".*
— Wannes Cappelle

The 30 in 30 podcast

What? Together with Club Magie, we created the podcast '30 in 30', in which project coordinator Dalilla Hermans gave five young creative Bruges residents the opportunity to talk. What is it that connects them? They will all turn 30 in the year 2030. Geertje, Océane, Brecht, Victor and Zita gave listeners an insight into their dreams, their work and their life in our city. They also looked ahead to the city of Bruges in 2030.

Why? Because the young adults of today will help define Bruges' cultural and sociocultural programme in 2030, and so we want to include their vision in our story now.

The result?

- a well-listened-to podcast about which we received positive feedback
- five young adults who are reminded that their opinions matter
- five stories that can inspire young people to create and express themselves through art and culture

In 2030? By creating podcasts in which we give each generation a voice, we will create a durable document that will reflect and encapsulate the year 2030. We can do this from any European country. Ultimately, this will result in a unique set of European voices of all ages. By recording the podcast live in a symbolic location, we will be able to create even more interaction.

From the conversation between Dalilla and the young dancer Zita

"Having a great conversation can be a form of art. To have a conversation, you need a language. Can dance be a language?" (Dalilla)

"Absolutely. In fact, I think many people use dance as a way of telling a story. Not always for other people, but to hold a conversation with themselves. We work a lot with duets and group pieces that tell stories. And even an improvisational piece between two dancers means that you're having a conversation with each other." (Zita)



Podcasts 30 in 30

Exhibition of the visual identity designed by Victor Verhelst

What? Artist Victor Verhelst designed the logo and visual identity for Bruges 2030. He responded to an open call in the summer of 2023. In his designs, Victor drew on the distinctive architecture of Bruges and succeeded in capturing our innovative individuality. Based on the visual identity, Victor created eight works that we exhibited at Grand Café De Republiek.

Why? Because we were very consciously looking for a designer who could capture the authenticity and the innovative nature of our city at the same time and thus convey the spirit of our candidacy for Bruges 2030. We also felt it was important for him, as a talented young person, to have the opportunity to share his vision.

The result?

- a house style that is Bruges through and through
- a distinctive style that we have actively used for an entire year, both online and in print (as in this bid-book)
- what we learned: giving young talented people a chance pays off, enthuses and inspires

In 2030? We will let other designers get to work using Bruges as a source of inspiration and give them the opportunity to unlock the resulting creations in an original way. This will become part of this exhibition, in which we will also show different perspectives and innovative designs.

“I also used the graphic elements from the visual identity to design my own alphabet. That way, anyone can create this type of work on their own PC. I wanted to develop this alphabet because it is a project from Bruges, for Bruges. Just because you hire a graphic designer doesn’t mean that his work is only for the in-crowd. I want everyone to be able to use this for themselves.” — Victor Verhelst

Babbelbrunches (Chatty Brunches)

What? An inspiring place. Something tasty. Engaging tablemates. The three ingredients of a good conversation! In autumn 2023, we organised ten Babbelbrunches, each of which was centred around a specific cultural discipline. From dance, theatre and literature to comedy, circus and cultural education. And who exactly was sitting around the table? The obvious and familiar names from houses of culture, as well as young enthusiasts, less-heard voices, and collaborators who usually work in the background.

Why? Because cultural and sociocultural players who get to know each other better and exchange ideas give rise to innovative, multi-disciplinary collaborations on a variety of levels, whether collaborations take place between the city, the surrounding towns and municipalities, associations and sociocultural organisations or between small and major players.

The result?

- engaging conversations between 120 passionate people
- numerous tantalising plans and even new collaborations
- our embryonic idea around ‘the art of Conversation’ took more concrete form
- what we learned: food creates connection and the cultural network becomes stronger as a result of initiatives like this

In 2030? A project much larger in scope that includes theme-based brunches, in which the hospitality industry and cultural and sociocultural players join forces. By means of organised opportunities for informal contact between established actors in the cultural sector and new, still unknown players, we are investing in the development of a close-knit network. The impact of this will continue long after 2030.

“In Bruges, a lot of great projects are launched, but they don’t always reach their intended target group. ‘The art of Conversation’ is therefore providing a common thread that is intended to strengthen this social fabric. Not with the intention of elevating the act of getting to know someone to an art, but rather of breaking open bubbles and removing barriers. So it’s actually about the heart of conversation as well as the art of conversation.” — Lien De Trogh

Open Discussion

What? In early September 2023, a few weeks after our launch event, everyone was welcome to share thoughts, doubts and dreams for our ECOC year during an open discussion evening. What ideas for Bruges are being discussed in the city? What questions do you have about the candidacy, our project and the future? What can we do in order to initiate conversations more effectively? And what conversations do we definitely need to have in the near future?

Why? Because ‘the art of Conversation’ is an ideal topic that offers something for everyone. Every Bruges resident can contribute to it. Meeting up regularly, talking and deliberating should therefore be a matter of course.

The result?

- an opportunity to give and receive a whole host of information about ‘the art of Conversation’
- an evening with many familiar but also new faces
- increased support

In 2030? In the run-up to our ECOC year and during the ECOC year, we intend to continue arranging these types of evenings often. That way, we can continue to invite the residents of Bruges and of the region to take part. The year 2030 will be their year, not just a year in which extra visitors come to the city.

Heritage Day: Room for Living & Anybody Home?

In the context of Heritage Day – the day on which cultural heritage is celebrated in Brussels and in all parts of Flanders, which on 21 April 2024 was dedicated to

the theme of ‘Home’ – we organised two pilot projects: ‘Room for Living’ and ‘Anybody Home?’

Why? Because a theme like ‘Home’ is all about making connections and we were able to link ‘the art of Conversation’ perfectly to it by means of two innovative projects in collaboration with enthusiastic creators and cultural and sociocultural partners.

Room for Living

What? FMDO (Federation for Global and Democratic Organizations) asked a lot of Bruges residents to pick an object that reminded them of ‘home’. The photographer Dora Ceobotaru captured this. The exhibition was on display in Burg 4. We invited three FMDO volunteers to take part in a panel discussion about feeling at home in a (new) city and the role that culture can play in this.

The result? A well-attended initiative that demonstrated that low-threshold conversations about, by and with newcomers and immigrants are much needed in a city undergoing rapid demographic changes.

In 2030? In particular, this event was mainly the reason that led to our intention to facilitate conversations about migration, diversity, discrimination and racism during the period leading up to and during 2030. So as we did in this project, we will go in search of methods to create a safe (or safer) space. And this, of course, in cooperation with the organisations that are already active in the field and have built up experience.

Anybody Home?

What? The Bruges theatre technician Koen Goossens constructed our own Bruges 2030 telephone box, in which people could take a seat and make a call to a stranger. The phone booth was connected to three mobile phones, which we had previously given to fluent chatterboxes. For the younger generation of callers, it was often the first time they had ever seen a ‘landline’ phone. The conversations were recorded.

The result? A small-scale art installation that created a lot of conversations and connections in a short period of time, as well as an original way of giving movable heritage a new lease of life, allowing the bygone magic to briefly spill over to a young audience.

In 2030? We can perfectly scale up this type of project in 2030, by asking artists, technicians and hobbyists to breathe new life into forgotten or obsolete communication technology and to distribute that technology throughout the Bruges region

B. Collaborations

Frontexpo

What? An artistic journey that culminated in an exhibition of the works of fifteen artists who are or were doing voluntary work via the organisation Refu Interim. During this exhibition in the Stadshallen, newcomers – from countries such as Syria, Palestine and China – brought their creative talent ‘to the forefront’. In keeping with ‘the art of Conversation’, we entered into a conversation with a number of artists. About their commitment, their art and their life stories. Together with the young videography collective Studio Woester, we made a short documentary about it.

Why? Because these newcomers have so many stories to tell and express their thoughts, feelings and ideas through a variety of art forms. From music and literature to the visual arts. Due to the way in which they came into being, their works also prompt reflection on social issues, so they deserve a platform.

The result?

- a very enjoyable collaboration with Refu Interim that set ideas in motion for subsequent projects
- the opportunity for newcomers to share their stories and introduce people to their artistic vision

In 2030? The artistic work of newcomers will play an important role in the programme for the our ECOC year. We will encourage the major cultural organisations (Museum Brugge, Concertgebouw Brugge (Concert Hall), KAAP, Cultuurcentrum Brugge (Cultural Centre), etc.) to hand over the keys of their premises to these artists, thereby giving them an opportunity to fill part of the programme. Our ambition? Not to roll out a diversity programme to run alongside our ECOC year, but to include the diversity of cultures within the very core of the programme and the organisation.



Video Frontexpo

Three talks at Docfest

What? Docfest showcased ten high-profile documentaries at Cinema Lumière and at unique locations around the city. The theme of the 2023 edition of this event was powerful role models and their resistance. As a partner of this edition, Bruges 2030 provided contextualisation for two documentaries and organised an exhibition and a panel discussion in connection with a third. This means that we were able to utilise a



total of three projects as a means of linking 'the art of Conversation' to this event.

- After **'Rebels'**, a documentary in which the over-75s speak out, Jong Volk organised a speed dating event between young and older people using the Bruges 2030 card game as a starting point.

At the screening of **'Mijn beessie en ik'**, a tragicomic documentary about the bond between pets and their owners, we invited Gideon Hakker as our guest. A playwright and philosophical discussion leader, he and the young viewers playfully addressed the topics that arose from the documentary.

- Linked to the trilogy **'Nobu, Baba & Henk'**, we presented a multimedia installation in which people were able to watch the short films on a TV screen while surrounded by the fashion outfits from the documentaries. Each documentary portrays a father from a migrant background who once came to the Netherlands with a rucksack full of dreams. Clad in custom-made designer outfits against a stylised backdrop, the fathers take you on a journey through their eventful lives. During the opening night, Tatzari Pablo Reyes, Beki Khani and Tahmina Ziai, three Bruges women of foreign origin, came to share their stories, dreams and ambitions in a panel discussion with the project coordinator Dalilla Hermans. For this project, we partnered with Refu Interim, FMDO and Cultuurcentrum Brugge.

Why? Because the theme of this Docfest offered the potential to bring out the activist in people, or at least to prompt them to reflect. In times of considerable societal challenges, documentaries are useful starting points to initiate the conversations we really need to have.

The result? The collaboration with Docfest showed us that documentaries are powerful tools with which to promote social dialogue. Involving a diversity of perspectives and stories stimulated reflection and activism among the participants. This success confirmed that such dialogues are essential for cultural events that seek to address social issues

In 2030? We aim to work with event organisers to make sure that 'the art of Conversation' forms an integral part in events. In 2030, we want to create a platform that focuses on in-depth conversations about social issues and devotes even greater space and attention to documentaries.

Day of Happiness

What? On the International Day of Happiness (20 March), together with the organisation Kapitein Werkgeluk (Captain Work Happiness) – which focuses on well-being and happiness at work amongst newly appointed and established secondary school teachers – we gave the large tarpaulin from our launch campaign a new goal: to collect as many happinesses as possible. We invited students, teachers, principals and passers-by

to Stationsplein (Station Square) in Bruges to write down their idea of happiness in colour. This action attracted a lot of interest and brought schools, classes and Bruges residents together.

Why? Because education is an important stakeholder within 'the art of Conversation'. Because we wanted to provide a powerful symbol – happiness at work deserves more attention in this sector. And because by doing so, we can draw attention to the shortage of teachers and to the problem that too many young teachers are leaving the profession.

The result?

- a participatory artwork about happiness that has since been deployed in the education sector in Bruges, including at job fairs
- a symbolic action that attracted a great deal of media attention
- what we learned: temporary artistic interventions in a public space can create a wonderful domino effect

In 2030? We want to keep repeating these kinds of initiatives in the period, leading up to and during ECOC year and ensure that they are distributed throughout Bruges and the surrounding municipalities. With different questions, other media and other audiences.



Video Day Of Happiness

Warme Wensen (Warm Wishes)

What? In early November 2023, we were already looking ahead to the holidays. Bruges was the host city for the 'De warmste week' (The Warmest Week) initiative, an annual campaign by Belgian radio stations that raises money around a specific theme. In 2023, the theme was 'Growing up without worries'. To be able to send as much warmth to as many people as possible, we asked people to leave warm wishes for unknown fellow human beings via our website. We worked with the organisation 'Vierkant Tegen Eenzaamheid' (Squarely Against Loneliness) for this project. From hundreds of submissions from Bruges residents, we chose the 30 most beautiful wishes. We printed these on posters and distributed them throughout the city centre and the sub-municipalities. People could pick up the posters for free at various locations and hang them on their windows.

Why? Because the holidays are not festive for everyone and loneliness is a theme arising under 'the art of Conversation' that we are very much taking to heart. In this way, we were able to encourage people to engage with the topic. They had ownership of this project themselves.

The result?

- many warm wishes for people walking through the streets of Bruges (and are still on display in many classrooms and offices today)
- many submissions and a very large number of posters collected: a successful and heartwarming campaign!

In 2030? We want to put the pen in the hands of Bruges residents so they can help shape our campaigns. During our ECOC year, their authentic words and texts can form part of a variety of artistic projects.

Tussen pot, pint en pastorie (Between Pot, Pint & Presbytery)

What? We transformed the garden of the Presbytery in the sub-municipality of Sint-Pieters into a fabulous meeting place. Thirty people from diverse backgrounds along with volunteers from the De Dijk community centre came along to cook together using surplus food. The spontaneous conversations that ensued were interrupted only in order to listen to music by the Bruges chansonnier Peter De Blicke. We also explained what 'the art of Conversation' could actually mean in Sint-Pieters. The photo exhibition 'Phantasos, dromen van een dorp' (Phantasos, dreams of a village) by the photographer Sammy Roelant set this pilot project in motion. We organised the evening in collaboration with a community worker and his network of socially disadvantaged people. And, as the Flemish idiom 'tussen pot en pint' means 'informally', we made sure that everyone felt welcome.

Why? Because we want to explore the needs of the districts and sub-municipalities by connecting them with art and culture. And because we want to engage people in socially disadvantaged situations in conversations, so that they have an opportunity to meet new people and make connections.

The result?

- extraordinary encounters with extraordinary people who often go unheard
- what we learned: 'the art of Conversation' is a concept that works and generates enthusiasm everywhere, even outside the city centre
- we also learned: strengthening ties with community workers means you can strengthen ties with local residents

In 2030? We will seek to create a robust network of community workers and associations combating poverty. They will have a say our ECOC year and in the way it is implemented in their neighbourhood. 'Between Pot, Pint & ...' is a formula that we can roll out across several neighbourhoods, but always in collaboration with the community workers.

The Big Talk

What? Under the motto 'Climate activism: from controversy to dialogue', we got together with Musea Brugge, De Republiek, Concertgebouw Brugge (Concert Hall), BruggeNaarMorgen and Climate Conscious to organise The Big Talk. An inspiring evening full of captivating voices on the role of climate activism. We added the 'art' to this 'conversation' by inviting Belgian singer Meskerem Mees and British author Mikaela Loach.

Why? Because the climate and climate activism are important social issues that stir up emotions. An open and respectful conversation demonstrates that 'the art of Conversation' adds value to just about any topic. Moreover, we never want to let go of the element of art in our concept.

The result?

- a successful, well-attended event around a highly relevant theme
- a fine collaboration with the major cultural players that clearly demonstrated the trust that exists between them

In 2030? Thanks to this collaboration, we know that major cultural players also want to apply 'the art of Conversation' in their programming and use it as a guide.

Participatory debate on AI

What? A participatory debate on artificial intelligence with experts in the field. Will AI become smarter than humans? Can AI be developed in an ethical way? What benefits may AI provide in the classroom? And... how is Europe dealing with AI? This debate was organised by Europa Direct West Flanders in cooperation with Bruges 2030 and the Europahuis Ryckvelde.

Why? Because this subject is incredibly topical and brings up a lot of questions. Many technological revolutions are increasingly pushing us in an online direction and are making our society even more complex. An open, clarifying conversation about this is very important.

The result?

- we reached a group of interested participants, mostly older people, who do not always find their way to art and culture, but are certainly along for the ride in 'the art of Conversation'
- what we learned: emphasising European values and fostering a European identity doesn't have to conflict with a local and accessible narrative.

In 2030? Artificial intelligence will only grow in importance in the coming years. So we need to keep holding conversations about it, especially with people who are further removed from it and for whom the digital divide is getting bigger. Between now and our ECOC year, we are planning to hold several debates on this theme, during which we will also be able to showcase the creative possibilities of AI and let people experiment under guidance.

Doctalks: White Balls on Walls

What: A screening of Sarah Vos' documentary 'White Balls on Walls' about the under-representation of women and people of colour in art museums. This was followed by a panel debate, in which the journalist Dominique Nzeyimana spoke with Dalilla Hermans, Nadia Nsai, Magali Elali and Ciska Debacker about diversity in museums and the cultural sector. This project was carried out in collaboration with De Republiek, Musea Brugge and Cinema Lumière. We recorded the panel discussion and made the video accessible on our website.

Why? Because as a city with a cultural sector that is still very homogeneous, we need to discuss the challenges around ethno-cultural diversity. Only that way can we set a process of change in motion.

The result?

- an enriching experience in two directions: both for the expert panel with professionals from outside Bruges and for the cultural players from Bruges, because we got to know each other and were stimulated by the good practices, and failed practices, that emerged during the discussion
- what we learned: Bruges is ready to take part in debates around these types of challenges and needs them, because there is still a lot of room for more diversity here too

In 2030? Bringing in expertise from outside the city to nurture and enliven our cultural sector can be an ongoing activity. What is more, we will undertake to ensure that in our ECOC year, all of the panels that are selected are 'not all male' and 'not all white'. During the run-up to 2030, we will take further steps via a cultural diversity learning network to systematically strengthen this inclusive approach.



Video Paneltalk

Under the Carpet: Documentary and Residents' Evening

What? For the Bruges Triennial, artist Adrien Tirtiaux brought the old and forgotten connecting road – which nowadays no longer exists in its entirety – between St John's Hospital and the Minnewater Hospital back to life with an extraordinary installation. To revive stories about the neighbourhood, we invited many (former) local residents and (former) employees of both hospitals to reminisce together. Of the entire process – from the creation of the artwork to the conversations and its impact – we made a documentary (the final result won't be available for viewing until in September 2024).

Why? Because art can connect people even more strongly when it is spoken about completely out in the open.

The result?

- a fun evening with many impressive anecdotes shared among old and new friends
- a wonderful pairing of culture and conversation that created support for art in public spaces
- an additional layer of meaning for the artwork, thanks to the many stories that came to light
- what we learned: working with the Triennial organisation and an individual artist provided us with valuable insights into how to keep relationships clear in a participatory process

In 2030? When carrying out creative interventions in public spaces as part of our ECOC year, we will put in place a participatory process involving local residents. This process will be carefully documented so that the insights are preserved. The most important thing, however, is that we will systematically take the time for this type of project and will use a variety of methods to secure the knowledge and experience gained.

Uitwijken, on the subject of 'loneliness'

What? The Uitwijken (Suburbs) initiative – which has been organised for years by the cultural neighbourhood work carried out by Brugge Plus – consists of a travelling caravan that gives the residents of Bruges' neighbourhoods a taste of art and culture in an accessible way. One drawback that residents themselves mentioned is the fact that the initiative is temporary. So we looked for ways to offer the neighbourhoods something lasting after spending a few great weeks there. From Bruges 2030, we sent an illustrator and a photographer out into the Male neighbourhood of Bruges to gather stories about loneliness in the district. They created tangible works of art that will have a permanent place in the neighbourhood.

Why? Because Uitwijkken has already amply proven its value, but does not have the resources to provide aftercare in neighbourhoods. This was something that Bruges 2030 could help with.

The result?

- a warm response from local residents, demonstrating that 'the art of Conversation' can also achieve a great deal at neighbourhood level
- a lot of enthusiasm among the Uitwijkken team and the artists to continue doing this

In 2030? We want to make this type of follow-on projects carried out by Uitwijkken a regular part of the city's neighbourhood operations. During the run-up to our ECOC year, we will be able to roll this out throughout the region.

Letters to the City

What? A special edition of Letters to the City, an event by De Republiek and architecture studio Dertien12 as part of the Bruges Triennial. The theme? Cultural tourism in our city. Four letter writers explored the power of cultural tourism as a positive lever to expand our view of our own city. Project coordinator Dalilla Hermans was one of the letter writers. In her letter, she explained the vision with regard to cultural tourism in 2030.

Why? Because we don't want to stick our heads in the sand when faced with critical voices around our candidacy. We want to adopt a solution-oriented approach and take a positive look at the opportunities for cultural tourism and at the alternatives available to us.

The result?

- four directions of approach in which to look at tourism that are very relevant within our candidacy
- an opportunity to explain 'the art of Conversation' and our focus on sustainable tourism spread across the region, while receiving insights from the other letter writers and from the public
- a packed hall, which immediately showed that the people of Bruges consider this topic important and are open to discussing it

In 2030? Whatever else happens, this type of discussion evening on cultural tourism and the impact of our ECOC year on the city, the region and on their residents will become a regular part of our programming.

C. Projects supported

Open call

What? We launched an open call for people and organisations who wanted to do something in connection with 'the art of Conversation' and were looking for funding to do so. We received as many as 63 proposals. This immediately confirmed the diverse cultural potential that exists in and around Bruges. An independent jury selected seven projects to be implemented in 2024 and each of them received part of the total budget of 30,000 euros.

- **Bert Larnout** | an enormous tin can telephone in the public space that allows strangers to communicate with each other through a visible cable

- **FMDO, De Republiek and Story Collective RELAAS** | the organisation of a new storytelling festival in Bruges living rooms, under the title 'Nieuw in Brugge' (New in Bruges), in which special attention is paid to the stories and growth trajectories of the participants

- **Frow Steeman** | an established artist who enters into conversation with vulnerable individuals and works with them to put a line, a word or an image ... on a postcard with a fine black marker, with the result appearing on large flags in the public space

- **Fika Huis** | Three groups, each with an artist, a process facilitator and six people recovering from a serious loss of health, engage creatively in workshops with their personal stories

- **Roots Explosion Soundsystem** | 'The birth of conversation' - a cultural project that aims to transform Bruges into a vibrant centre for reggae and intercultural dialogue and to highlight the city's profile as the home of the largest dub scene in Europe

- **De Tank** | 'Penalty Protest' - a performative soccer match, followed by a film screening and debate, through which the organisation aims to artistically shine the spotlight on the real issue of proper compensation for emerging artists and new talent

- **Rodrigo Fraga** | public billboards in the city centre that show no advertising but are filled with the designs of artists who, in their own idiosyncratic way, want to speak with the city and its residents

Why? Because we want to provide opportunities from within a clear framework for creative projects that do not come from the usual suspects. We deliberately went outside the boundaries of the professional cultural sector in search of ideas.

The result?

- a significantly lowered threshold, which meant that even people less skilled in grant jargon and administrative processes seized their chance to come and pitch their idea
- confirmation that there is a whole lot of creativity and artistic fervour in Bruges
- what we learned: that it will be important to develop a broader set of instruments in the form of impulse grants between now and the ECOC year



In 2030? We intend to get started on several open call projects between now and 2030 or during the ECOC year itself. What is more, we want to make new open calls for 2030 so that people continue to experience at first hand that 'the art of Conversation' is a project for them, by them and is owned by them. Our residents, artists, associations and organisations will be the co-curators of the ECOC year. We can work with alternating independent juries and will be able to provide different opportunities to pitch.

Bankcontact / Bench Invasion

What? A pop-up performance by the Bruges theatre company Compagnie KRAK, in which ten people walk into the city carrying a bench. 'the art of Conversation', we organised four Bench Invasions

- at Adrien Tirtiaux's artwork, in which volunteers from Bruges spoke with passers-by
- at a Bruges residential care centre, where volunteers from Bruges interacted with residents
- in the city centre, where children from an elementary school spoke with people from Bruges
- and in special needs secondary education

Why? Because some projects are already so heavily imbued with 'the art of Conversation' that we, as a city, can only help them gain greater attention and help develop them even more.

The result?

- many wonderful encounters and beautiful final moments
- what we learned: Bruges already has very strong projects in the spirit of 'the art of Conversation', but they lack visibility.

In 2030? Bench Invasion is a project that we definitely want to roll out even more during our ECOC year. But above all, this collaboration has also motivated us to draw



up an inventory of initiatives under the heading of 'the art of Conversation' that are working well. Initiatives which, with the right support and funding, can also be put on the programme in 2030, but on a larger scale. That year, we will not only be celebrating new projects and events, but will also make it a glorious year in which to showcase less visible initiatives that have already proven their worth.

Edubox

What? Legends Tours, a Bruges-based company of storytellers, designed a three-part lesson series that uses Bruges' instructive history as a means of anticipating contemporary issues and social issues that may arise in the future. To this end, they developed the Beyond Bruges Edubox with a clear work bundle, an innovative app and a board game. They merged all of these together to form an educational project. It includes research on story credibility, virtual and real field trips and an engaging workshop in which the knowledge gained is incorporated into research questions that students then submit to artificial intelligence. Bruges 2030 offered financial support, networking and visibility.

Why? Because in this project, we saw many of the focal points of 'the art of Conversation' coming together, not least the linking of heritage, art and culture to social issues and also not forgetting the attention being paid to innovative methods of cultural education. Students learn to recognise the patterns that occur in our history, discover how they are manifesting themselves again today and link those insights to the future.

The result?

- an example of how innovative methodologies can creatively portray a city's heritage
- a project that resonates with both teachers and students
- what we learned: collaborating with commercial partners and entrepreneurs can also provide significant added value when putting our artistic vision into practice

In 2030? During the run-up to 2030, we are building a network of companies and entrepreneurs who are developing products and services that incorporate the theme of 'the art of Conversation' and can help us bridge the gap to education.

Young Curators 2024

What? Young Curators is a project for creative young people between the ages of 16 and 18 who want to engage artistically in their free time and learn something from artists, coaches and each other. It is intended for makers who dare to think and thinkers who dare to make. The project itself consists of artistic boot camps around

various disciplines: music, image, word, dance and media. The young people share the end result of their creative process during a presentation. This is a joint initiative of Concertgebouw Brugge (Concert Hall) and Het Entrepot. In 2024, the project was given 'the art of Conversation' as the theme for all of its workshops.

Why? Because we want to go full steam ahead for young talent and were able to link the concept of 'the art of Conversation' in a very strong way to this existing learning pathway for young people.

The result? A smooth collaboration with various partners, in which we provided inspiration from Bruges 2030, gave a workshop and supported the project financially.

In 2030? We want to inspire initiatives that will give young people learning opportunities between now and 2030 and during our ECOC year itself. Using 'the art of Conversation', we can share knowledge and bridge the gap between education and cultural education.

MA Festival: Sounds for the Soul

What? With the contribution of MA Festival and Bruges 2030, the organisation Sounds for the Soul will be active in Bruges and in the region during the festival (August 2024). Sounds for the Soul is an initiative of DAS HAUS. They bring a live music experience to people's homes. Anyone going through a difficult moment in their life can share their story. Sounds for the Soul then plans a one-on-one meeting with a professional musician who can shed new light on the story.

Why? Because music is a universal language, which can sometimes expose emotions that are difficult to discuss, and the intimacy of such a living room concert for one person can touch deeply.

The result? More than 20 people going through a difficult period were visited by a musician who transformed their story into music.

In 2030? We also want to pay attention during our ECOC year to those who have difficulties, and to those for whom participating in a programme outside of their homes is not obvious. In doing so, we want to continue to pay attention to art as a form of language in our programme.

Burg4: Apero Expo

What? We contributed financially to a pop-up project in Burg4, a building to be renovated, in which art studios and sociocultural organisations found a temporary home. The temporary residents used the funding to develop their own exhibition concept. In

the large exhibition space, they presented their work and organisation each month and opened a temporary bar.

Why? Because we want to provide opportunities for artists and organisations to make their own interpretation of 'the art of Conversation'.

The result?

- engaging exhibits that introduced the public to a variety of artists and organisations
- what we learned: by letting artists and organisations choose for themselves how they wanted to use our funding, they came up with a fruitful idea that they then elaborated themselves



- we also learned: the importance of a well-developed plan and infrastructural framework for our ECOC year, in which monumental sites, renovated infrastructure and temporarily vacant heritage locations are used as places for presentation and creation

In 2030? In the run-up to 2030 and during our ECOC year itself, we will provide financial injections to existing initiatives that are in line with our vision and focal points, and which, with additional resources, will be able to highlight 'the art of Conversation' in an original way.

D. Visit to

Cyprus

What? A meeting of all candidate cities for our ECOC year, initiated by the Larnaca 2030 and MolenbeekforBrussels 2030 teams. With one-on-one interviews between the various teams from Belgium, Cyprus and Montenegro.

Why? This was an excellent opportunity to share experiences and explore cooperation opportunities.

The result?

- inspirational sharing of expertise
- exploratory discussions about possible collaborations
- one collaboration that is already under way:

Our card game with thirty conversation starters, specifically developed by Bruges 2030, has been translated into Greek. The team from Larnaca is going to distribute it and use it in different settings to start conversations. As a launch event, we will organise an occasion in the autumn where Bruges residents will be able to play the card game online with people from Larnaca. We will also work out further development opportunities for the card game in consultation with Larnaca, such as customised games for different audiences, with different types of questions.

In 2030? Moreover, using the visit to Cyprus and the collaboration as a source of inspiration, we will look for activities to facilitate conversations across national borders in order that we can learn from each other.



European Social Work Conference

What? A European conference organised by Sterk Sociaal Werk (Strong Social Work) and the Flemish Government's Department of Care and hosted by our project coordinator Dalilla Hermans. She interviewed guest speakers and provided continuity between the items on the programme. We also gave an interactive presentation, taking social workers from different European countries through 'the art of Conversation' and asking them to share their own good practices.

Why? Because social work forms an important part of 'the art of Conversation', especially in the context of interaction between culture and society, and attention to little-heard voices and different cultures.

The result?

- the discovery that throughout Europe, social and cultural initiatives are moving ever closer together and that 'the art of Conversation' can play a key role in this
- what we learned: supralocal and European players like to come to Bruges and our infrastructure allows for this.

In 2030? We will promote our city as a venue and our ECOC year itself as an impetus with which to bring supralocal and European civil society partners to Bruges for exchanges, conferences and debates.

E: Opening Celebration ECOC year 2030

What follows here are some ideas on how we will festively open Culture Year 2030. They build on the pilot projects and conversations with our many partners and stakeholders about original interpretations of 'the art of Conversation'.

The art of Conversation in motion

With the Procession of the Holy Blood and the Pageant of the Golden Tree, Bruges has two historic parades with international appeal. To kick off our ECOC year, we are adding a new grand parade. In every municipality of Bruges, a group will be formed to prepare a festive parade to the city centre together with an artist. Through dance, music, theatre, circus, literature, etc., these twelve groups will invite all inhabitants to join the parade towards the historic heart of the city. This procession of committed citizens of Bruges will end at 't Zand, where a big festival with artists from all over Europe will take place.

The art of Conversation in public

In the run-up to the parade and launch festival, we want to immerse the streets of Bruges in 'the art of Conversation'. Film organisations are joining forces for a week to show high-profile short films in/on shop windows, followed by post-screening talks in nearby pubs and cafés.

Together with the various Academies of Part-time Art Education, we are designing seating units that residents can install in front of their façades. Each seat has a QR code that leads to a digital version of the 'conversation starters' card game. In this way, we aim to create new spaces in at least 100 places that can facilitate conversations for a year.

The art of Conversation in sight

The launch weekend will also see the opening of the first of four major exhibitions that will take place in exhibition hall BRUSK during our ECOC year. Masterpieces from the Bruges Collection will enter into conversation with international loaned art work, thus connecting art from different times and continents with our contemporary world. Additional lectures, debates and workshops will further fuel this conversation.

The street-art of Conversation

With 'The Bridges' and 'Legendz', Bruges is also the birthplace of several street-art festivals and initiatives. To kick off our ECOC year, we are inviting thirty Belgian street artists to spread questions around the city and region in the form of large murals. We want to provide each of these questions with an artistic answer, and this by local graffiti talent in thirty different European cities. Both artworks will feature a QR code connecting the locations and contexts, creating an interactive network of art and dialogue.

The art of Conversational Theatre

Finally, we are programming our own theatre production 'Tirol Inferno' at the launch festival. The Bruges artist couple NYKLYN (Evelien Declercq and Nyk Dekeyser) was inspired by the graphic novel of the same name by

illustrator Klaas Verplancke and author Annelies Verbeke. The story in rhyme, about 40 characters stuck in a broken ski lift, zooms in on the difficulties of communication and social interaction. NYKLYN wants to use this narrative for a cinematic-theatrical experience in Bruges, together with participatory theatre maker Tom Ternest, the Bruges theatre collective Another Hero and amateur actors from the region.

In the process, the story is translated into the Bruges context of tourists versus locals and historical versus future aspirations. 'Tirol inferno' thus promises to be a unique professional, artistic-participatory performance in Bruges and the region, around 'the art of Conversation' and especially the search for it.



Part 6 | Radical Facilitation

A. Collaboration with the local cultural ecosystem

“Culture is a core component of Bruges, so present we float around in it. As cultural organisations, it is precisely for that reason that we need to be even more involved in society and more closely engaged with the residents of Bruges. Otherwise, we will become a niche product and that cannot be allowed to happen.” —Elviera Velghe, Musea Brugge

Maintaining a dialogue with the cultural and sociocultural organisations in Bruges and with our local artists is an obvious step for us. We are involving them in the design and implementation of the cultural programme. (Q22)

As you have already read, we resolutely sought to achieve a strong interaction with the professional cultural organisations and artists in Bruges right from the start. In the pre-selection phase, Bruges 2030 still relied on just a small team. Our choice of intensive collaborations was related to this. At the same time, we felt that it was very important to identify the needs and expectations of the different players and to discuss with them the possible approaches that would enable them to incorporate ‘the art of Conversation’ into their programmes. Many of the pilot projects formed the first tangible outcome from these conversations.

In order to expand the 2030 programme further, we are systematically increasing the size of the team. Dialogue with all cultural organisations and artists will continue to be fundamental and additional attention will be paid to sociocultural players. We are therefore creating a programme that is supported by everyone and that maximises the use of innovative collaborations. Our goal? Radical facilitation. Both in the coming years and during our ECOC year. That means: no top-down decisions by curators or managers. The Bruges 2030 team turns as many stakeholders as possible into co-curators and co-owners. Our intention is to build from the bottom up.

We want to provide young artists, creative collectives and young cultural organisations with opportunities to grow and develop. A lot of our pilot projects yielded opportunities for talented young people to create and share their vision. We have already identified many opportunities to further highlight young talent, to offer the necessary support and to encourage experimentation.

We are also expanding our cultural boundaries and seizing the opportunity that 2030 represents in order to establish an even larger number of regional cultural and sociocultural collaborations. Several pilot projects demonstrate that our wish is to provide cultural offerings far beyond the city centre itself. We have also already started talking to the cultural coordinators and aldermen of the nine surrounding

municipalities. We brought together all of the opportunities and chances in an ‘Initial memorandum for supralocal cultural operation in the Bruges region’, which met with much enthusiasm. The initial memorandum not only feeds into the programme for our ECOC year, but is also the starting point for a further participatory road map for the future that the city councils plan to roll out starting in 2025.

With ‘the art of Conversation’ as a common thread, one of the things we are thinking about is this long-term cultural, social and economic impact upon Bruges (Q23), in the context of the intentional collaborations we will enter into:

B. Collaboration with the social sector

“We advocate the increasing adoption of working from the bottom up. From the associations and voluntary initiatives in the region, from neighbourhood initiatives and sociocultural organisations. Not a cultural policy that starts out from the major houses of culture only, but one that involves multiple partners of equal status seated around the table and respects the knowledge and opinion of each partner. Only then will we get a cultural policy that includes everyone.” —Karl Duc, Avansa Regio Brugge

In 2020, Bruges was the first city in Belgium to become a Compassionate City. Several partners have joined forces to provide sustainable support for residents of our city who are experiencing grieving and loss. This is just one of the examples that demonstrate that Bruges is a caring city that stands behind its residents. We can rely on a strong local social policy from the Public Centre for Social Welfare (PCSW) and the city council, together with numerous social organisations, associations and councils. During the run-up to our ECOC year, we will intensify our contacts with these crucial partners even further. Not only are the cultural and social policies in Bruges already heavily intertwined, but there is no doubt that we can work together even more and be even more inclusive. In that regard, we’re very ambitious.

Using ‘the art of Conversation’ as our starting point, we constantly encourage people to talk about social challenges. Cooperation with social actors is essential in order to reach the various target groups. One of our focal points? Making less-heard voices, such as those of young immigrants, those in poverty and ageing Bruges residents, heard. For them, we already lowered the threshold in 2023 and 2024 by means of various pilot projects, all of which took place in collaboration with a social or sociocultural partner. Together, we will roll out these kinds of exemplary projects on a larger scale in 2030. That is how we create impact for everyone.

“People will continue to need rituals and art and culture can be very powerful in that regard. In our activities, we are increasingly adopting a socio-artistic approach. We actively seek partners and intermediaries in the sociocultural, care and welfare sectors to create rituals together.” —Evi Huys and Jeroen Vanacker, Concertgebouw Brugge

Our intensive collaboration with social and sociocultural actors – in which radical facilitation is our motto – also implies that we are creating many opportunities for the participation of marginalised and disadvantaged groups, today and with a view to 2030. (Q25) In what follows, we would like to zoom in on the initiatives we have already taken for those groups and will continue taking for them between now and 2030.

People in poverty

Under the slogan ‘Culture for All’, numerous support initiatives are already taking place that are bringing cultural programmes to vulnerable residents. The insights and expertise of the Brugs Netwerk Vrijetijds participatie (Bruges Network for Leisure Participation), which offers people from disadvantaged groups access to culture and art at a greatly reduced rate, plays an important role in this regard. Just about all of the Bruges 2030 pilot projects were free of charge. This was a conscious choice.

“Participating in guided cultural initiatives can create social cohesion between people and can cause further conversations and friendships to develop. Culture and most definitely ‘the art of Conversation’, can play an important role in the lives of vulnerable members of society. That is why we will continue providing affordable yet accessible art and culture.” —Bart Hollevoet, Brugs Netwerk Vrijetijds participatie

We realise that affordability and accessibility are not synonyms. By means of the UiTPAS – an important overarching tool to promote cultural and leisure experiences – we are offering an opportunity rate for people in poverty. At the same time, we will need to make the programme more familiar and accessible to people who have difficulty finding their way to art and culture. In the coming years, the Brugs Netwerk Vrijetijds participatie would like to share the cumulative knowledge it has gained about this target group with large and small houses of culture. The goal is that these houses do not wait for people to partake in culture but start the conversation and bring culture to the people.

Newcomers and immigrants

The cultural diversity in Bruges is increasing all of the time. Our population is growing for the first time in a long time and this is mainly due to the increase in the number of young immigrants. We think it is very important to hold open, positive conversations about this, rather than endlessly regulating or even stigmatising. By involving these young people fully in our cultural story, we avoid becoming an old, rather rigid, settled city. They are the oxygen we need!

Whatever we do, art and culture must always respond to changing demographics by embracing cultural diversity, we can innovate and also remain socially relevant. Art enriches people. People enrich art. And the binding factor in all of this is ‘the art of Conversation’.

“We want to give immigrants a face within the existing cultural landscape in a way that is non-stigmatising. We often receive a question arising from the need for more diversity. Between now and 2030, we also want to turn this around and create initiatives ourselves, in which we will then involve the houses of culture. This means that the wall between the cultural and social sectors can truly be torn down. The pilot projects under the heading of ‘the art of Conversation’ were already a great example of this.” —Tine Dessein, FMDO

The ageing residents of Bruges

Between now and 2030, we are also going to produce a cultural programme tailored to senior citizens. An increasingly ageing society is a reality. Not only in Bruges, but also in the municipalities that surround it. Many older people continue to be interested in culture, but can no longer get to the venues. Despite the fact that culture can be a unifying element and therefore help prevent loneliness.

We are developing ways to bring senior citizens to art and culture, but also to bring art and culture to them. To that end, we collaborate with various welfare actors and existing initiatives such as ‘Vier het leven’ (Celebrate Life), a buddy operation that picks up and accompanies less mobile senior citizens, and the learning network Compassionate Bruges, which we mentioned earlier. Several municipalities already offer cultural programmes in residential care centres. By joining forces, we can grow this area of activity even further. The fact that we held one of our Bench Invasions in a residential care centre is no coincidence, of course.

People with disabilities

“The art world is very adept at talking about inclusion, but as yet, it doesn’t always put it into practice. In the care sector, there is less theoretical knowledge, but inclusion is the norm. We can learn from that in order to climb out of the ivory tower and step out into society. ‘the art of Conversation’ has therefore come at the perfect time.” —Rolf Quaghebeur, KAAP

Bruges can count on a robust network of organisations that provide tailored support to people with disabilities. As early as 1836, for example, Spermalie, a training centre for deaf people and blind people, was established. In the meantime, that organisation is embedded within the non-profit organisation De Kade and is an authority in Europe for the support of people with hearing and visual impairment. Bruges also has several social enterprises, such as Viro vzw, UNIE-K, Ons Huis and ODAS, which help people in need of support on a daily basis, not only to in connection with living and accommodation, working and daytime support, but also leisure and recreation. In our ECOC year, we will use ‘the art of Conversation’ in order to develop a cultural programme aimed at these target groups as well. In doing so, we will expand upon projects such as The World at Our Fingertips, in which in 2021, two curators with visual impairments curated a multi-sensory exhibition around the unique collection of assistive

devices preserved at Spermalie. A second inspiring avenue is Woeshcraft, where the Woesh Circusatelier rolled out a circus assistant training programme for people with specific support needs. Students from the Industrial Product Development, Occupational Therapy and Orthopedagogy programmes developed tools to enable circus movements to be carried out smoothly. Using those aids, the circus assistants conducted workshops in schools, residential care centres and at events and festivals.

So there are ideas for exciting projects and events galore. And radical facilitation will also be our starting point for this particular target group as well. We certainly also want to mention that although we are not focusing on new infrastructure in the context of Bruges 2030, we do want to ensure that the existing infrastructure becomes more accessible to people with disabilities.

Extending our reach through intermediaries, community and neighbourhood workers and cross-sectoral collaboration

“The number of vulnerable students in Bruges is increasing, just like in other centre cities where this increase has been a fact of life for some time. Connection is therefore incredibly important. We want to use even more intermediaries to get together with schools and district workers. That way, we can discover precisely what needs there are, who already is providing which activities, and how to bring them together. With a concept like ‘the art of Conversation’, we can also see that the Bruges 2030 team will be able to play a role in that regard.”
— Koen Mattheewes, Flankerend onderwijsbeleid
Complementary Education Policy City of Bruges

Only by always addressing ‘socio’ and ‘cultural’ aspects together will the year 2030 in Bruges become an ECOC year for everyone. Within our organisational framework, we will invest in intermediaries, community and neighbourhood workers and cross-sector collaboration. Above all else, our ECOC year is meant to showcase Bruges as a socially engaged and contemporary city of culture. We are harnessing art, culture and creativity as a vehicle with which to secure the ongoing development of Bruges into a sustainable city on a human scale, based on a clear motto: culture belongs to everyone! Because that is our starting point. That is the social impact we are intending to have with ‘the art of Conversation’.

C. Cooperation with society and civil society

In the preparatory phase, we not only involved cultural organisations, local artists and social actors, but also the local population and civil society. And they will also take part in the implementation of the ECOC year itself. (Q24) in line with our goal of radical facilitation as a starting point.

Bruges residents as ambassadors

The people of Bruges, who are known to be proud of their city, will be the foremost ambassadors for our ECOC year. The vision statement that we shared back in August 2023 makes our ambitions clear from the outset: ‘This candidacy is both for and by the residents of Bruges and its visitors and is founded on the conversations they want to have and on the questions they wish to ask and answer.’ So right from the beginning, we focused on contact and connection with the local population. The effort we have already made in order to translate all of the pilot projects in preparation for 2030 demonstrates that our ECOC year will also be based on this ambition.

After all, the art of conversation relies on involvement. An involvement with their city that the people of Bruges feel very strongly. Our conversation starters have set the tone and during the run-up to our ECOC year, we want to continue to ask inviting questions. During our communication campaigns, pilot projects and opportunities to meet, we detected a great deal of enthusiasm from young and old to help get Bruges 2030 off the ground. The fact that a great many Bruges residents have fond memories of Bruges 2002 will no doubt also play a part in that. Together with the involved community of Bruges 2030 ambassadors, we also want to focus on an active dialogue with city visitors. Visit Bruges is our logical partner in this.

“The fact that an ECOC year can have very long-lasting effects can be seen in the long-term effects of Bruges 2002 that we are still feeling today. I find your innovative and atypical approach, in which you start from exploration and experimentation and focus on the sociocultural aspect instead of choosing predictable anchor points for the candidacy, very refreshing.”
— Bart Caron, project coordinator of Bruges 2002

Civil society as a partner

In the preparatory phase, we also approached civil society organisations and captured the issues that they were struggling with. Examples of pilot projects in which we involved them include the Day of Happiness (see page 37) and Warme wesen (see page 37). These were two successful initiatives that received many positive responses and on which we therefore want to build further, so that civil society also has a place in the programme for 2030. Working with civil society organisations will mean that we can build a bridge between our cultural initiatives and our intended audience. By joining hands and having conversations, we will get to know the different audiences even better and working together means that we can reach more people. Together, we are also developing new methodologies to hear and engage the voiceless - a collective term for harder-to-reach and/or harder-to-understand target groups.

D. Collaboration with the economic sector

The main economic activities in Bruges can be found in the port of Zeebrugge, in the service and care sector, in hospitality (tourism, gastronomy) and finally in the creative and IT sectors.

The service sector is the primary economic sector in Bruges, with some 2,700 establishments providing commercial services and some 800 offices of non-commercial players.

The care sector is a second major economic force that is working with universities and colleges to enhance the interaction between healthcare and technology as a means of achieving healthcare innovation.

Port of Antwerp-Bruges is the region’s largest industrial employer, with more than 400 companies in the Zeebrugge port area. The city council is heavily involved in the continued expansion and growth of this second largest port in Europe. Port of Antwerp-Bruges is also supporting the cultural growth of Bruges, as a structural partner of institutions such as Concertgebouw Brugge (Concert Hall), Musea Brugge and European events such as the Bruges Triennial, amongst others. During the run-up to our ECOC year, we will be developing a strong partnership with that organisation.

Tourism is also an important component of the Bruges economy, and culture lies at the heart of the city’s tourism policy. From 2019 to 2024, Visit Bruges developed a new vision in which tourism is more strongly linked to the well-being of city residents, business owners and visitors. The question is no longer what the city can do for tourism, but what tourism can do for the city. The basic principle? Bruges is a dynamic city where people live, work and play, but is also an inspiring breeding ground for culture and creation at the same time. Our candidacy to become European Capital of Culture 2030 is fully in keeping with this strategy, as we are also highlighting the cultural assets of the various neighbourhoods, sub-municipalities and surrounding cities and municipalities. Using Bruges as base, this means that art and heritage lovers can therefore also explore the culture and nature within a broad radius of the city centre, thereby providing an economic boost in the realm of cultural tourism and increasing the number of tourist stays in the Bruges region.

On the economic front, Bruges city council is also encouraging consultation and innovation, as a means of facilitating a favourable business climate. As an economic hub, brugge.inc. offers support to start-ups and scale-ups that are active within Bruges’ spearhead sectors, and Circular Hub Brugge is an experimental test-bed for circular entrepreneurship in the Bruges region with a focus on ICT and Gastronomy & Food. The ‘Handmade in Brugge’ designation is providing craftsmanship in Bruges and the region with an overarching identity, while TURBO is helping to boost and encourage young entrepreneurship in Bruges. The retail options in the historic city centre and the shopping experience are monitored and enhanced by a city centre manager, amongst others. These are all striking examples of how entrepreneurship in Bruges has the wind in its sails.

Bruges and the region are also home to several networking organisations, such as Bedrijvig Brugge, business club De Hanze, the women’s organisation Markant or the urban innovation network De Toekomstmakers, that link business players together. We took the time to introduce ‘the art of Conversation’, our vision and our pilot projects to them and were met with enthusiasm. Some companies have already specifically asked to cooperate in the next phase. We also presented our story to the executive teams in the care sector, and they too indicated a desire to become further involved in ‘the art of Conversation’.

A theme linked to cultural, social and economic impact is sustainability and that is also one of the themes we will be placing at the forefront. Bruges wants to be a climate-neutral city by 2050. In the ECOC year, we will be building thematic bridges to the Climate Plan 2030. In our cultural policy, we are deliberately aiming for shared infrastructure and firmly connected operations.

When our ECOC year comes to an end, we will thoroughly evaluate our approach towards radical facilitation, our strategy around the eight pillars of ‘the art of Conversation’ and our city marketing. Based on the results, we will develop a new plan of action to profile Bruges locally, supralocally, nationally and Europe-wide as a socially rooted city of art and culture, while paying attention to the challenges and concerns of our residents, business owners and organisations, not only on a cultural level, but on a social and economic level too.



Part 7
Finance

In this section on the subject of finance, we will follow the structure of the document ‘Call for applications for ECOC 2030 in Belgium’, and more specifically, the subdivision presented on pages 20 to 23. First, we will address our city’s budget for culture, then our operating budget for our ECOC year.

A. The city’s budget for culture
Our annual budget for culture over the past five years (excluding spending on the current candidacy)

In the budget below, we have included expenses that form part of the city budget and are fully attributable to culture. Within the city as an organisation, support services – such as finance, HR and facilities management – are being centralised, but their operating costs have not been included in this budget.

The main part of the annual culture budget consists of the operating funds (including personnel costs) of the city’s cultural organisations: Musea Brugge, Cultuurcentrum Brugge (Cultural Centre), Bruges Public Library, Brugge Plus, the Bruges City Archive, the Bruges Heritage Unit, Raakvlak and the Cultural Policy Unit. A second part of the annual budget includes the structural operating grants we give to cultural organisations, both professional and amateur. A third part concerns project grants provided by the city council for cultural activities.

The annual culture budget consists of the sum total of operational expenses – personnel, operation and allowances – and investments. The large increase in 2023 and 2024 is due to the investment expenditure for BRUSK, Musea Brugge’s new exhibition hall.

The percentage reflects the magnitude of the cultural budgets within the city council’s overall budget. Over the years, there has been a stable rate of 14 percent, meaning that one-seventh of all city government spending has been linked to cultural operations. When calculating this percentage, we have not listed the major cultural investment projects (such as BRUSK in 2023 and 2024) – unlike the budget column – because this would give a distorted picture.

Year	Annual budget for culture in the city (in euros)	Annual budget for culture in the city (as a percentage of the total annual budget for the city)
2020	33,118,687	14%
2021	37,528,068	14%
2022	42,499,407	14%
2023	55,258,111	15%
2024	71,151,575	14%

Annual budget for the preparation of the Bruges 2030 project

- Year 2023: 260,000 euros
 - Year 2024: 275,000 euros
 - Year 2025: 800,000 euros
 - Year 2026: 1,000,000 euros
 - Year 2027: 1,000,000 euros
 - Year 2028: 2,000,000 euros
 - Year 2029: 3,000,000 euros
- The amount of the total annual budget that Bruges plans to spend on culture after the ECOC year has elapsed: 42,500,000 euros, that is, 15% of the total budget.

B. Operational budget for our ECOC year

Here, we have provided a detailed account of our budget for preparation as a successful candidate (2026-2029), for the ECOC year itself (2030) and the evaluation and for our legacy activities (2031):

Component 1: revenues to cover operating expenses

Overview of the total operating budget (the funds specifically set aside to cover operating expenses):

Total revenues before operating expenses (in euros)	From the public sector (in euros)	From the public sector (as a %)	From the private sector (in euros)	From the private sector (as a %)
75,000,000	60,000,000	81%	15,000,000	19%

Component 2: public-sector revenues

Summary of public-sector revenues used to cover operating expenses:

Public-sector revenues for operating expenses	In euros	%
Belgium – federal government	15,000,000	25%
Flanders – regional government	25,000,000	42%
Bruges – city budget	20,000,000	33%
Region – Province of West Flanders – municipalities in the reference region	*	
EU (not including the Melina Mercouri International Prize)	*	
Other		
Total	60,000,000	100%

* Taking advantage of additional grant opportunities is anticipated.

The drafting of the detailed budget for the further roll-out of our ECOC year is part of the drafting of the multi-year budget of the City of Bruges 2026-2031, which the (new) city council will draw up at the start of the 2025-2030 municipal legislature in the first half of 2025. That detailed budget will form part of the final bid-book for the selection phase, which we will submit to the City Council for approval.

The minister-president of the Flemish Government has verbally promised a commitment of 25,000,000 euros if a Flemish city becomes European Capital of Culture. That commitment has yet to be ratified by the new Flemish Government 2025-2029. The federal government has already given approval to invest 15,000,000 euros in the successful candidate. That amount is to be sourced from National Lottery funds.

Component 3: private-sector revenues

In the pre-selection phase, we have not yet focused on establishing a fundraising strategy. In the selection phase, we will outline a full and feasible fundraising plan in order to achieve private sector engagement that equates to 19 percent of the total budget. In order to achieve that, we are building on the good relationships that the city council maintains with various business leaders in the region and with local business organisations. In the pre-selection phase as mentioned above, they have already shown their enthusiasm for the overarching theme of ‘the art of Conversation’. In drawing up this fundraising plan, we also want to integrate avenues around citizen financing. For instance, we are thinking of the possibility for citizens to buy a participative share in order to realise projects. But we also see crowdfunding of neighbourhood-oriented projects as a possibility. Responding to ‘the art of Conversation’, such methodologies promise to promote conversation and increase shared ownership around our ECOC year.

Component 4: operational expenses

- Thanks to Bruges 2002, European Capital of Culture and subsequent large-scale cultural events, Bruges has a lot of experience in drawing up a realistic budget. Coupled with our intended approach of ‘the art of Conversation’ - both theme and guiding principle - this leads to the following outline of the operational budget:
- 60 % is retained for the programme, where we prioritise creation and the targeted strengthening of cultural projects and initiatives in line with the central theme
 - 17% is reserved for a strong communication budget, allowing for a personalised approach to different target groups
 - 18% goes to the umbrella organisation, in order to effectively create a central team of committed networkers who can make co-owners out of as many stakeholders as possible
 - 5 % of the budget we want to place in a reserve fund, in order to be able to include fantastic new ideas along the way or to re-scale projects

Total operational expenses	Programme expenses	Communication & marketing	General organisation, expenses & administration	Reserve fund
75.000.000 Euro	45.000.000 Euro	12.750.000 Euro	13.500.000 Euro	3.750.000 Euro
100%	60%	17%	18%	5%

This financial framework will be further specified in the Selection Phase and converted into phased operating budgets across years (preparation, title year, evaluation and legacy).

Component 5: capital expenses budget

- The city council has invested heavily in cultural infrastructure over the past two decades (Part 2). No additional large-scale infrastructure projects are therefore in the pipeline in the years leading up to the ECOC year. The existing cultural infrastructure is sufficient to provide a quality and layered programme.
- Of course, this does not mean that there are no plans for the further optimisation of the city’s cultural infrastructure during the next five years. As previously stated, much of Bruges’ cultural infrastructure is located inside protected historical buildings. We will continue to care for this heritage and will carry out sustainable adaptations as needed. The study phase has been completed for four projects of that type. Our ECOC year represents an opportunity – with the support of the Flemish Government – to achieve rapid implementation.

- The **Stadshallen and the Belfry** are in good condition overall, but further building maintenance will be imminent. In that regard, the city council is aiming to carry out much more than just a renovation. The restoration forms the basis for preparing the building for contemporary purposes, so that the Stadshallen can play a role as a central meeting place and cultural hub. The cost of that project is estimated at 40,000,000 euros, to be divided between the Flemish Community (60%) and the city council (40%).
- By updating the technological installations, the security system and the visitor experience in the museum, we intend to make the **Groeninge Museum** ready for the future. The cost of the renovation is estimated at 13,800,000 euros. The Flemish Community will pay 60% and the city 40%.
- By investing in technology, roofs and plumbing, we want to make **De Bickorf** – where the Public Library and the Cultural Centre are situated- more sustainable and dynamic. The Flemish Community already pledged 2,000,000 euros and the city will invest 7,000,000 euros.
- For the Bruges **Beguinage**, which has been recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site. In order to mark to its 800th anniversary in 2025, the city council has developed a future-oriented master plan. To realise this plan, 11,000,000 euros will be invested, 60% of which by the Flemish Community and 40% by the city council.

The following shows the breakdown of the revenue we will receive from the government to cover the capital expenditures associated with the ECOC year:

Public-sector revenues for operating expenses	In euros	%
National government		
City of Bruges	32,920,000	44.6%
Flemish Government	40,880,000	55.4%
EU (not including the Melina Mercouri International Prize)	*	
Other		
Total	73.800.000	100%

* Opportunities to take advantage of European grant programmes will be explored in more detail en route.

At the time that this bid-book for the pre-election phase is being compiled, the regional and federal elections in Belgium have just ended. Local elections will follow in October. Investment expenses will be included in the multi-year budget of both the Flemish and local governments. The formal commitments cannot be made until after this bid-book is submitted.

Capital expenses will be based upon a shared responsibility between the Flemish Government and the Bruges City Council. Of course, we will also seek funding from European grant programmes on a targeted basis. Providing more details about this possibility will form part of the selection phase.



Part 8 Tourist Capacity

An exhaustive tourism policy in which heritage experience and innovation go hand in hand. This is what Bruges, as a cultural tourism city, has been investing in for some time. We are a model and a source of inspiration for many other European heritage cities. In the coming years, we will continue our approach in response to Visit Flanders' central policy on 'Reizen naar morgen' (Travel to Tomorrow).

Everyone is welcome in Bruges, but we are not proactively running any campaigns directed towards day tourism. Our focus on the ECOC year will be an excellent opportunity to encourage international visitors to stay longer and to link their stay with an exploration of the region, as we have also set out in Part 6. In that regard, a sustainable and ecological approach will form the key. Bruges can count on excellent accessibility and a sufficiently diverse range of accommodation options. We would like to take you through our city's assets in terms of accessibility, including regional and national as well as international accessibility, and elaborate on Bruges' absorption capacity regarding tourist accommodation. (Q27 & Q28)

A. Visiting Bruges

Bruges is centrally located in north-western Europe, in the middle of the London, Paris and Amsterdam triangle. Thanks to easy connections with these and other major European cities, travelling to Bruges is very easy. We are very accessible by train and plane as well as by car, bus and ferry.

Bruges, an accessible travel destination

The city council pursues a targeted policy with regard to full accessibility, so that Bruges is effectively accessible to everyone: the elderly, visitors with physical or mental disabilities, or people in need of extra convenience or care. Visit Bruges, the city's tourism department, developed the brochure 'Oooh! Bruges, accessible for everyone', which contains a clear overview of all kinds of resources that will help to ensure a pleasant visit, together with a mapped out accessible walk.

Transportation options to and from Bruges

By bus

From major airports, international railway stations and foreign cities, visitors can travel to Bruges easily and directly by bus, using services offered by various bus companies.

- *Bus services to and from transportation hubs*
Flibco provides a direct connection between Bruges and Brussels Charleroi Airport, with twelve bus connections a day. Flixbus takes travellers to and from various European railway stations

and airports. The stops include the HST stations Brussels-South (Bruxelles-Midi/Brussel-Zuid) and Lille-Europe, as well as Frankfurt Airport, Brussels Airport, Amsterdam Airport Schiphol, Charles de Gaulle Airport and Orly Airport.

- *Bus services to and from foreign cities*

The Flixbus connects Bruges with Dortmund, Brest, Prague, Paris, London and Amsterdam. These buses also stop at Eindhoven, Maastricht, Rotterdam, The Hague, Groningen, Göttingen, Hamburg, Aachen, Essen, Bonn, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Würzburg, Nuremberg, Rennes, Ploërmel, Vannes, Lorient, Concarneau, Quimper and Chateaulin. BlaBlaCar Bus organises frequent services between Paris and Bruges.

By train

Bruges is well connected to other Belgian cities and international cities and capital cities. Travellers can also travel to the airports easily by train. The station is within walking distance of the historic city centre. Taking the bus or a taxi or bicycle taxi to the city centre is also perfectly possible.

- *International train traffic*

Brussels-South station (Bruxelles-Midi/Brussel-Zuid) is the Belgian hub for international train traffic. Several high-speed trains arrive there every day, from Paris (Eurostar and TGV), Lille (Eurostar and TGV), London (Eurostar), Amsterdam (NS InterCity and Eurostar) and Cologne (Eurostar and ICE). Frequent sleeper trains are also scheduled from Vienna (with ÖBB Nightjet) and Berlin (with European Sleeper) to Brussels-South. At Brussels-South (Bruxelles-Midi/Brussel-Zuid), passengers can easily transfer to one of the three trains per hour that stop at Bruges station. The journey takes just under an hour. Passengers travelling from Amsterdam or Rotterdam can change trains at Antwerp-Central. From there, a direct train to Bruges leaves every hour and the journey takes around one hour and a half.

- *National train traffic*

From the cities of Antwerp, Ghent, Hasselt, Leuven and Brussels, 1 to 4 direct trains per hour travel to Bruges station every day.

By car

Whatever direction you are travelling from, Bruges is easy to reach by road. The city is close to various major motorways (the E40, E403 and A11). Motor traffic and above-ground parking are discouraged in the city centre. Car access is restricted in a number of streets or they are car-free at specific times. Ideally, cars should be parked in one of the free car parks on the edge of the city or in one of the Park&Ride facilities around the city centre. Paid parking is without time limits and most cost-effective in one of the two central underground car parks: the Centrum-t Zand car park and the Centrum-Station car park. Transfer by bus from the Centrum Station car park to the city centre is included in the car park ticket. Bruges is equipped to facilitate the electrification of both private and public transport. For instance, anno 2024 we have more than 1,000 public charging points and bus transport is already fully electric in the historic centre today.

On foot

Walking is without a doubt the best way to explore Bruges. The historic city centre is compact and on a small scale. All the must-sees are within a stone's throw of each other. Visit Bruges developed several themed walks that can be followed online. Joining guided walks from one of the guide associations is also recommended.

By bike

The last decade has seen particularly strong investments in bicycle connections with the surrounding municipalities in the Bruges region. For visitors to the region, the cultural year 2030 is therefore also an incentive to leave the car at home and opt for cycling.

By air

- *Via Brussels Airport*
Belgium's national airport receives daily flights from more than 200 destinations in 66 countries. From the railway station underneath Brussels Airport, travelling to Bruges by train is easy. There is a direct train every hour.
- *Via Brussels South Charleroi Airport*
This popular regional airport welcomes many low-cost flights every day from various cities and regions in Europe. As already mentioned above, Flibco operates a direct shuttle bus to and from Bruges Station at a frequency of 12 trips per day, there and back.
- *Via Ostend-Bruges Airport*
Ostend-Bruges Airport is developing and systematically expanding its flights.

B. Overnight accommodation

In 2023, 1.1 million visitors stayed one or more nights in Bruges city centre. Together, they accounted for 1.8 million overnight stays. We have operated a policy of vigilance since the 1990s, in order to avoid a proliferation of tourist accommodation. This balanced approach towards living, working and visiting will continue during the run-up to our ECOC year. According to the latest measurements (2023), Bruges has 802 establishments providing tourist accommodation, with a total of 14,658 beds.

Hotels	100
Rooms	3,744
Beds	8,830
Approved B&Bs	135
Rooms	404
Beds	964
Registered B&Bs	131
Rooms	261
Beds	623
Approved holiday homes	108
Beds	760
Registered holiday homes	167
Beds	891
Approved room-based accommodation	31
Rental units	269
Beds	974
Registered room-based accommodation	121
Rental units	220
Beds	542
Hostels	7
Beds	909
Campsite	1
Places	128
Camping ground	1
Places	37



Part 9
Marketing and
Communication

Our vision

In recent years, the ways in which people, businesses, cities and institutions communicate have been evolving at lightning speed. The likelihood that any marketing and communications strategy we are currently working on will be obsolete by 2030 is therefore high. That is why we intend to prioritise the art of conversation, including for marketing purposes. That way, we will be able to switch course quickly and efficiently, if needed.

This plan for our marketing and communication primarily should be regarded as a starting point for an ongoing conversation about what we want to share with Bruges residents and with the city's visitors. We intend to develop communication strategies that are tailored to different primary and secondary audiences, and that respond to all kinds of changes. These strategies will be the result of consultation and will be continually under review. To help temper the necessary and unstoppable advance of digitisation, we also want to devote much more effort to human interaction once again, by continuing to foster offline communication.

You have already read our core messages – that we really want to send out into the world – and how we view 'the art of Conversation' in the chapters above. In the section below, we will explain a possible plan of action for our marketing and communications that is made up of elements that embody our current strategy, with a look at what the most important elements may be in 2030. In doing so, we will certainly also fully communicate the fact that Bruges 2030 is a project of the European Union (Q29 & Q30)

Our marketing and communication strategy will also be part of the Bruges city councils new brand management policy. Anno 2024, this overarching brand strategy is in full preparation. The results and findings of the communication campaign of Brugge 2030 during the preselection phase are taken into consideration to further shape the brand essence and brand story of Bruges.

Our objectives

Our marketing and communication objectives will evolve organically as the programme advances in the period before and during the ECOC year. Currently, these are our most important objectives:

- To create awareness and generate support for Bruges' candidacy and for 'the art of Conversation'
- To make residents and visitors part of the conversation and generate interaction
- To attract local, national and international media attention
- To build partnerships with public and private organisations

- To strengthen diversity and inclusion within Bruges' cultural life
- To involve ambassadors from the cultural sector and society
- To inspire other European cities to get started with 'the art of Conversation'

Our target groups

We are aiming to achieve the widest possible reach, but are aware that different audiences also require different communication and marketing approaches. We are targeting our efforts at:

- the local community: residents of Bruges and the surrounding region and their (social) organisations – in which diversity and inclusion are self-evident
- tourists: visitors from elsewhere in Belgium and from abroad

Within these two target groups, we also distinguish between the following sub-categories: children and families, young people, immigrants, people with disabilities, the elderly, people in disadvantaged situations etc.

- media: local, national and international press
- governments and policy makers: municipal, regional, national and European government bodies
- artists and cultural institutions: local, national and international cultural actors
- educational institutions: from nursery schools to colleges and universities
- businesses and sponsors: local, regional and international companies that support culture

Our channels and campaigns

Just as we experimented with our pilot projects, we also tested out a number of things in the area of marketing and communications. We developed a visual identity, experimented on social media and maintained our website and newsletter. We also went out and engaged in many offline conversations. Thanks to the lessons learned, we then arrived at this possible plan of action:

- **Interactive website** We will develop a dynamic campaign website that includes more than simply news and updates, within the structure of the existing Visit Bruges and City of Bruges websites. That way we will be able to start out from a strong base and can immediately reach a very large audience via websites that are already available in six languages. We will use our current website Brugge2030.be as a blueprint for this campaign website.

Idea for 2030 The website can offer interactive elements, such as virtual tours of Bruges, in which users can click on works of art and monuments to learn more. We will have a blog or vlog hosted by artists, residents and ambassadors, with weekly contributions that stimulate discussion. The website will have an integrated chat feature that allows visitors to chat with guides and experts in real time.

• **Innovative social media** Bruges 2030 has its own social media channels, but can also rely on the platforms of Visit Bruges, the City of Bruges and Brugge Plus.

- Facebook – Stad Brugge: 46k followers
- Facebook – Brugge Plus: 7.8k followers
- Facebook – Visit Bruges: 61k followers
- Facebook – Brugge 2030: 1k followers
- Instagram – Stad Brugge: 24.4k followers
- Instagram – Brugge Plus: 3k followers
- Instagram – Visit Bruges: 80.4k followers
- Instagram – Bruges 2030: 1.3k followers
- LinkedIn – Stad Brugge: 9k followers
- LinkedIn – Brugge Plus: 500 followers
- LinkedIn – Visit Bruges: 1k followers
- LinkedIn – Brugge 2030: 100 followers

We are also creating accounts on platforms such as TikTok, X, Threads and YouTube. We will additionally use other social networks, such as the neighbourhood networking site Hoplr, travel networking sites, UiTPAS and channels operated by the Flemish and Federal governments.

Idea for 2030 For example, we use AR (augmented reality) filters on Instagram that project Bruges artwork into the real world, or create TikTok challenges in which users create short videos about their favourite conversations in the city. We could provide a 'Conversation Map' on social media, where people can mark their conversations and encounters in the city and share them with others.

• **Online advertising campaigns and email marketing**

Using targeted ad campaigns on social media will enable us to reach different audiences in the places where they are already online. The ease with which outreach can be monitored in this way also allows us to continually fine-tune. Brugge 2030 also has its own newsletter. Events and news will also be communicated via our partners' newsletters. In addition, we also focus on social listening, in order to better map out what is being said, where and by whom, about our activities and events.

• **Press releases and press conferences**

We will generate coverage in the media by means of regular press releases and press conferences. Together with Visit Bruges and Visit Flanders, we will organise press trips for national and international journalists to let them experience the cultural highlights of Bruges and 'the art of Conversation'.

• **Media collaborations**

We will enter into partnerships with local, regional, national and international media for special reports and interviews. Between now and 2030 and in 2030 itself, we will continue to add to the library of images we already have available.

Idea for 2030 We will create a fully-fledged documentary to be broadcast via a streaming platform. With a monthly column in local newspapers, we will give prominent Bruges residents an opportunity to talk about the importance of conversation and dialogue.

• **Virtual events and webinars**

Idea for 2030 In addition to physical events, we will organise virtual events, such as webinars with international artists and experts. These events will offer interactive Q&A sessions and breakout rooms, in which participants can discuss and network in smaller groups. We will put on a virtual conference entitled 'Bruges 2030 Online Summit' with keynotes, panel discussions and interactive workshops.

• **Gamification and apps**

Idea for 2030 We will develop a mobile app with a game element. Users will be able to earn badges by taking part in conversations, attending events and visiting cultural venues in Bruges. The app will also offer a city adventure that will require users to complete various tasks and solve riddles. The intention behind all of these will be to encourage dialogue and cultural exchange.

• **Ambassadors from society and from the cultural sector**

We will engage well-chosen ambassadors from the arts, culture, the care sector, education, hospitality, the region and from other European cities. We place them centre-stage on our social media outlets, thereby strengthening the diversity and inclusion of the Bruges 2030 journey and Bruges' cultural life. These ambassadors will be a reflection of both the people of Bruges and our visitors. For example: residents who were born and raised in Bruges and newcomers, ambassadors with disabilities, children, young people, senior citizens ... In that regard, we will seek to achieve a mix of familiar and unfamiliar faces.

• **Collaborations**

By continuing to focus on collaborations with important partners, such as educational institutions, the health and welfare sector and the local hospitality industry, as well as Visit Bruges, Westtoer and Visit Flanders, we will reach many more people who can themselves communicate the art of Conversation.

• **Public installations and performances**

We will establish art projects in public spaces that will encourage interaction and conversation and convey the core messages of 'the art of Conversation'. Each installation will include interactive elements that invite the audience to take part in the conversation.

• **Conversation evenings and debates**

We will host regular gatherings where people from diverse backgrounds can come together to take part in discussions on a variety of topics linked to art and conversation. These meetings will take place in libraries, community centres and cultural hubs around the city, but also in unexpected places in Bruges and the region that spark the imagination. Each of these gatherings will be shaped in an original and different way.

The European dimension to our communications

We will creatively incorporate the European vision, the European house style and the substantive priorities of European policy into our communications. During our visit to Cyprus, we drew inspiration from a project in Larnaca: information about all the previous European Capitals of Culture was disseminated in shops and commercial establishments. We want to develop something similar for Bruges and its surroundings in 2030 that is linked to 'the art of Conversation'. By attracting ambassadors from all over Europe by means of a six-language website, and of course by offering international programming, we hope to appeal to as many Europeans as possible.

Our evaluation and monitoring

• **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**

We will track visitor statistics and measure media reach, engagement on social media, event participation and feedback from participants. Using programmes such as Google Analytics and reporting on social media will enable us to continually adjust and optimise our plan of action. We also collect qualitative data, such as anecdotes and personal stories. This will also enable us to evaluate our impact on an individual level. In our pre-selection phase, we already made a start along both of these avenues. We kept close track of our online statistics and collected quantitative and qualitative feedback on our (communication) actions.

• **Regular evaluations**

We will schedule monthly reports and feedback sessions to monitor our progress and adjust our strategies. By means of focus groups and online surveys, we will assess the effectiveness of our communication efforts. We will carry 'the art of Conversation' forward within our entire working method and will look for different ways to organise evaluation moments in dialogue form and in a way that involves as many stakeholders as possible.

Our budget

A detailed budget plan for marketing activities, including digital marketing, events, collaborations and PR campaigns, will form the basis. We reserve additional funds for unforeseen opportunities that arise during the campaign. This budget plan will be elaborated upon during the selection phase.

Outro | Dear reader,

with this Bid-book Preselection Phase, we wanted to take you on a wild ride through the art of conversation. We hope you enjoyed it and, like us, are convinced that this theme and Bruges are a match made in heaven. We want to continue working with 'the art of Conversation' in the run-up to our ECOC year together with other European cities that want to use art and culture as a driving force for conversation and interaction.

To conclude, we want to tell you something about us, the people behind this mission and the pen holders of this bid-book: the Bruges 2030 team. We each answered one question from our conversation starters.

Project coordinator Dalilla Hermans

Question: "Wa gift er joen energie?" (What gives you energy?)

"I wear many hats: among other things, I am a writer, theatre maker and coordinator of this project. I also have three young children and a busy social life. People often ask me where I get my energy from. More than ever, I realise that I get it from small, human moments. From seeing someone smile genuinely, or seeing someone find comfort in a difficult moment. From deep chats with friends, or an almost unnoticed 'acts of kindness' between strangers. Not surprisingly, 'the art of Conversation' and everything we have done so far and still want to do gives me a lot of energy."

Project officer Marthe Soete

Question: "When were you last amazed?"

"During my journey with Brugge 2030, I was often amazed by the city, the people I met, and the many inspiring projects. I find wonder in art, in small everyday things, and especially in conversations with others. I am therefore immensely grateful that I was also able to experience this wonder in my job. I hope that Bruges 2030 can create many more moments of amazement for everyone, both in Bruges and beyond."

Communications officer Silke Bomberna

Question: "What is your idea of happiness?"

"This year I came back to work in my hometown. Proudly I saw how much Bruges had changed since I left: I arrived in a city with many more young people, fresh ideas and creative places than I remembered. The fact that I can now participate in such a beautiful and ambitious project as Bruges 2030, and thus contribute to a thriving cultural sector in my own hometown, makes me truly happy. People from Bruges taking the lead together to create a more connected society through art and conversation, I wouldn't have dared to dream it."

Policy Adviser of the Cel Cultuurbeleid Lothar Casteleyn

Question: "What do you want your legacy to be?"

"I am one of many members of the Bruges cultural field who took their first steps during Bruges 2002. When I see the wide range of talented young people with fresh ideas around 'the art of Conversation', I want to give them maximum support to further grow into the next generation of Bruges culture makers through our ECOC year."

Culture coach Bart Vanduyver

Question: "What would you try if you knew you couldn't fail?"

"Meeting every Bruges resident in person and having a conversation with them. I am a social worker by training and since that training I am convinced that meetings and conversation are the basis of mutual understanding and social change. The population of Bruges is becoming increasingly diverse, rich and multi-layered. At the same time, many people are struggling with mental and social problems and there are also more and more people trying (often through conversation, culture and art) to play a role in this. From my position as a culture coach, I meet many of these people and very often these encounters give me strength and inspiration."



Colofon

Authors	Silke Bomberna, Lothar Casteleyn, Dalilla Hermans, Marthe Soete, Bart Vanduyver	
Editorial support	Sara Reymen, Tekstueel	
Translation	Oneliner	
Design	Victor Verhelst	
Printing	Digitaal Print	
Photography	August Van de Gracht:	p23, 24 & 52
	Cato Crevits:	p6 & 54
	Cesar De Greve :	p36
	Femke Appeltans:	p41
	Femke den Hollander:	p4, 6, 7, 12, 17, 29, 30, 36, 41, 42, 44, 45 & 49
	Jasper van het Groenewoud:	p8 & 43
	Jolien Chielens:	p8

THE
ART
OF
CONVERSION
SESSION