

# Toopen



*Candidate* European  
Capital of Culture



Cultural  
*recharge* for  
a common  
future.

# Together

Before you start...

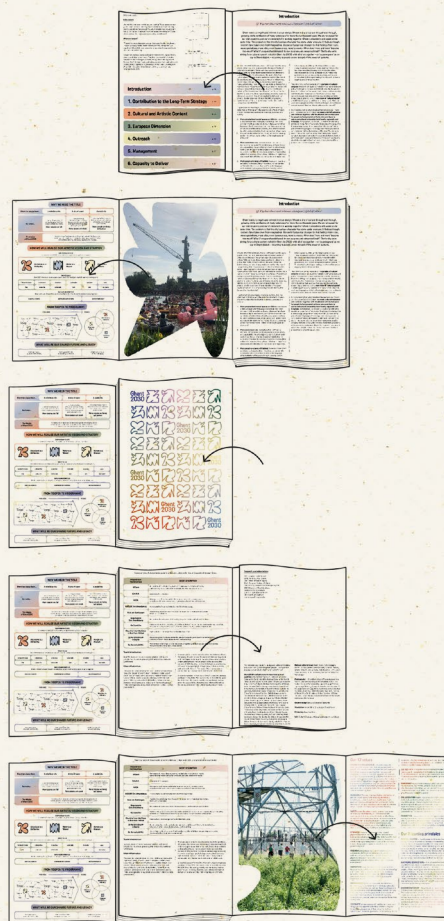
### **Extra covers**

Use the fold-out covers while you are reading. These pages are your guide to this bidbook. The diagram inside the front cover will help you to understand the concept visually. Inside the back cover, you'll find our 12 values, 3 learning principles and a list of frequently used abbreviations. We hope you enjoy reading our bidbook!

### **What are toopen?**

"Toopen" is an exciting new concept that combines the Greek word "topos" (place) with the Ghent dialect word "tuupetegoare" (all together). Ghent2030 uses toopen to bring cultural programming to life in an innovative way.

Toopen are dynamic, open workspaces where artists, together with organisations, experts and citizens join forces. Together, they search for creative solutions to the challenges currently facing Ghent, the region and Europe. How? By listening to each other, learning from each other and tackling things together in a genuinely Ghentish way: tuupetegoare. What will the result of these toopen be? A co-creative artistic programme for 2030.



## **Introduction**

p. 01

## **1. Contribution to the Long-Term Strategy**

p. 08

## **2. Cultural and Artistic Content**

p. 14

## **3. European Dimension**

p. 28

## **4. Outreach**

p. 33

## **5. Management**

p. 37

## **6. Capacity to Deliver**

p. 48

## WHY WE NEED THE TITLE

Ghent has always been...

A rebellious city

A city of water

A social city

But today...

... we need more physical and mental space for artists, cultural workers and citizens.

**Many spaces are full**

... institutions have difficulty introducing reforms, because we often work in silos and new initiatives frequently get tangled up in rules.

**Many systems are stuck**

... the sense of disconnection between citizens and institutions is increasing, both in culture and elsewhere.

**Many people are feeling left behind**

**The mission of Ghent2030**

To create a city of resistance and resilience together, with the physical and mental space for people to feel genuinely at home and contribute to active and cultural citizenship, both locally, regionally and in Europe.

## HOW WE WILL REALISE OUR ARTISTIC VISION AND STRATEGY

### OUR PROGRAMME LINES

The themes of Ghent2030 inspire, connect and generate energy to work together.



**Wasteland as a Wellspring**



**Water as a Weaver**



**Margin as a Measure**

### TWELVE VALUES

Ghent2030's framework of values provides direction for the big and small choices we make, both today and in the long term.

inclusive & diverse

collaborative

connective

sustainable

innovative

open

free

accessible

democratic

just

safe

in solidarity

### OUR LEARNING PRINCIPLES

Direct us in every phase, to strengthen skills in the city and the sector and grow together.

**RADICAL LEARNING**

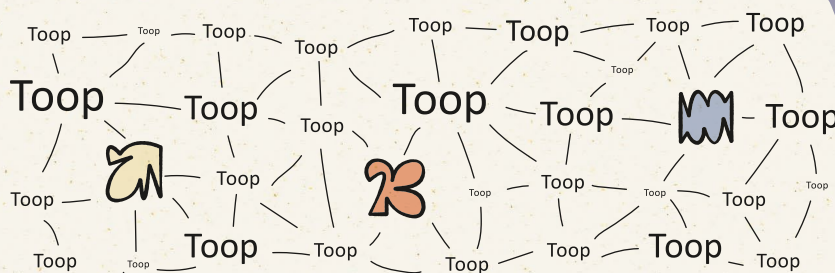
**SURPRISING CONNECTIONS**

**SHARED OWNERSHIP**

## FROM TOOPEN TO PROGRAMME

FROM 2025

TO 2030



## WHAT WILL BE OUR SHARED FUTURE AND LEGACY

more open space, physically and mentally

more *resilience* due to surprising connections

people have a greater sense of belonging



# Introduction

## *Q1 Why does Ghent want to become a European Capital of Culture?*

Ghent wants to regain and reinvent its true energy. We are a city of culture through and through, growing at the confluence of many waterways for more than a thousand years. We are renowned for our wild creativity and our intrinsic belief in working together. Ghent is disorderly and social at the same time. The problem is that the city's unique character has come under pressure. It feels as though systems have taken over from imagination. No one in Europe is a stranger to that feeling: more rules, more specialisms, more silos, more bureaucracy, more burnouts. When does 'more and more' become too much? What if progress has defeated its own purpose and exhausted itself? That's why we're aiming for a cultural system switch in Ghent by 2030: with all of us together – or 'tuupetegoare' as we say in Ghent dialect – returning to the power of people instead of the power of systems.

With its 270,000 inhabitants, Ghent is different from the many smaller cities that have been appointed European Capital of Culture in recent years. We already have an abundance of culture. With our iconic three towers and tourist attractions such as the Castle of the Counts and the work of the Van Eyck brothers, we have already made our mark on the map of Europe. Every other mayor is jealous of the Ghent Festivities, our ten-day cultural festival in July. We already have an opera house, a flourishing music scene, an international film festival, a diverse array of museums and theatres, a finely crafted cultural policy, a network from Kanazawa to LA and a new library hailed by *The Guardian* as 'the library of the future'. On the traditional scale of 'cultural capital' (name, network, resources, infrastructure), Ghent has almost reached its full potential. So why would we still need the title of European Capital of Culture? And what else might we be able to offer Europe if we had that title?

In spite of all our advantages, we are facing three warning lights that confront us with the possible side effects of years of growth and professionalisation in culture, economy and society:

1. **Many physical and mental spaces are full.** More and more artists are unable to find a place to develop their work or share it with an audience. Many cultural workers have become cultural overworkers, with no free space on their schedules or in their heads. Socially, too, saturation leads to unfortunate exclusions, from waiting lists in healthcare to a lack of affordable homes. Young people are queueing up for mental healthcare. Is there still enough space for everyone?
2. **Many systems are stuck.** Institutions find it difficult to reshape themselves to fit their discourse of inclusiveness or sustainability. The arts (highly concentrated in the city centre) and the social sector (mainly embedded in the outskirts) often tend to work independently of each other, rather than together. New cultural initiatives in nightlife or youth work feel stifled by too many rules and regulations.

3. **Many people are feeling left behind.** More and more Ghent residents, particularly ethnic minorities, do not identify sufficiently with what art has to offer or the language of its institutions. For people living in poverty, culture is too expensive, although the Uitspas (a leisure pass that gives people on a low income significant discounts) has experienced explosive growth. As in other cities, we are witnessing a drop in citizens' trust in their local government, as burnouts and general unease increase. This is a feeling that is permeating the whole of Europe: a nagging sense of disconnection.

Thus Ghent is a perfect example of the **paradox of cultural progress**: the more we invest in institutions, infrastructure and policy to strengthen human creativity structurally, the greater the risk of stifling the free space, inventiveness and community spirit from which human creativity naturally arises. How can a city escape that paradox? The way out does not lie in dismantling or decline, but in a **new vision of 'cultural capital'**, a redefining of 'capacity building' on a human scale. How can we invest in people and their collective strength, rather than in extra structures? How can Ghent rediscover its true self?

Our response to the symptoms described above is our mission as a European Capital of Culture: **to create a city of resistance and resilience together, with the physical and mental space for people to feel genuinely at home and contribute to active and cultural citizenship, both locally, regionally and in Europe.** 'Resistilience', as we call it, is resilience with extra resistance to any form of exclusion. Simply put, it's about energy. The human energy you get from being able to be yourself, being part of something bigger. The energy that makes you want to contribute something that makes a difference. The energy to take on the world together, even when reality bites or puts complex obstacles in our path. The real Ghent that we want to rediscover needs to do more than reform our own system and give it the strength to face the future; it also aims to offer a proposition to other European cities.

We can clearly imagine this city we dream of with new 'cultural energy':

### It has more open space, physically and mentally (Ghent as a freethinking city)

- Artists and cultural creators find the space they need to create and share their creations – thanks to a more open vision of the use of space and infrastructure.
- Ghent reveals itself as free haven for experimentation, innovation and wild initiatives – thanks to a policy culture of trust, rather than thinking mainly in terms of rules and control.
- People grow together by continuously learning from each other and the rest of Europe – thanks to learning networks and alternative knowledge-sharing between people and organisations.
- Young people get the space to do their thing, including the chance to party – thanks to creative, unexplored hives of activity and a dynamic and safe nightlife policy.

### It has more *resistilience* due to surprising connections (Ghent as a city of water)

- Culture recharges the city, flowing freely into the social and economic world, etc. – thanks to more overarching win-win initiatives. Culture is the forerunner in a creative approach to social, ecological and technological challenges – thanks to even more cooperation between people and groups.
- There is more culture on offer in the outskirts of Ghent and in the region between Ghent and Zeeland – thanks to a broadening of perspective among the cultural players in the city centre and those in the surrounding area.
- Education and culture reinforce each other in creative learning – thanks to more fluid flows of knowledge between complementary fields of knowledge.

### Its people have a greater sense of belonging (Ghent as a social city)

- Challenges are tackled with the strength of collective action – thanks to a culture of cooperation and solidarity, both locally and internationally.
- Every resident can identify with the culture on offer in Ghent and feels a sense of co-ownership – thanks to extra focus on those who currently feel excluded.
- Ghent shows great care for mental well-being – thanks to a widely supported culture in which human sustainability sets the pace, with respect for everyone's boundaries.
- Ethnic minority residents feel fully acknowledged – thanks to extra attention to their heritage as an inalienable part of cultural life.

This Ghentish dream is no stranger to the **great European values**. But to ensure that these values really do apply to everyone, we need a **system shift**: a collective transformation of the (cultural) apparatus of policy, institutions and the organisational world. A shift that returns ownership to the people, so that an inclusive 'we' can emerge. A change like this is only possible with all of us together: *'tuupetegoare'*. The local and supranational levels also need each other, like a plug needs a socket. **Ghent and Europe can't do without each other**. The challenges of our time – climate, digitalisation and AI, inequality, sustainable transport, decolonisation, war and so on – are too big to fit within the confines of our city ring road. Conversely, all the lofty ambitions of the EU, from the New European Bauhaus to the Strategy for Persons with Disabilities, can only become a reality if they are rooted in specific places,

between people, in institutions. This is precisely why Ghent wants to be a European Capital of Culture: because this system shift requires a **massive, collective momentum**. That is the only way to turn our city *in* transition into a city *of* transition. A city where the world of systems and the world of lived experience team up to really make that shift happen. This is why **'toopen'** will become the central generators of our cultural recharge as early as 2025: shared artistic workshops that will turn Ghent into one big, wide learning environment to co-create the programme for Ghent2030, with close links to other thinkers, doers and transformers elsewhere in Europe. Because the only way to cause a real shift is to work together. It is only through a learning process like this that we can develop the agility to respond better to our rapidly changing reality. We will work from these toopen to create more free space, a greater sense of belonging, greater *resistilience* and more active citizenship.

Ghent has the perfect genes to achieve this collective reinvention of cultural capital: as a rebellious city, a port city connected to the entire world, a city with a long tradition of social and cooperative cooperation, and as the European Youth Capital (EYC) in 2024. We don't want to invent anything new, but we do intend to bring everything together in new ways. We want to give oxygen to the things already happening at micro level and connect them across the city and in Europe at macro level. For a long time there was a slogan painted on one of the Ghent University buildings, visible to everyone walking past the Vooruit building: **'The next big thing will be a lot of small things'** (a work of art by Thomas Lommée). In 2030, we're aiming for the big connection and collectivisation of all those small things. That, in a nutshell, is also the key to the European project. In Ghent2030, that dream can come home. Our energy is boundless.





## *Q2 Ghent's plans to involve the surrounding area*

Many waterways – the Lys and Scheldt rivers, the Ghent-Terneuzen canal – and many major roads and bicycle highways connect Ghent closely to its direct surroundings. Nevertheless, the cultural systems of the central city and the neighbouring towns operate as parallel worlds. As part of its long-term strategy for 2040, Ghent intends to thoroughly recalibrate its relationship to the region. We are working with two priority areas to develop a regional vision for culture and put it into practice. Ghent2030 will act as a lever to make this happen.

1. To the north of Ghent is an elongated zone around the North Sea Port (on either side of the border between Belgium and the Netherlands). Here, we are teaming up with all the municipalities involved, in both countries, to develop **the economic axis between Ghent (BE) and Middelburg (NL)** culturally as well. This border zone lends itself perfectly to exploring how rural and more urban contexts can strengthen each other with art and culture. By responding to local social challenges with Ghent2030 and creating links across national and mental boundaries, we hope to connect people differently and strengthen their mental *resilience* to crises.

*STATUS: This coordination of efforts, focused on Ghent2030, will occur in the administrative cooperation zone in the North Sea Port District (NSPD) and Middelburg (the capital of Zeeland). Other members of the NSPD besides the City of Ghent are the Belgian municipalities of Evergem and Zelzate, the Dutch municipalities of Terneuzen, Borsele and Vlissingen and the provinces of East Flanders (B) and Zeeland (NL). These local governments have signed a declaration of intent to collaborate on Ghent2030, expanding it to include the city of Middelburg in Zeeland. This partnership will be made more concrete in 2024, with input from local cultural makers.*

2. Along with the – currently 22 – Flemish municipalities around Ghent, which have formed the **Ghent Reference Region (GRR)** since 2021, we intend to develop a shared regional cultural policy as equal partners. What if we looked at this whole area as a single cultural playing field with 670,000 inhabitants? Which underexploited strengths or forgotten needs require extra attention? In the context of Ghent2030, we aim to try out specific responses among policymakers, residents and artists (including amateurs). In this way, Ghent2030 will become a lever to structurally reformulate the cultural relationships between the city and the region.

*STATUS: There has been repeated consultation with the cultural staff of the 22 partner municipalities on the opportunities offered by Ghent2030. This has already generated many ideas for partnerships in heritage, leisure, temporary use, the promotion of culture and space for artists. The current mayors in the Ghent Reference Region also support Ghent's candidacy. After the local elections on 13 October 2024, we will give this collaboration a more concrete form, also involving independent cultural makers. In the new plans for the intermunicipal cultural regions, the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) will be noted as a key project to provide leverage.*

## North Sea Port District & Middelburg

With the Ghent-Terneuzen canal as its artery and also the River Scheldt as a connecting waterway, this region is a highly logical partner within the 'water as a weaver' aspect of the Ghent2030 programme. In 2024, it also became part of the UNESCO Global Geopark Schelde Delta. Historically, it has close ties to Ghent. Zeelandic Flanders was part of Flanders until the 17th century. From 1815 until Belgian independence in 1830 (exactly 200 years before 2030), both regions were part of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, which resulted in the foundation of Ghent University (1817) and the digging of the canal (1827), among other things. The ties that remain are mainly economic, including workers who commute across the border in both directions. For many people in Ghent, however, Zeeland is unfamiliar and as such unloved.

Nevertheless this Flemish-Dutch port region is a very relevant place socially, and of interest to Europe and similar European border regions. It is a largely rural area that has attracted heavy industry over the last 200 years. All today's global challenges come together here: rising sea levels, climate pollution, demographic decline, social and political disconnection, superdiversity, the future of agriculture and food provision, insufficient public transport, rural poverty and so on.

At present, culture here mainly serves for purely recreational purposes and the needs of tourism and the economy. There is a wasteland of opportunities lying fallow.

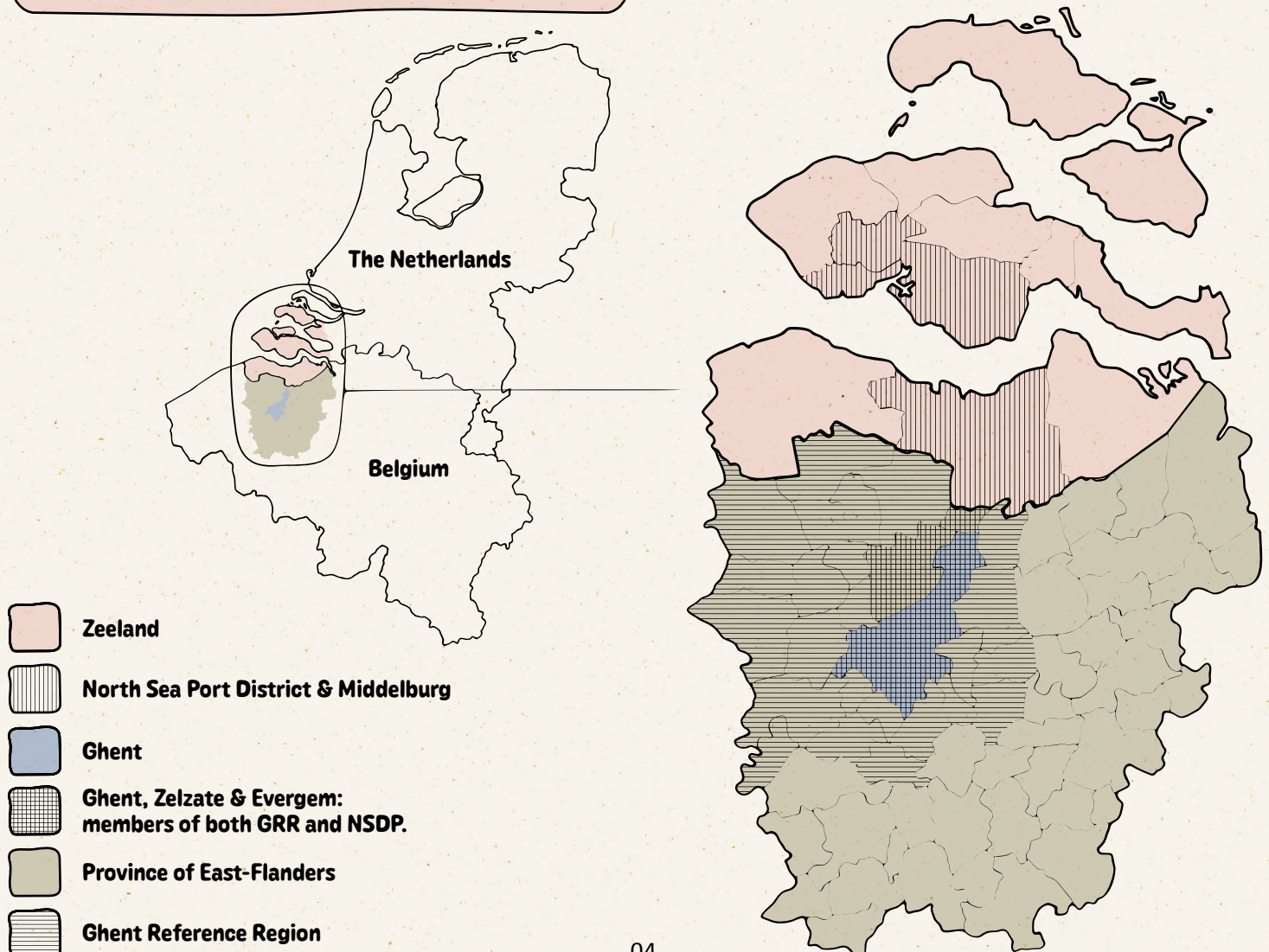
## Ghent Reference Region

The Ghent RR is one of the 15 regions into which Flanders has been divided for administrative purposes since 2021, to stimulate the forming of regions and collaboration between them. Ghent is more or less centrally located among the other 22 municipalities, but it has had little structural involvement until now in the links that they have with each other, for example in heritage working groups.

Nevertheless, Ghent has a clear function for many inhabitants of the region as a central city (for school, work, shopping or culture). Simultaneously, many young families are moving out of Ghent in favour of these neighbouring municipalities that are often greener, quieter and/or more affordable.

Historically, there has always been plenty of cultural interaction between Ghent and its direct surroundings. Take the painters from Ghent, for example, who went to live and work in the enchanting area along the River Lys in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (such as the 'Latem School' which included George Minne, Emile Claus and Constant Permeke), or the many castles built by Ghent aristocrats and textiles barons in the green belt around the city.

We see many opportunities to build new cultural bridges in the present with Ghent2030. Ghent has every interest in getting a better feel for the region's perspective. And not just because there is a lack of space.



Both regional collaborations tie in perfectly with Ghent2030's ambition to free up more space for creativity, tap into new connections and create extra energy with culture outside central Ghent as well. The impact of this collaboration on the **artistic and cultural strength of non-urban areas** will also continue to be felt after 2030 – and continue to inspire Europe as well.

In Ghent, there is a need to develop our first exploratory experiences of such intensive regional collaboration. That is why **we are drawing inspiration from other ECoCs** that have achieved great successes with similar regional ambitions, such as Aarhus, Leeuwarden and Evora (see Q16).

Besides these two priority collaborations, we are also aiming for **content-based collaborations with other regional/ Belgian/neighbouring governmental and cultural players** (for instance, other Belgian ECoC candidate cities, Liège and the Province of East Flanders for heritage, Roubaix and Lille in northern France, and so on). These collaborations will become more concrete in subsequent phases of our candidacy.

### *Q3 Overall cultural profile of the city*

**Ghent is a city of culture with two sides:  
a sunny side and a shadow side.**

#### **The sunny side of Ghent: something for everyone**

Ghent is characterised by its combination of ancient foundations and contemporary cool. In 2030, our city will be celebrating its 1400th birthday: Ghent was founded in 630, when Saint Amandus chose the confluence (or 'Ganda') of the Lys and Scheldt rivers as the place to build an abbey. We would like nothing more than to celebrate that birthday with the whole of Europe in our **atmospheric, mediaeval setting** with a cathedral, bell tower, three beguinages and countless unique monuments and art treasures – of which the world-famous painting The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb by the Van Eyck brothers (180,000 visitors per year) and the Castle of the Counts (450,000 visitors per year) are just two. Within a few square kilometres, you can find **an abundance of art and heritage** in our city. Besides the City Museum for Contemporary Art (S.M.A.K), the Museum of Fine Arts (MSK), Ghent City Museum (STAM) and St Peter's Abbey, Ghent also has its Design Museum, Museum of Industry, Museum Dr. Guislain focusing on psychological well-being and, since 2020, the Ghent University Museum (GUM) as well. This combination of specific museums says much about Ghent's cultural identity in itself. As a city of textiles, Ghent has a rich industrial heritage, but it also has a long history of care.

A **contemporary culture of creativity and innovation** is flourishing on these historical foundations. We are spoiled for choice every day in this rich array of culture. Since 2009, Ghent has borne the title of UNESCO Creative City of Music as a trendsetter in music – a title which only Glasgow, Bologna and Sevilla earned before us. Our city hosts the most important film festival in Belgium, Film Fest Gent, along with Gent Jazz that attracts a good 40,000 music lovers to the city each year; it is home to the Flemish Circus Centre and Poetry Centre and has both an opera house and a famous techno scene, plus two of the eight arthouse cinemas in Flanders. Among our

nine permanent concert halls is De Bijloke, the oldest in the world. The Wintercircuit was also re-opened recently as an architecturally impressive incubator for start-ups and scale-ups in the tech sector that are seeking connections with the creative sector. Together, around **500 creative businesses in film, gaming, design, architecture** etc. account for 4% of employment in the city.

As a university city and the biggest student city in Flanders, we are in close contact with a **great deal of knowledge and research**, symbolised culturally by Ghent University's very striking Book Tower. With two major art schools (LUCA and KASK & Conservatorium) in the city, there is also a huge annual influx of new talent in drama, music, animation, visual art, etc. into the professional arts. And that bears fruit. The challenging stage productions made in Ghent by Alain Platel, Milo Rau, Ontroerend Goed, CAMPO and others travel **all over the world** today, as does the DJ Charlotte De Witte or the visual art of Berlinde de Bruyckere and Michaël Borremans. Many Ghent-based cultural and heritage organisations also work almost daily with foreign counterparts in international networks and European projects. Borders are there to be pushed back, as we believe in Ghent.

At the same time, Ghent's rich history with the workers' movement keeps it keenly aware of the **social aspect of artistic and cultural production**. Now subsidising seven socio-artistic groups, Ghent has been offering **fertile soil for participative art practices** for 30 years, not infrequently in neighbourhoods that lack public infrastructure or face challenges linked to safety or social cohesion. The wide-ranging, socio-artistic civil society is also deeply embedded in the neighbourhoods through many key figures. And that resonates throughout the cultural field. In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, the arts sector spontaneously teamed up with the social sector to provide an artistic offering on people's doorsteps. Heritage policy in Ghent is also infused with attention to 'ordinary people', with a **strong focus on the intangible power of daily traditions and hidden stories**, for example at the House of Alijn, in the district project 'The Square Kilometre' (see Q18) or on the innovative digital platform 'De Collectie van de Gentenaar' ('Collections of Ghent' or CoGhent), a collaborative analogue and digital project that brings together Ghent's museums, heritage institutions and residents to share and celebrate their cultural heritage (see Q12). A similarly inclusive atmosphere characterises the new Ghent library De Krook: partly thanks to 14 local branches, it is our most frequently visited cultural institution, where a very wide variety of Ghent locals eagerly spend time reading or just hanging out. In Ghent, culture will either be social and participatory, or it will not be.

This rich cultural life is a policy choice. When the city council needed to save a good 21 million euros at the end of 2022, the cultural sector was deliberately spared from the cut. The people of Ghent also value this creative abundance. In comparison with people in other central Flemish cities, Ghent residents engage most regularly with culture (60%), show the highest appreciation for the culture on offer (87%) and emphatically rank Ghent's cultural policy as the most appreciated area of policy. Might **Ghent's culture of festivities** have something to do with that? We are a city of big events, many of which are in the streets, such as Odegand with classical music at the waterside or our Light Festival every three years, with around 700,000 people coming to see light art in public spaces. Here in Ghent, we genuinely love celebrating life

together. From the carnival in Ledeborg to tipsy student nights in the Overpoort, our culture of festivities has a subversive edge. The high point of the year is the Ghent Festivities every summer: ten days of free popular festivities in the city centre held since 1843, with more than 3,500 shows ranging from art to entertainment, by more than 400 organisers for 1.6 million people. When we party in Ghent, we do it en masse and for days on end. Will you come and join us, Europe?

### The shadow side of Ghent: systems that are stuck

However, we are receiving various signals that our broadly developed cultural system in Ghent is hitting its limits. Is it becoming an obstacle to its own ambitions? We can name eight such signals.

1. Although many gaze enviously at the spirit of cooperation that emanates from the Gents Kunstenoverleg (Ghent Arts Platform, or GKO), a similarly energetic exchange of views with the social sector, part-time arts education or the worlds of technology and economics is still limited. **'We operate in silos too much, among like minds'**, was a frequent complaint in the first exploratory survey for Ghent2030. Have our systems become too complex to break out of them?
2. **Ethno-cultural diversity is still a challenge.** Our cultural institutions are hardly on the radar of ethnic minority Ghent residents, a survey by Burgerplicht revealed. On average, this group could only name 4 of the 162 cultural organisations in Ghent that receive Flemish government grants, whereas young people feel that their creative potential is not taken seriously enough. Many amateur associations are also still very white. And that in a city where half of our children up to the age of 9 have migrant parents or grandparents... We see attempts to diversify the cultural offering and the people employed in culture everywhere, but this often gets no further than projects. A genuine transition is yet to occur.
3. Many are frustrated by the increase in **regulations, bureaucracy and compartmentalisation** required to get 'permission' to create culture. For example, there are the stricter noise limits that now make it much more difficult for youth clubs to organise small, open-air concerts. Didn't Ghent use to be the city where anything was possible?
4. 60% of all Ghent residents regularly engage with culture. But what is stopping the other 40%? What obstacles do they experience? It is no coincidence that, for example, there is **significantly less participation in culture among residents who live outside the centre of Ghent**. Of all the 120 cultural institutions subsidised by the city, 94% are based in the small city centre. Are the centre and the periphery drifting apart?
5. There is also a **lack of places to create culture**. Arts centres can no longer cope with the growing demand from new creators, leading to frustration on both sides. Especially for young artists, rent prices in Ghent are often too high to stay here after their studies. There is a lack of affordable studio and rehearsal space (and access to them). Dancers in particular often prefer to move to Brussels. Thus Ghent risks losing creative talent.



6. More and more **burnouts in cultural centres** indicate that the pace of production and presentation is difficult to keep up with, or that cultural creators are experiencing exhausting splits between their dreams and the context in which they have to operate. Is there a lack of connection between words and deeds, mission and measurement?
7. In spite of all the scans, projects, support and coaching by Greentrack (an organisation working on the **ecological transition, set up by Ghent's cultural scene itself**), **the collective ecological footprint of all the cultural infrastructure is still too large**. It is still a difficult, expensive task to make that infrastructure genuinely sustainable. Many opportunities in mobility and culture as a social awareness-raiser also remain underexploited.
8. The exploratory survey of 400 key figures in the run-up to Ghent2030 concluded on the **rapidly expanding digitalisation of the cultural offering** that: 'Positive first steps have been taken in Ghent, but there are still big gaps as well.' Is cultural Ghent really ready for the digital shift, with regard to both digital marketing and making its offering accessible?

It is clear that the complex cultural system in Ghent is at risk of getting stuck (as it is in many other cities). That is why Ghent wants to invent a new culture of involvement as a European Capital of Culture, in which institutions make the transition together and the whole of Ghent feels that they are part of it. It is in the nature of Ghent to innovate, experiment and reinvent. But how do we trigger a system shift?

Ghent2030 is a combination of 1) three artistic programme lines and 2) a unique approach to the process of really making our collective transformation happen. In 2030, this combination will result in an inclusive, varied and strong programme, co-owned by everyone in Ghent and many other players in Europe. It will enable us to cherish culture as the main lever and accelerator of the lives we share, offering space and energy to gain *resistilience* for all the changes that are already happening and those that are yet to come.

### Three artistic programme lines

At the heart of Ghent2030 are three metaphors representing the three artistic lines of our programme. They capture typical characteristics of Ghent as well as converting our system analysis (places that are full, systems that are stuck and people who are left behind) and the mission of Ghent2030 into three tangible, spatial symbols. These symbols inspire creative imagination in cultural players, but also in our residents and stakeholders from other sectors.



**Wasteland as a wellspring:** the natural wildness of unexploited land and liminal zones as a metaphor for clear space, learning, growth and unbridled creativity beyond fixed formulas.



**Water as a weaver:** the flowing fluidity of our most elementary raw material as a metaphor for connectiveness, life force and elemental energy, beyond closed-off silos.



**Margin as a measure:** the often-invisible power of the periphery as a metaphor for turning the centralised perspective inside out and playing with borders, beyond the familiar hierarchies.

Every initiative and aspect of the programme within Ghent2030 will be based on one (or more) of these three programme lines. They feel Ghentish, but simultaneously invite everyone in Europe to connect with them. Wasteland, water and margins are everywhere. Equally, they symbolise our alternative definition of cultural capital in terms of people and nature.

### The 'toop' as a participatory processor

To put the mission of Ghent2030 into practice straight away and start tackling the transformation of our cultural system collectively, we will start working from 2024 onwards with **'toopen' as the backbone of our entire co-creative process** to shape the programme of our European Capital of Culture (see Q10). You might see them as sanctuaries outside the existing structures.

We have defined the concept of 'toopen' on the fold-out page. **In practice, a toop for Ghent2030 is:**

- **A physical or mental space where artists, citizens, cultural organisations and other bodies work together** to put an artistic idea or socio-cultural learning goal into practice. You might also call it a group workshop: a laboratory or studio where a community works and learns to shape a specific result. The focus of the toop might be an issue affecting Ghent, the region or Europe.



- **A participatory way to develop a programme:** each toop is aligned with one (or more) of the three programme lines and aims for concrete contributions to the programme of Ghent2030, ranging from a major exhibition to a conference, a neighbourhood festival to a book, etc. Artists are always involved, but a toop never consists exclusively of artists.
- **A shared learning environment for the system switch that Ghent2030 is working towards:** every toop is different from other collaborations because it puts the '12 values' and '3 learning principles' of Ghent2030 into practice (see fold-out page). These values and learning principles are the outcomes of our broad participative process in preparation for this bidbook (see Q13/17). All of these brainstorming sessions, with countless interested parties, revealed a need to pay at least as much attention to the process leading up to Ghent2030 as to the programme itself. This is why all the toopen will embrace the values and learning principles as their inalienable foundations.

Thus toopen operate consciously as **alternative learning environments**, where the cultural sector gains practice with other players in a more engaged **form of cultural programming**. They develop a way of making culture that gives residents and other sectors a greater sense of belonging, as well as initiating new connections and helping people and the system itself acquire new skills. As such, we can align Ghent2030 with several ECoCs before us, choosing a path that we would like to develop further. With our wide-ranging experiences of participative collaboration with the freethinking yet social mindset that typifies Ghent, we aim to create a surprising programme that can inspire others in return.

# 1. Contribution to the Long-Term Strategy

## Q5 Ghent's current Cultural Strategy

### I. From today to tomorrow

**Ghent's current cultural strategy** until 2025 (drawn up and approved by Ghent city council in 2018) focuses mainly on:

- **culture as a driving** force for social cohesion in the districts of the city
- **more inclusiveness** within the sector
- encouraging people to **engage with the arts in their free time**
- strengthening certain **disciplines**, such as circus and film
- making the city's **cultural infrastructure** more sustainable

**After 2025, we want to take things a step further, by putting culture at the very heart** of the City of Ghent's overall mission to shape a diverse, sustainable and internationally connected community through co-creation and experimentation – a community that everyone can feel part of. The City of Ghent's mission reads as follows:

*Ghent is a proud city  
where people like to live, work and enjoy life.  
A city that breathes and lets others breathe.  
Everyone is equally different and belongs equally to Ghent.  
Children here get the space they need to grow.  
People get the opportunity to develop their talents.  
In Ghent, we are enterprising and adventurous.  
Our sights are set on the world.  
We are creating the city together.  
And we are turning the city into an even  
better Ghent for the generations to come.*

**Like the European Union (EU) itself, the City of Ghent sees culture and creativity as the key to innovation and understanding.** To achieve this, there is a need for a renewed cultural ecosystem that strengthens social cohesion and offers people space to build a '*resilient*' city together, with minimal rules and maximum wonder. Ghent wants to be a pioneer in this area: how can culture become a genuine driving force for how we shape the future? At present, culture is rarely mentioned in our transition plans for urban development, for example, or other major urban projects. This is a missed opportunity.

### II. Work in progress

This key cultural vision has not simply dropped into our laps. It is the result of an extensive, bottom-up process that began in 2018 and will continue until June 2025, involving a wide range of cultural players, **leading up to a cultural strategy for 2040** that transcends legislative terms. For example, a survey has been conducted of 200 people involved in the arts in their free time, as well as a stakeholder analysis of cultural infrastructure, a learning network with cultural district programmers from 10 Ghent districts, an analysis of more than 1,000 cultural organisations in Ghent and a meeting day for the sector (April 2024) to reflect together on the link between culture and innovation, sustainability and democracy. The many participative sessions linked to Ghent2030 also provided extra input (see Q13).

**The coordinator of the whole process is Cultuur Gent**, the city's cultural department. It is integrating the legacy of European projects such as CoGhent and EYC 2024 into this strategy development, whilst drawing inspiration from consultations in international networks such as Culture Next, Eurocities, AVIAMA and the UNESCO Creative Cities Network and more focused contacts with specific cities in Europe.

This cultural strategy for 2040 is based on **four equally important pillars or major goals** that the city council validated in June 2024. In the second half of 2024, Cultuur Gent will be converting these pillars into **concrete action points** (including the allocation of resources) in consultation with the city's relevant policy departments, the cultural sector and linked sectors, the GKO, the Cultuurraad (Cultural Council) that contributes official advice from the sector, higher levels of government and so on. The final validation of these action points and budgets will happen when drafting the new city administration's multiannual plan (June 2025).

### III. Four pillars: what our cultural strategy aims for

1. **CONNECTION** – The cultural sector in Ghent embraces the city in all its diversity: in cultures, languages and disciplines. The sector will emerge as a pioneer of innovative collaborations and exchanges between communities, organisations and individuals, across physical borders and borders of content. This will result in more social cohesion and safe surroundings where people genuinely feel at home and enjoy contributing to an open, resilient, caring and spacious city. Culture will also be a fundamental part of the city's strategy and specific development and transition plans.
2. **SUSTAINABILITY** – Artists and cultural organisations are obvious partners to help seek sustainable, circular solutions to complex social, ecological, economic and democratic questions. Likewise, in day-to-day practice, the cultural sector will demonstrate its leadership in ecological and social sustainability and innovation, from fair pay to accessible infrastructure. Obstacles to participation in culture will be broken down, and all Ghent residents will have access to culture in their neighbourhood.
3. **FREETHINKING** – The people of Ghent are rebellious, original thinkers who love to swim against the tide. We will cherish this critical culture among cultural creators and organisations in order to question and improve what we already have, among their audiences as well. Artistic freedom will be safeguarded, also in the light of new technological developments. By means of an extensive and accessible support policy with minimal rules, the City of Ghent will offer great trust and maximum opportunities. There is nothing wrong with friction now and then. Freethinking is a crucial feature of active citizenship, required to build a resilient city together.
4. **WONDER** – Art and culture must also be allowed simply to move us and inspire wonder: beauty too can be a goal in itself. Art will have a prominent place in public spaces, including those outside the city centre. There is space for

all disciplines to grow and flourish, both professionally and as a leisure pastime. The cultural strategy will keep things in balance and ensure that the culture and art on offer in and around Ghent is diverse, ranging from literature to graffiti and from arthouse films to techno. Not everything needs to be intended for everybody or to involve them all at the same time. This diversity is also crucial.

Ghent2030 will provide a layer of fertile soil in which these four principles can grow to fruition: the ECoC year creates momentum to ensure they take root throughout the city and at European level, becoming tangible in the workings of the city and the cultural sectors. Conversely, the cultural strategy for 2040 will make the results of the Ghent2030 toopen more sustainable. In this way, we are creating a dynamic and sustainable local cultural ecosystem that helps to achieve the City of Ghent's mission.

*Q6 Plans to strengthen the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors, including long-term links between these sectors and the economic and social sectors*

To put this strategy into practice and offer a *resilient* approach to the 'wicked problems' of today and tomorrow (from alienation to a lack of space), **transformations are needed** within the city administration, in the culture and heritage sector, and in the collaboration with other sectors. Culture can only offer a creative recharge for society if it is also the focal point of a **broad network of energy moving between domains**. Responses to complex issues simply cannot be produced by one sector alone. We need to connect all available capacities.

## I. The City

Even though Ghent is a pioneer of participative policymaking, the cultural sector, youth work, civil society and other sectors in Ghent are still confronted with financing in silos, difficult choices due to limited budgets, complicated procedures and fragmented or demanding reporting. This is why the City of Ghent intends to commit to:

1. **A more fluid support policy through a culture of trust**, in the form of less regulated processes and a more accessible support policy. Artists and organisations must have the space to focus on their core practice; without it, authentic freethinking is impossible.
2. **Breaking down walls between areas of policy**, for example through cross-sectoral district and project teams and similarly structured support. This should also be done in collaboration with different administrative levels, such as the Province of Zeeland, surrounding municipalities in the Ghent RR, the Province of East Flanders, the Flemish Community and the European Commission.
3. **Integrating culture into city policy as a possible response to collective challenges** across policy domains. Culture and partners must be involved from the outset in urban development plans.

4. More **exchange and collaboration between the arts (whether practiced professionally or in people's free time) and education**. The foundations of a *resilient* collective are laid at school. See Q19.
5. Initiating and stimulating new forms of **democracy and participation in policymaking**.
6. A **commitment to a socially and ecologically sustainable city**, where everyone has access to art and culture, public space, communication and a cross-sectoral infrastructure policy. We will help to ensure sustainability in every sense of the term. We are committed to fair pay and the removal of financial obstacles (e.g. with the Uitpas).
7. **Facilitating sustainable dialogue and matchmaking** between cultural institutions interested in district-based activities, cultural programmers in the districts and other facilitators there.
8. **Offering extra stimuli for international exchanges** involving Ghent-based players, by opening up the City's urban network with European partners more effectively.

## II. The culture and heritage sector

Along with Ghent's cultural, artistic and heritage organisations, we will shape a cultural **ecosystem that is even more meaningful** to the people and lives in the city and beyond. Hidden mechanisms of exclusion will disappear, and the existing capacity will be distributed better. For example, the City of Ghent aims to support the culture and heritage sector by committing to these transformations:

1. **A broader range of culture on offer in the districts** outside the city centre and in the municipalities around Ghent, based on a policy of distribution harmonised between cultural players and many active citizens. The suburban periphery will become a shared area of attention.
2. **Inclusiveness and diversity as a given**, through a social sustainability code (on issues such as more intersectionally diverse staff) and a completely accessible cultural infrastructure for visitors with disabilities. We will also continue to remove financial obstacles to participation in culture, for instance with the Uitpas and principles such as 'pay what you can'.
3. A sector with a **robust approach to the climate**, based on principles such as CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, socio-ecological justice, reuse of materials, sustainable mobility, water saving, etc. (see the action plan by Greentrack, the socio-ecological thinktank set up by Ghent's cultural sector).

4. **Embracing digitisation as a strength** rather than a threat: we will reinforce creative use of artificial intelligence (AI) and other rapid digital developments for audience development, archiving, learning processes, sustainability, creating more connections between the past and future, etc.
5. Structural consultation between the GKO and the social, care and welfare sectors, to **increase dialogue between social needs** and artistic planning and programming.
6. **Training key figures, facilitators and civil cultural programmers** to continue encouraging the spirit of cross-sectoral activity. The GKO will set up its own Learning Centre to strengthen the exchange of learning needs, knowledge-sharing and online and offline training.
7. A **cross-sectoral infrastructure policy** focused on shared use, whether temporary or long term. For this, we are committing to the necessary (shared) digital platforms and a pooling of skills and capacity. We are drawing inspiration from good practices elsewhere in Europe.
8. **Linking up creative talents in the cultural and economic sectors**, by organising a structural exchange between the two sectors aimed at mutual enrichment. Simultaneously, we guarantee everyone's autonomy.

This will bring different sectors and systems into closer relationships, enabling them to respond more pertinently to the needs of various users and citizens. Each year, the city and the sector can celebrate and publicly showcase the results of their collective capacity building and cultural shift.



## Q7 How is the European Capital of Culture initiative included in this strategy?

The ECoC year will be a crucial element in the realisation of our long-term cultural strategy:

1. Ghent2030 will be the necessary **catalyst** for our ambition of achieving a culture shift by 2040 with the entire ecosystem in Ghent. Only a **collective, city-wide transformation** of this kind can genuinely cause a shift. This is precisely where the title of European Capital of Culture creates the ideal momentum: it calls upon all the systems to join the process together, with an allure that Cultuur Gent could never generate on its own. All the cultural sectors, civil society, large sections of the city's administration, the business community, the wider region and other levels of government, many international networks: as an ECoC, we will be able to involve all of them at once in the practical task of shaping our long-term strategy. This **cross-sectoral collaboration** is crucial to the system shift and capacity building that we aspire to in Ghent.
2. Ghent2030 will be the **direct laboratory and particle accelerator** for our ambition to inject culture into the heart of life in Ghent. Ghent2030 will not limit the strategic policy process to drawing boards and meeting rooms; instead, we will refine it through **learning by doing with the entire community**. Ghent2030 will make our strategy into more of a 'plan being implemented' than a 'plan to be implemented'. This learning by doing is essential to system change and to authentic freethinking. The proof of the plan is in the practice.
3. Ghent2030 puts our **local experiment with systemic transformation into a broader, European perspective**. We will draw inspiration for our strategy from other parts of Europe and will take the opportunity to give back our own insights into 'culture shifts' on a broad scale. This **'free sharing of insights and experiences'** is a key to the alternative capacity building we aspire to. Sharing is caring.

That makes Ghent2030 the **ideal lever** to try out the city's long-term goals in practice, to scale them up to the required level and to share them internationally at the same time. The toopen lay the foundation: developing the necessary skills and competencies, practicing shared ownership, and creating new empowering connections. In the legacy, we sustain all these new relationships and insights.

This table illustrates the interaction between the cultural strategy and the ECoC year:

| CULTURAL STRATEGY FOR 2040 | GOAL OF CULTURAL STRATEGY                                                                                                                                   | CONTRIBUTION IN 2030                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CONNECTION                 | Innovative collaborations and exchanges of knowledge and expertise will strengthen Ghent's cultural sector, across physical borders and borders of content. | Ghent2030 will honour the basic principle of creating maximum cross-sectional connections, often in surprising ways – both locally, regionally and internationally.                 |
|                            | Social cohesion will increase in the districts of Ghent and the region.                                                                                     | Ghent2030 is thinking beyond the city centre to the districts and connecting Zeeland, Ghent and Europe so that communities can come together across municipal and national borders. |
|                            | Culture is a fundamental part of the city's strategy.                                                                                                       | Ghent2030 will amplify the sense of togetherness in Ghent, the region and the whole of Europe. The programme aims to offer a diverse range that appeals to all population groups.   |
| SUSTAINABILITY             | The cultural organisations and creators in Ghent are partners in the search for innovative solutions to complex issues.                                     | Ghent2030 is committed to cross-sectoral collaboration with tech companies, the care sector, economic and ecological players and so on.                                             |
|                            | The people of Ghent will no longer experience barriers (physical, mental or financial) to making and enjoying culture.                                      | Ghent2030 will provide culture in every district, with attention paid to 'safe spaces' and opportunities for talented youngsters.                                                   |
|                            | The cultural infrastructure will be sustainable and accessible.                                                                                             | Ghent2030 will commit to opportunities to share (semi-public) space and make it genuinely accessible.                                                                               |
| FREETHINKING               | Cultural organisations and creators will have clear and easy access to support, always with a guarantee of artistic freedom and autonomy.                   | Ghent2030 will experiment with more flexible rules, low levels of regulations and new financing possibilities in various forms.                                                     |
|                            | Innovative methodologies and technological progress will form an integral aspect of its operation.                                                          | Ghent2030 will make use of new technologies and AI.                                                                                                                                 |
|                            | Art and culture will contribute to active citizenship.                                                                                                      | Ghent2030 will experiment with forms of shared ownership, inviting all residents to participate.                                                                                    |
| WONDER                     | Art will have a prominent place in public spaces, including those in the margins.                                                                           | Ghent2030 will bring art and culture to every district, seeking surprising places and playgrounds that have not yet been exploited.                                                 |
|                            | All the creative, artistic and cultural disciplines will receive the support they need, including amateur arts, gaming, film, circus, etc.                  | Ghent2030 will commit to a maximum diversity of artistic disciplines by local, regional and international performers and artists.                                                   |
|                            | The art and culture on offer in Ghent will be diverse, with all possible variations on the theme.                                                           | The programming for Ghent2030 will include both highbrow culture and more mainstream events and opportunities for gatherings, such as community dances.                             |

*Q8 Expected long-term cultural, social and economic impact*

The intended impact of both 2030 and 2040 is summarised in the table below. All of these aspects can be measured based on the data available from the city's cultural department, other policy departments, support points, the city monitor or the Flemish Government's leisure monitor.

| IMPACT<br>2030-<br>2040 | CULTURAL                                                                                                                             | SOCIAL                                                                                                                          | ECONOMIC                                                                                                        | URBAN DEVELOPMENT<br>(SPACE/ECOLOGY)                                                                           |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CONNECTION              | Culture is public property that will be honoured as such.                                                                            | Citizens will understand each other's culture, which ensures that society becomes more harmonious.                              | More talent retained in the port area thanks to the cultural collaboration in the NSPD and Middelburg.          | The proportion of activities in the city centre compared to the districts will be balanced.                    |
|                         | Integration into the field of education will stimulate children from a young age, ensuring that culture is part of their upbringing. | Social cohesion in Ghent will increase, along with trust in Europe.                                                             | Linking the desires and interests of residents to those of visitors will lead to more sustainable tourism.      | Incorporating cultural needs into urban development will make the city more inclusive.                         |
| SUSTAINABILITY          | The conscious and responsible application of technological and innovative development will connect the past and future.              | The cultural infrastructure will be physically accessible to everyone.                                                          | More young creatives will stay in Ghent thanks to the structural collaboration between economy and culture.     | The cultural sector will set an example and lead the way in ecological sustainability.                         |
|                         | Cultural policy will be socially sustainable.                                                                                        | The number of burnouts in Ghent's artistic sector will fall.                                                                    | Shopping streets will be livelier since empty commercial spaces will be used for creativity and innovation.     | The artistic line 'water as the weaver' will make people aware of the importance of adaptation to the climate. |
| FREETHINKING            | Application procedures for support will be accessible to all cultural creators.                                                      | Shared cultural ownership will mean that more Ghent residents will contribute actively to our society.                          | Fewer rules and more accessible procedures will create more space for enterprise, also on the margins of Ghent. | Low-regulated procedures will ensure more innovative urban projects that respond better to trends and needs.   |
|                         | Breaking down barriers will improve support to transversal disciplines.                                                              | New forms of democracy and participation in (cultural) policy will give Ghent residents a voice, and they will feel understood. | There will be supplementary financing channels for artists.                                                     | Sharing space will be a given. Cross-sectoral temporary use will increase.                                     |
| WONDER                  | Participation in culture will rise due to a diverse cultural offering that responds to the needs of Ghent residents.                 | More people in Ghent will set up cultural initiatives or pursue a cultural education.                                           | More people will come to Ghent for pleasure because of the lively atmosphere.                                   | A rich, diverse cultural offering will contribute to a vibrant city that is attractive to young adults.        |
|                         | Major international productions will be welcome on our stages or in the region.                                                      | Enjoying culture together in the districts will improve the social fabric of neighbourhoods.                                    | Ghent will posit itself as a cultural hotspot, which helps it to attract other big events and also conferences. | The number of artworks in public space and pieces of street art will increase.                                 |

## Q9 The plans for monitoring and evaluation

In Ghent2030, learning and sharing the learning insights gained is one of the three principles for each toop. As such, closely monitoring and evaluating the ECoC year feels obvious. According to the basic philosophy of Ghent2030, we will develop a specific evaluation and monitoring framework that will build upon what has already been learned elsewhere.

### Measuring the impact of the ECoC year

To monitor the impact of Ghent2030, we will take the **Theory of Change** as a broad basis. This method is well-suited to transformation processes. It has already been used in Ghent for European projects such as EYC 2024 and CoGhent. Specific measuring tools were developed in those contexts, such as impact assessment surveys, which can also be used for Ghent2030.

In order to monitor the learning process in the toopen from the end of 2024, we will use the **ABC of the Self-Determination Theory**. This theory, by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, states that there are three basic needs for human motivation to tackle things: **Autonomy, Belonging and Competence** (ABC). Much in-depth research has been done on this ABC in Belgium and abroad, which has also formed the basis for the three learning principles of Ghent2030: shared ownership (A), surprising connections (B) and radical learning (C) - (see fold-out page)

Detailed measurement models have also been developed from this Self-Determination Theory, and there is considerable expertise in these at Ghent University and elsewhere. We intend to survey participants on these specific parameters using short questionnaires: to what extent have they got to know new people, been able to take decisions or gained new skills? We will then share these insights in the city and in Europe with people, organisations and bodies with comparable learning goals. They also provide data for the impact evaluation in 2030 and beyond.

### Data

The evaluation and monitoring methods for Ghent2030 will be a **combination of qualitative and quantitative indicators and data**. We will follow the European Commission's guidelines for ECoC evaluations. In terms of data, we already have a lot of figures in Ghent and Flanders that are collected periodically. They can help map the cultural, economic, and social impact of Ghent 2030, including its long-term effects:

#### Municipal and city monitors:

these provide background scans for the broad situation of every Flemish town and city (including Ghent), in the form of a citizen survey that investigates topics such as satisfaction, participation and the behaviour of citizens in relationship to culture. The monitor compares Flemish cities and evolutions over time, making it well suited for measuring the impact of an ECoC year on the city.

#### City of Ghent's data:

all the data that Ghent has can be consulted on the City of Ghent's website. We have our own Data and Information Department that specialises in monitoring. Every six years it provides a background analysis, a study that analyses the context in Ghent based on numerical data, such as economic growth, the number of tourists, attendance figures for the performing arts, etc.

#### SDG reporting and SDG monitor:

Since 2020, the City of Ghent has monitored its policies annually with sustainability reports, fulfilling a pioneering role in Flanders. Ghent contributed to the development of the Flemish SDG Monitor, a tool that provides insight into how Flemish cities and municipalities score on the 17 SDGs based on more than 240 indicators.

### Who does the monitoring?

To support the evaluation and monitoring of Ghent2030, we intend to collaborate with Ghent University, HoGent, Artevelde University of Applied Sciences, and imec/mict (Ghent University's highly specialised research group on digitisation, which is also a partner in CoGhent). Some of their impact researchers have already committed to the design and sounding board groups for Ghent2030 and to the thinktank for evaluation and monitoring. Collaboration with educational institutions ensures greater objectivity, as well as engaging students with Ghent2030.

For evaluation, we are also working with **Ghent's broad and varied civil society**, through key figures who will survey diverse target groups using (accessible) methods such as 'waiting room chats'. We also run **workshops for volunteers**, including people from the cultural sector, who want to gain skills to help evaluate and monitor the whole process. This way, we are working on capacity-building throughout the sector.

### Furthermore, we have borrowed some good practices from other ECoC cities:

Like **Leeds2023**, we are putting the data for the ECoC year on a separate website. Ghent already has the necessary background data to do this, such as figures on demographics, society, health, education, etc. for each part of the city and for the city as a whole.

Like **Bodø 2024**, we are setting up a reference group of experts from previous ECoC countries and from universities in other member states, for advice and inspiration.

Ghent will join the platform set up as a research project for Culture Next. The intention of this evaluation instrument is to measure the collective and local impact of culture and the ECoC and to align it with the SDGs. At present, **13 former and future ECoC cities** are participating, such as Leeds, Leeuwarden, Oulu, Elefsina and Chemnitz.

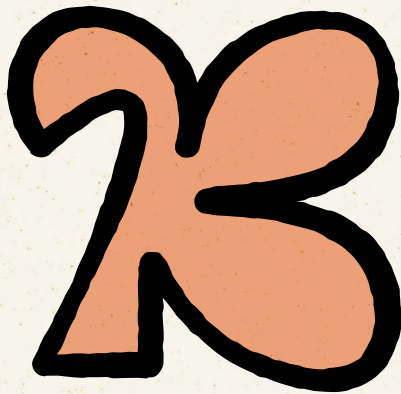
## 2. Cultural and Artistic Content

### *Q10 Our artistic vision and strategy*

Imagine the programme for Ghent2030 as one big garden. Not a place that is meticulously planned by one star architect who can gaze five years into the future, but the flourishing result of a gradual growth process by many green fingers. It is a bit like the patchwork of allotments we find in Ghent: wild, diverse and original. Likewise, our European Capital of Culture will be both an orchard of delicious fruit and a practice of gardening together. The toopen will dig in the compost. The programme in 2030 will represent the harvest of all the energy they gather.

#### **Our three artistic programme lines as common ground**

These lines are the fruit of intensive conversations in a temporary artistic team of eight cultural creators from outside the cultural institutions. From October 2023 until March 2024, they considered all the ideas that had been collected through participation and expanded upon them in dialogue with many other people. That enabled them to convert the mission of Ghent2030 into three evocative metaphors. These are both specific places ('topoi') and ideas with a long history.



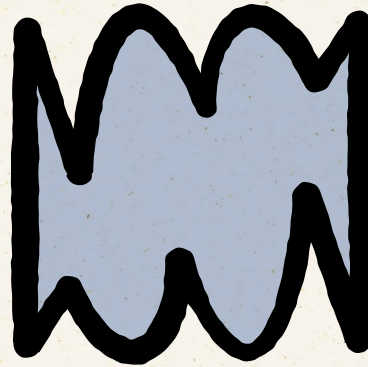
#### **Wasteland as a wellspring**

Originally, wasteland meant the fallow fields that were not used for one or more years so that the soil could recover. Today, wasteland is described as 'land that is not currently fulfilling its intended purpose'.

That pause for rest and quietness generates a healing power, whilst also offering space for unpredictable creative possibilities, a new beginning.

Sometimes you need to take the time to recharge and free up energy so that you can find the essence: connection with yourself and others. In that clear, empty space, the rules that shape our thoughts and actions fade away. Our minds open up to unexpected inspiration, learning or knowledge, beyond the everlasting, functional focus on personal growth goals. New synergies emerge spontaneously. Ultimately, the community and society also gain extra breathing space as well.

One fifth of Ghent's surface area is agricultural land; in fact, two fifths of the entire territory of the EU is agricultural. Isn't it strange that we are alienated from our fallow fields? Couldn't the wasteland offer more space for diversity rather than monoculture, for extra 'free time' rather than constant mass production?



#### **Water as a weaver**

Ghent originated at the convergence of the rivers Lys and Scheldt, at the place now called Portus Ganda, the small harbour for pleasure boats and canoes beside the historic Van Eyck swimming pool. In the Middle Ages, the

entire network of waterways was crucial to survival as a major European city. Even today, these waterways keep the city cool as the climate heats up, and all the water buffers and flood plains around Ghent protect our vital needs in times of flooding.

Water is capital. According to the WWF, the value of water in Europe amounts to three times the GNP of Germany. In Ghent, the port provides direct or indirect employment for 70,000 people, or almost a quarter of the city's population. A staggering 90% of the global economy is dependent on water, Water Europe claims. Nevertheless, water remains our most undervalued resource. We only think about it when sprinkler bans are imposed in hot summers. Europe has lost 90% of its flood plains and now has the most fragmented water landscape on earth, with more than a million blockades.

Just as water connects what is above ground to what is below, our interpersonal networks determine what flows through the city and society. In these terms, Ghent and Europe find themselves in turbulent waters. Growing xenophobia, international conflicts and a general sense of insecurity: the water is rising, sometimes up to our necks. What social lifelines can we grasp to fight declining kindness?

Water as a weaver stands for the elementary connections we depend upon as a community. For continuing to move in fluid ways. For always finding our way, around and over and through obstacles and difficulties. Water is unstoppable. More and more disastrous flooding is unfortunately showing how destructive that can be. Water is everywhere. Even human beings are 70% water.



## Margin as a measure

So much of value is lurking in the messy margins. From the blue-green belt of canal villages and outlying municipalities around Ghent to the borderlands just beyond Europe: they hold a different

relationship to things, a different consciousness, a different set of measurements. Much can also be learned from their perspective on the centre and the standards that apply. What if we turn that fixed hierarchy between the 'edge' and the 'reference' on its head? What if the centre changed to accommodate the edge, instead of always doing things the other way round? Borderlands invite you to move, to travel, but also to decentralise your way of thinking. To call borders into question.

At the same time, every dynamic between the margin and the centre implies a difference in power (and decision-making power), legitimacy and ownership. What new habits emerge in institutions if they embrace the truths of more peripheral practices and subcultures? What freedoms do you gain? Every revaluation of the periphery entails the crucial question: who decides who decides?

'The margin' is a construct, that much is certain. Historically, too, the drawing of borders has had significant consequences that are still felt today. Voyages of discovery, colonialism, migration, border politics: it's difficult to escape them. What is our current and historic interaction with cultures and influences from far beyond Ghent and Europe?

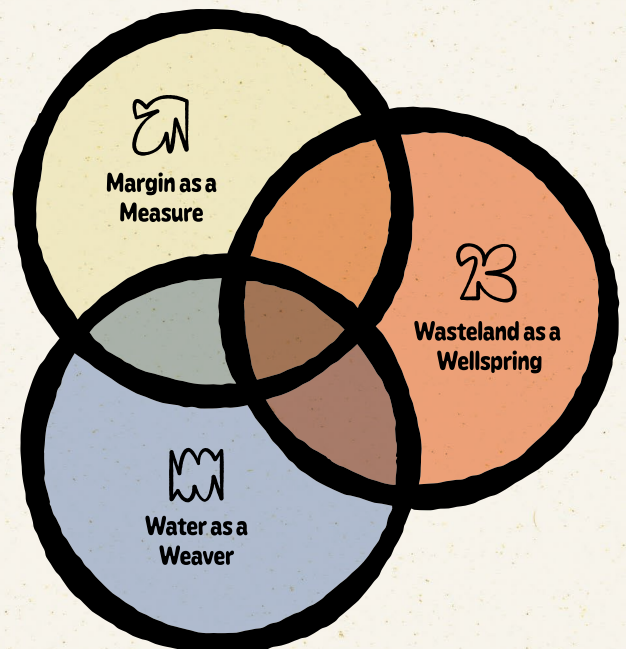
Margin as a measure has to do with our relationship with 'the abnormal'. Mental vulnerability. Insiders and outsiders. Strengthening unheard and underrepresented voices. The beauty of crookedness, the power of the unfinished. It also has to do with our personal boundaries. When can my specific 'I' merge with our collective 'together'? Which boundaries can I cross, when are my boundaries violated? Margin as a measure is not a plea to bring everyone into the centre or a fight for everyone in the margins. It is a profound questioning of perspective and ownership.

## How do these lines define the Ghent2030 programme?

Ghent itself has greatly inspired the metaphors of wasteland, water and margin, but this does not make them any less European. They have been **designed to resonate with both artistic players and with other sectors and cultures** (economy, ecology, education, welfare, integration, etc.) so that these stakeholders can work together. They directly address present-day challenges and can be **directly associated with our three learning principles**. 'Margin' has to do with rethinking ownership (Autonomy), 'water' with surprising connections (Belonging) and 'wasteland' with extra nourishment and learning (Competences).

**Together, these three thematic fields form the canvas on which all the activities in Ghent2030 will find a place.**

Every project fits into one or more lines of the programme. Before 2030, the three themes also offer nourishment and direction to the city-wide participatory process leading up to the ECoC year. Margin, water and wasteland turn the open process into something tangible, graspable and accessible for artists, individuals and organisations: it is easy to associate ideas with them.



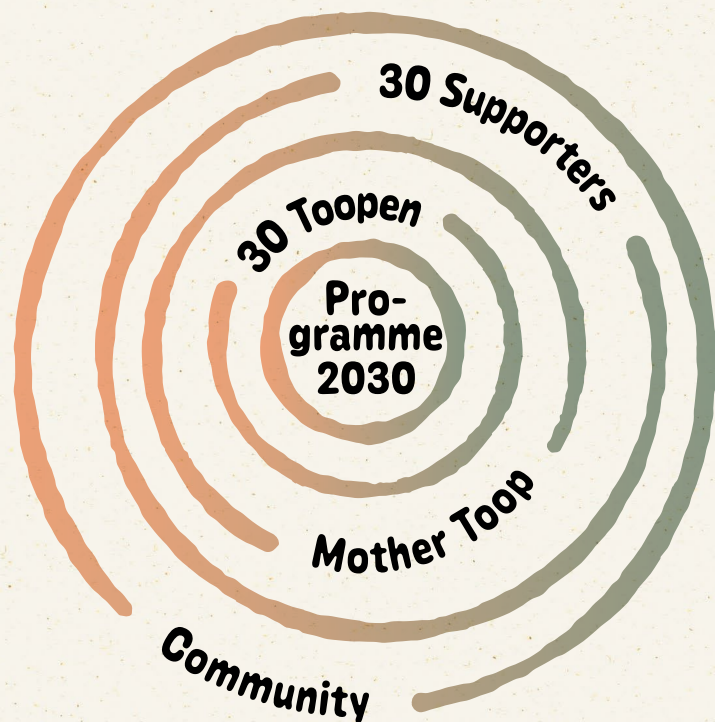
## From toop to programme

How is it possible to keep as much space as possible open for shared ownership and learning by doing, while simultaneously working towards an appealing programme on different scales that is worthy of a European Capital of Culture? We will apply a **twofold programming method**:

1. **A clear framework of goals** for the diversity of activities in the programme (see Q11)
2. **A clear framework for the process** of how we will achieve our mission.

## Process framework for Ghent2030

Every aspect of the Ghent2030 programme will emerge from a 'toop', as described in Q4. To keep this open and co-creative process on the right track, with high-quality participation and a strong artistic result, we will set up an **interaction between five circles**. Just outside the innermost circle of the programme, we find the toopen, which work at their own tempo and with relative autonomy within the framework of values and the lines of the programme. They are the real cultural rechargers of Ghent2030, the heartbeat of our European Capital of Culture. They are collectively nourished by the Mother Toop and **supported by general artistic coordinators** (who are responsible for the artistic quality of the entire programme) **and process coaches** (who help to practice the learning principles and create extra connections). **Supporters** give advice on content, acting as the ambassadors of the Mother Toop and all the other toopen. The community is **everyone** from Ghent, the region or Europe who feels involved.



1. **About 30 toopen** will act as testing grounds for how we dream that cultural programmes will be created more often in Ghent and Europe. They will be set up between 2025 and 2029 – some earlier and others later (see below). They start out from a specific theme within a single programme line and aim for a concrete contribution to the ECoC programme, guided by the three learning principles of Ghent2030. The participants will enrich their own practice as they go:

- **Shared ownership** – The starting point for each toop is building trust, safety and openness. There is explicit attention to sharing responsibilities and an open decision-making process. At the same time, each toop focuses actively on encouraging a generally less involved audience to participate.
- **Surprising connections** – Each toop is an unprecedented collaboration or pairing that involves at least three different sectors, one of which is always art and culture. So cultural creators are always involved, along with partners who have not worked together before. As such, a toop creates new connections by definition.
- **Radical learning** – Each toop will start with a clear learning goal and defined ambition aligned with the objectives of Ghent2030. Consequently, each toop will bring about either a significant or minor transformation and will also multiply the experiences and learnings among other parties.

2. **The Mother Toop is the supporting toop that watches over** the entire development process and the ultimate organisation of Ghent2030 **and bears the final responsibility**. So you can see this structure as the full-time coordination team of our European Capital of Culture: ongoing consultation between the artistic coordinators and process coaches (led by one artistic collaboration coordinator, see Q32) with all the different coordinators of the teams working on finance, monitoring, communications, etc. (led by one business collaboration coordinator). This Mother Toop also makes

the decisions involved in starting up the toopen and the final programme. From 2025 until 2028-2029, this team mainly acts as a generator and facilitator of the process of preparing the toopen, and as a contact point for Ghent2030. From 2029 onwards, it will transform and expand into the organising cockpit for the ECoC year itself (see also Q32).

3. **The 30 supporters are the advisors on content and the ambassadors for Ghent2030 from 2024 onwards**, supporting the Mother Toop and all the toopen. They contribute extra, specific expertise and represent various relevant voices and groups in Ghent, the region and Europe. They meet once a month (face to face or in a high-quality hybrid format) to help keep an eye on the mission, offer tips and feedback on the content of the three programme lines and help open up networks throughout Europe. Supporters can also be active members of toopen. The Mother Toop will form the group of supporters as early as 2024, after an open call and ensuring diversity in age, expertise, colour, ethnocultural background, etc. Some of the supporters may change every year. This keeps the group's composition open.



4. **The community is everyone in Ghent, the region and Europe who wants to be or stay involved in Ghent2030**. Once a year (from 2026 onwards), we will hold a festival over several days where the toopen will share their provisional insights with a wide audience, along the lines of the 'Doeners- & (Om)denkersfestival' (Festival of Doers, Thinkers and Transformers) in 2023 (see Q13). That will enable Ghent2030 to keep its progress and scope broad.

## How is a toop created?

A toop can start up in three ways. We are aiming for a 50-30-20 distribution among the 30 toopen:

1. **Curated (50%)** – These toopen will arise from a direct dialogue between the Mother Toop (and its artistic curators) and specific interested artists, cultural or non-cultural organisations, at the initiative of either party. They work with a clear artistic and/or social challenge and offer a clear answer to how the learning principles will be applied. Players are prepared to extend their established practice. The supporters give feedback and extra tips.
2. **By means of an open call based on a specific theme (30%)** – Interested cultural creators, entrepreneurs, social organisations, arts institutions, etc. can respond to a public call for creative projects linked to a specific cultural or social challenge within one of the programme lines. The call will specify the available budget, intended timespan and envisaged composition of the specific toop. The intended scope (Ghent, wider region, Europe) will vary from call to call. The call will also be spread energetically in circuits 'in the margin'. For the selection of players/projects for these open toopen, Ghent2030 will

engage in 'participatory grant-making': all the candidate players will evaluate their own submissions together. To do this, we will bring in expertise from other countries.

3. **By means of a very open call with no specific request (20%)**: In 2027, the Mother Toop will also launch three freer calls for open proposals from Ghent, the region and Europe. Which citizens, organisations, institutions, government bodies, businesses, etc. have their own ideas relating to wasteland, water or the margin, within the objectives of Ghent2030? In this way, we will retain some fallow land within the programme, create extra shared ownership, correct blind spots and respond to acute challenges in the near future. To make this call as accessible as possible, we will create a structure with a helpdesk, toolkit, training, collective brainstorming and so on. 20% of the budget will also be reserved for these extra toopen.

## Process building 2024-2030

The diversity of the envisaged programme for Ghent2030 demands that the 30 toopen be started at different times over the coming 5 years:

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Autumn 2024</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start of the Mother Toop (incl. supporters), made up of diverse participants</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>2025</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start of one curated toop (large) for each programme line</li> <li>• Start of one extra toop for each programme line through open calls</li> <li>• Expansion of a closer-knit European network in which to distribute calls</li> </ul>                                                                                       |
| <b>2026</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identical to 2025, with the start of six more toopen (the previous six continue)</li> <li>• Process monitoring by the Mother Toop: overview, evaluation, adjustment (until 2030)</li> <li>• Start creating a supporting infrastructure for the 'very open call'</li> <li>• Annual Ghent2030 festival (until 2029)</li> </ul> |
| <b>2027</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identical to 2025, with the start of six more toopen (the previous 12 continue)</li> <li>• Three meetings with all 18 active toopen: exchange, lessons learned, evaluation (until 2030)</li> <li>• Distribution of the 'very open call' for free submissions</li> </ul>                                                      |
| <b>2028</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start of the last six curated and open call toopen (the previous 18 continue)</li> <li>• (Collective) selection of the six free projects from the very open call</li> <li>• Extension of the Mother Toop to include operational/production teams</li> </ul>                                                                  |
| <b>2029</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Production of all programme elements by the 30 active toopen</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>2030</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• European Capital of Culture year</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

The Ghent2030 programme is structured according to the three artistic lines. Each theme predominates during a four-month bloc (which does not mean that it is completely absent before or after that period). Presented on a timeline of a year, this is the result:



**'Margin as a measure' in January-April 2030:** we will open our European Capital of Culture year with a focus on the districts of Ghent, the region around Ghent and the outer borders of Europe. The aim of this decentralised start is to stimulate widespread engagement from people and groups who do not belong to the usual cultural audience, while enabling Europe to get to know Ghent in a different way. This will lay a foundation for the rest of the year.



**'Water as a weaver' in May-August 2030:** the summer months (and harvest time) are suitable for activities, projects and reflection processes that are focused on water in a real or metaphorical sense (or the lack of water, due to drought). We are aiming mainly for surprising connections in public space, celebrations and connectedness, and a wide audience. We intend to overturn the established logic of seasons maintained by many cultural institutions by being extra active during these holiday months. At this climax of our cultural year, we want to commit fully to visitors from all over Europe, celebrating a special edition of the Ghent Festivities (in July).



**'Wasteland as a wellspring' in September-December 2030:** the autumn, with the winter on its way, invites us to calm down and recharge for the future. We will focus on projects committed to system change, growth and development. We will share the lessons learned from the past year. We will end with a grand closing ritual for all the toopen, again aiming for European resonance.

Hence Ghent2030 has both an ongoing local/regional programme and one period of sharing in each bloc focused specifically on higher concentrations of foreign visitors: in February (opening), July-August (climax) and December (close). It goes without saying that these visitors are welcome all year round, but we have also deliberately opted for calmer periods with fewer foreign visitors, partly inspired by Uppsala2029 and its Charters concept.



### Framework of goals for Ghent2030

**What are our parameters for a strong and diverse programme?** Because Ghent2030 will be highly process-based, it is difficult to present the entire programme at this point. We can say that the entire process will be directed by balances determined in advance to ensure a diverse overall programme. The Mother Toop will ensure that the following guideline figures are upheld, in order to offer everyone involved a clear and workable framework:

- **30%** of the total programme will appeal to an **international audience**, with sufficient variation among them.
- **50%** of the programme will be presented **outside the city centre** (postal code 9000): in the districts (30%), the region (15%) and the rest of Europe (5%). We want to entice both Ghent residents and other visitors out of Ghent city centre, into the lesser known 'periphery'.
- **50%** of the toopen (and hence also 50% of the programme) will integrate a visible involvement of **European artists and cultural organisations**. At the same time, a minimal European dimension will be expected from every toop, for example in the initial learning goal, through a transnational collaboration or inspiration, or in the intended audience for the final result, etc.
- The scale of the projects will be: 33% large, 33% medium and 33% small. Here, large refers mainly to the audience figures and (European) allure of the final result.

### Example programme for Ghent2030

Given our participatory intent, we cannot yet offer a complete overview of the programme. However, we already have a lot of concrete ideas for the curated part of each programme line (50%) and the learning goals for open calls (30%). The programme below is an elaboration of the **first imagining of our European Capital of Culture**, intended as a sketch of what it might become. Several cultural partnerships have already been explored in concrete terms, with other conversations to follow. Entirely in line with our co-creative process, the programme will be further developed 'tuupetegoare' (by all of us together) after the Mother Toop and Supporters have been set up in the second half of 2024.



## Wasteland as a wellspring

*extra space & time,  
deregulation, swimming  
against the tide, back to  
basics, fertile soil, etc*

### CURATED

#### OPEN TO THE PUBLIC (L)

**Theme:** How can cultural and other institutions share their buildings more and make them genuinely accessible as semi-public spaces? [making and sharing space – shared ownership]

Several Ghent institutions will search together for ways to make their infrastructure freely available to the creativity of people in Ghent, without top-down programming. We will open these 'halls' in 2030, after a local and European process of inspiration and experimentation, with a publication/conference on the concept of halls.

**Possible partners:** [B] Ghent University (T4), Wintercircus, Design Museum, Opera Ballet Vlaanderen, Flemish Government Architect, De Koer, Decoratelier, Museum Dr. Guislain, Chinastraat, Labland, Wooncoop, Endeavour, ToT/h/em, TimeLab, ConstructLab, Ocup vzw, etc. [ & EU] Trans Europe Halles Network, New European Bauhaus, Pogon (Zagreb, HR), Southbank Centre (London, UK), Le 104 (Paris, FR), Magacin (Belgrade, RS), La Friche Belle de Mai (Marseille, FR), Bios/Communitism (Athene, GR), Tartu2024 (EE), PLAI & Light Festival Timisoara2023 (RO), Light Festival Oulu2026 (FI), Institut for X (Aarhus, DK), etc.

#### FESTIVITIES 2.0 (M)

**Theme:** How can we reinvent festive traditions as free, authentic and inclusive celebrations by and between communities? [heritage – festivities – tourism]

We will take the opportunity of Ghent2030 to question, renew and open up some of our annual festivities as 'rewilded' space for free and unexpected encounters. For example: the Ghent Festivities might proliferate into the districts and the region around Ghent, Ledeborg Carnival might be enriched with the carnival traditions of newcomers... or we might spend a whole year celebrating the national holidays of the entire world with everyone. We certainly won't forget Belgium's 200th anniversary either. How can you turn these festivals and anniversaries back into something both open and wild?

**Possible partners:** [B] Trefpunt, Copacobana, Woodrock, Modulair, Asphalt, Hip Hop Hurray, Ghent Festivities square organisers, Amal Gent, Ledeborg carnival crew, Refu Interim, etc. [ & EU] 80 years of the Schuman Declaration, Noorderzon (NL), Province of Zeeland, Middelburg and Terneuzen (NL), Festival de la Cité (Lausanne, CH), Riga City Festival (LV), etc.

#### LET THE SUN SHINE EVERYWHERE (L)

**Theme:** What win-win situation might accommodate the cultural desires of the region around Ghent as well as the needs of artists in the centre for extra space to work? [redefinition of centre-periphery, studio space]

This toop pairs Ghent artists and organisations working on the temporary use of space with residents, cultural players and cultural staff from the municipalities around Ghent. In 2030, for example, this will lead to a new network of studio spaces and a surprising route/programme from Kaprijke to Merelbeke by cultural creators from the centre and periphery.

**Possible partners:** [B] IGS Comeet, Lys-Scheldt Cultural Region, Waas Culture Garden, Dijk 92, Route 42, Kunstenplatform Plan B, Nucleo, Toestand, Aardigaards, etc. [ & EU] AREA – Arts in Rural European Areas, Aarhus2017 (DK), Leeuwarden2018 (NL), NovaGorica2025 (SI), Bourges2028 (FR), Artemrede (PT), etc.

#### GROUNDLED (S)

**Theme:** How do we imagine free 'land' for local, green alternatives, away from the capitalist market? [short chain, agri-culture, art & ecology]

This toop will link the question of public land ownership (e.g. the 18,000 hectares owned by Ghent Public Centres for Social Welfare) to cultural and ecological opportunities for sustainability, circular agriculture and self-sufficiency. Land is also capital: what are we going to do with it? Artists will cross-pollinate with sustainable architecture and food production. In 2030, that will result in a small festival of ecological art, plus a symposium with artistic interventions.

**Possible partners:** [B] STAM, ILVO, Gent en Garde, Avansa, De Krook, Greentrack, Future Farmers, Environment and Climate Department, St Peter's Abbey, Gents MilieuFront, Klimooten, City Academy, ECOPOLIS (Kiemkracht), Seasonal Neighbours, Landwijzer, De Pandemisten, De Goedinge, Natural Contract Lab, etc. [ & EU] Evora2027 (PT), Casa Delle Agriculture (IT), Delfina Foundation (UK), Trajna (SI), Foodculture Days (CH), etc.

#### HAVE YOU TRIED TURNING IT OFF? (S)

**Theme:** How can (mental) rest and taking a break be an act of resistance, or re-ignite creativity?

A toop about rest as resistance, the right not to produce and the creative possibilities that opens up, as in the mediaeval three-field system. In 2030, that will result in 'nothing', or perhaps in a lot.

**Possible partners:** [B] Waerbeke, Trage Wegen, State Of The Arts (SOTA), Namaste Merendree, etc. [ & EU] Lublin2029 (PL), Cultural Centre Cluj (RO), Artistic Collective KURS (RS), Pirate Care Syllabus, Culture Action Europe, etc.

## OPEN CALL

### IRRESPONSIBLE IDEAS (S)

**Theme:** How can the city make space for and express its confidence in crazy/wild performances without too much control and responsibility? [freethinking nature of Ghent, deregulation]

An open call to Europe (especially the periphery) to send in subversive cultural productions that do not need to be justified, for example with a budget of around € 5,000. How will we grant that financing? By drawing lots? A new, simplified subsidy system without bureaucratic control? A fund with cash that can be paid out at short notice?

**Possible partners:** [B] CirQ, De Koer, LABO vzw, etc. [& EU] Evora2027 (PT), Moleskine Foundation (IT), etc.

### NEW URBAN FAIRYTALES (S)

**Theme:** What unheard stories need to be inscribed on the blank page of our intangible heritage? [contemporary storytelling about forgotten experiences and histories]

This literary project will produce new city legends with stories, podcasts, books, reading sessions, spoken word events, etc. It is a deliberate search for stories that are insufficiently told and recognised in Ghent. That will result in an alternative guided tour of Ghent in 2030, in the form of a literary creation. The stories will also be collected in a book.

**Possible partners:** [B] spoken word collectives, Departments of History and Literature at Ghent University, GKO Literature Working Group, Radio Urgent, KANTL, Slam Aleikum, Kleine Cervantes, storytellers (Relaas), De Koer story lab, Willemsfonds, PEN Flanders, Voem vzw, Dichter des Vaderlands, Gentse Raconteurs [& EU] Paphos2017 (CY), Budweis2028 (CZ), etc.

### THE DAY AFTER TOMORROWLAND (M)

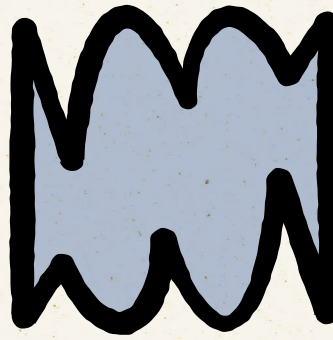
**Theme:** How can we recreate a free nightlife in our overregulated city, one that is wild but safe enough? [deregulation, young people, time for a break]

The intention is to boost Ghent's party and clubbing culture. We see this as a genuinely local project, although Ghent as an informal afterparty for the well-known festival Tomorrowland would obviously bring in a lot of people from elsewhere...

**Possible partners:** [B] Kompas Club, North Sea Port, Charlatan, VIERNULVIER, Arsenaalsite, Jeugd van de Nacht, Nightlife Council, Broei, Go BOOM, Democrazy, KAPOW, Wintercircuit, Decadance, Asgaard Gentbrugge, Dauwtrip, Chinastraat, EYC, Yalla.worldwide, LEDA.collective, etc. [& EU] Tartu2024 (EE), Uppsala2029 (SE), Dortmund (DE), London (UK)

## VERY OPEN CALL

Clear space for two toopen for people's own project proposals based on the idea of 'wasteland'.



## Water as a weaver

*connective encounter, bridging & pairing, h2o, sense of belonging, etc.*

## CURATED

### A DIFFERENT PROGRAMME (L)

**Theme:** How can all the performing arts centres work together to offer a stage for less visible work from Europe, which often fails to find its way here otherwise? [Ghent in Europe, programming the invisible]

This toop will extend the existing Ghent International Festival (GIF) to more performing arts partners and also to lesser-known artists in Europe, to show their work here in 2030 in partnership with the professional arts, part-time arts education and amateur arts. The theme in 2030 is 80 years of Europe. This festival will continue to be organised every two years after 2030. How can we change western Europe's (privileged) view of programming and turn the established artistic mobility upside down? GIF 2030 will present atypical work in an atypical collaboration.

**Possible partners:** [B] GIF partners, part-time arts education, GKO, amateur associations, etc. [& EU] IETM, NEXT Festival, Kampnagel (Hamburg, DE), Noorderzon (NL), Zürcher Theater Spektakel (Zürich, CH), Homo Novus Festival (Riga, LV), Paris Globe Festival (FR), Dancing on the Edge festival (NL), D-CAF festival (EG), Spielart festival (DE), InSzPer Performing Arts Institute (PL), Nomad Dance Academy (Balkan contemporary dance network)

### HEALING SPACE (S)

**Theme:** What is needed to support a community across borders in shared grief? [human repair, cross-border solidarity]

A growing network of healing spaces that can be immediately activated in times of crisis (Gaza, Ukraine, the earthquake in Turkey, etc.) to show solidarity and help process trauma through culture.

**Possible partners:** [B] Palestina Cafe, vzw Splinter, Kunsthal, NTGent, VIERNULVIER, Manoeuvre, Ocup vzw, Bartal, Ethiopian churches, WGC De Sleep, Saamo Gent, De Centrale, Sidhe, etc. [& EU] European Forum For Restorative Justice, Artist at Risk, Icorn, Playback Theatre (Palestine), etc.

## (JUST) CRUISING (L)

**Theme:** How can we put the cultural and ecological significance of water higher on the agenda? [water, climate & art]

A slow, nomadic arts and performance route sailing along the waterways around Ghent for a year, dropping anchor at different places, from Middelburg and Terneuzen via Ghent to Deinze, with local creation and participation processes relating to climate and local culture at each location.

**Possible partners:** [B] Tot in de Stad!, Waterland vzw, Water Festival (Brussels), OdeGand, Zelzate cultural centre, Instituut voor Volkswarmte, Gents MilieuFront, Apollo18 (Ostend), Instituut voor Onderzoek van de Betovering der Zeeën, Ghent University Consortium, Ghent Climate Forum, Floating Philosopher, Buut vzw, a factory (Terneuzen), etc. [& EU] Flood Museum Zeeland (NL), Ars Biologica Budweis2028 (CZ), Water Europe, Elefsina2023 (GR), Polau & Parlement de la Loire (FR), Liquid Becomings, Floating University (DE), Limassol2030 (CY), etc.

## MONDAY MEALDAY (L)

**Theme:** How can we genuinely connect the city so that all its citizens and organisations can meet each other in shared activities? [eating together]

Starting in 2024, a cooking and community project will introduce a new city tradition where nobody in Ghent needs to worry about dinner on the first Monday evening of each month. Neighbours will provide dinner for everyone, always adding an artistic touch. There will be cooking teams in every street by 2030. In December 2030, there will be a Monday Mealday everywhere in Europe as the closing event in Ghent2030.

**Possible partners:** [B] Gent en Garde, social restaurants, Villa Ooievaar, De Broederij, food bank, De Zuidpoort, Volkskeuken CAMPO, short-chain organisations, Ecopolis, Eva vzw, OTARK, Veggie=Halal, International Stomachs, Futurefarmers, CSA-Netwerk vzw, etc.

## WE, MYSELF & AI (M)

**Theme:** How can AI help to break down filter bubbles / algorithms, so that young people's horizons are widened, and they are less exposed to toxic polarisation and hate messages? [digitisation, schools]

A toop that brings together culture, education and the creative sector, using the profound impact of AI on traditional learning and the presentation of art constructively to invent alternative forms of socialising media. We will make surprising connections with AI bots and other non-human strengths. In 2030, that will result in something we cannot know yet, but it is certain that many schoolchildren in Ghent will be involved.

**Possible partners:** [B] city-run schools, part-time arts education, Kopergieterij, Mediaraven, LARF, Wintercircus, Oisoi, Larian Studios, etc. [& EU] Digital European Public Spaces, Oulu2026 (FI), etc.

## OPEN CALL

## DON'T TALK, JUST DANCE (M)

**Theme:** How can non-verbal communication make art more accessible? How can we meet each other without words, across the language barrier? [non-verbal connection]

A call/toop based on proposals for wordless contact as a direct form of human connection, e.g. through dance, music, circus, etc. Neurodiversity will also be an attention point. Non-verbality facilitates international connections. In 2030, this will result in an inclusive, intergenerational artistic project.

**Possible partners:** [B] LaGeste, Platform-K, Thé Dansant VIERNULVIER, dance schools, Boksgala, Together We Stand, Hip Hop Hooray, Graffiti vzw, De Gentse Hoppers, Takkenorkest, Konekt, Elftwelf/Ledebirds, Radio Silence, KAA Gent Foundation, Yalla 3 Dabke, Ghent Dance Platform, Sportaround, Gents Urban Sportsteam, Staging Access vzw [& EU] Handiclap (Nantes, FR), the European Dance Development Network EDN, the Europe Beyond Access project by Skånes Dansteater (SE), Nomad Dance Academy (Balkan contemporary dance network), etc.

## RIGHT TO REPAIR (M)

**Theme:** How can art and culture forge friendship between two people, beyond their national, political, cultural, class and other differences? [depolarisation, fighting loneliness]

An open call for proposals to pair people creatively, with the focus on people experiencing loneliness or psychological vulnerability or those who have few opportunities for new encounters, such as prison inmates. These pairs can be created both in and around Ghent and between EU countries.

**Possible partners:** [B] De Rode Antraciet, De Sprekende Ezels, spoken word collectives, Poëziecentrum, Duo for a Job buddy organisations, ArmenTeKort, vzw aPart, Voem vzw, Ghent prison, Human Library (De Krook library and Avansa), etc. [& EU] post-crossing community, etc.

## SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW (S)

**Theme:** How can we combine heritage and classic traditions with contemporary trends and new technologies? [heritage & technology]

This toop will explore innovative combinations of old and new technologies, e.g. pairings such as carnival and VR, traditional printing techniques and AI, etc. These traditions may encompass both tangible and intangible aspects.

**Possible partners:** [B] Museum of Industry, Manoeuvre, Wintercircus, House of Alijn, puppet theatre, digi-craft iDROPS, Larian Studios, etc. [& EU] Oulu2026 (FI), etc.

## VERY OPEN CALL

Clear space for two toopen for people's own project proposals based on the idea of 'water'.



## Margin as a measure

*periphery, borders, unheard voices, redistribution, change of perspective*

### CURATED



#### TRIANGLE (L)

**Theme:** How can cultural institutions open themselves up to real needs in the districts, as well as to what is already on offer? [social design, shared ownership]

In the run-up to 2030, the 25 districts of Ghent will each formulate their needs based on a dialogue between residents, local cultural creators and district workers. 25 interested cultural institutions from the city centre will each pair up with one European artist to set up a fully-fledged artistic project together, which will result in 25 unique creations of all kinds in 2030, each with a direct connection to their audience. In this way, we will also reformulate the relationships between large institutions and small organisations.

**Possible partners:** [B] 25 arts institutions, SAAMO, Kompas vzw, Voluit vzw, part-time arts education and adult education, Constructlab, etc. [ & EU] In Situ, European platform for artistic creation in public space, Nomad Dance Academy (Balkan dance network), Something Great (DE), Izolatsya, the Ukrainian platform for cultural initiatives (UA), Artsadmin (UK)



#### MOVING MIGRATION (M)

**Theme:** How can we rewrite the history of the city? How can the contribution of Turkish, Bulgarian and all the other migrant groups in Ghent be acknowledged better? [intangible heritage, the city as a woven fabric]

One in three residents of Ghent has an ethnic minority background. However, their stories still do not resonate loudly enough through our intangible heritage. Using textiles as a metaphor for our social fabric and industrial past, we will repair that hole in our history in 2030, with exhibitions, concerts, stories and so on. The histories of Ghent are also those of people from elsewhere.

**Possible partners:** [B] CoGhent, Manoeuvre, Burgerplicht, Ghent Turkish Heritage Group, Klerezooi, Clothing Loop, Koza, etc. [ & EU] Badlschl2024 (AT), Bielsko-Biala2029 (PL), Depo in Istanbul (TR), Diyarbakir Arts Centre (TR)



#### ON THE EDGES (L)

**Theme:** How can all the museums in Ghent cross the boundaries that exist between them in order to work together? [cultural cooperation, visual arts, borders]

In 2030, many museums in Ghent and the wider region will create a single cross-disciplinary exhibition together about 'borders': what borders and boundaries do we need and why, and which can we still cross? There will also be space to consider the borders and border politics of Europe. Afterwards, each museum involved will look for one sister museum elsewhere in Europe to take over their part of the exhibition, so that it spreads throughout Europe in 2031.

**Possible partners:** [B] S.M.A.K., MSK, GUM, Museum Dr. Guislain, Design Museum, STAM, Museum of Industry, House of Alijn, De Wereld van KINA, Comic Art Museum, Veterinary Museum, De School van Toen, Museum Dhont-Dhaenens, etc. [ & EU] Delta Life Budweis2028 (CZ), Oulu2026 (FI), Rouen2028 candidate [FR], Lublin2029 (PL), etc.



#### YOUNGSTARS (M)

**Theme:** What are art and culture lacking for young people? What might be on offer if they had full ownership? [EU connection with the newest generation]

This toop spins out the legacy of EYC 2024 to 2030. We will run a summer school for young Europeans from Ghent and other ECOC cities, who will create their own travelling programme of music, reflection, events, parties, etc. What do young people need more of?

**Possible partners:** [B] EYC legacy, Plek, Giftshop Gent, Gouvernement, vzw Jong, Bijenkorf/Averroes, Victoria Deluxe, Jong Gewei, Lochness, Sportschool 9000, Sportaround, KAA Gent Foundation, Larf, Kopergietery, Klein Festijn, part-time arts education, JongGeduld, Risaala, Together We Stand, Hip Hop Hooray, Graffiti vzw, etc. [ & EU] Lviv (UA), Chemnitz2025 (DE), Nova Gorica2025 (SI), Budweis skateholders project (CZ), Identity Symphony Buddies, etc.



#### UNPUBLIC PROGRAMME (S)

**Theme:** How can we create cultural safe spaces for specific groups? [redistribution of space, psychological and social safety]

During Ghent2030, this toop will experiment with events for a very select audience (such as queer people, people of colour, people on the autistic spectrum, etc.): invitation-only events through specific Flemish and European networks. What beneficial effects will be generated by this correction of the unjust distribution of resources, precisely by granting extra support to smaller organisations? The intended output is a method that will also be useful for other toopen and the entire sector.

**Possible partners:** [B] Bebe Books, Poc Poc, Kunsthall, Veggie=Halal, FMV-women, Univers'elle, Kokerpark Women's House, Koza, Ghent Girl Gone International, De Sloep, Victoria Deluxe, Villa Voortman, Engage, Diversdenken, Risaala, Lost Words, etc. [ & EU] Acesso Cultura (PT), Europe Beyond Access (art & disability), Domino / Queer Zagreb (HR), Resilience in Culture Lab Lublin2029 (PL) and Burgos2031 (ES), Festival Handiclap Nantes (FR), etc.

## OPEN CALL



### PASS IT ON! (M)

**Theme:** How can culture respond to ageing in Europe? How can we grow old in the West with a sense of belonging, as active citizens? [ageing, intergenerational]

By 2030, the proportion of people aged 65 and over will have risen from 20% to 30%. How can culture contribute to anticipating that challenge? This toop will be based on surprising project proposals relating to intergenerational exchanges that pass on the knowledge and skills of elders to young people. We will also reflect on meaningful and meaning-making ways to 'make space' for the next generations.

**Possible partners:** [B] part-time arts education, Muda, Ghent University Hospital, residential care homes, OKRA, Age on Stage (Open Doek), Health and Care Department, etc. [& EU] Wander-full Journeys Leeuwarden2018 (NL), Oulu2026 (FI), LBO (FR), Skart Collective (RS), Mammalian Diving Reflex (Canada), etc.



### DISRUPTED REALITY (L)

**Theme:** How can unexpected digital (and/or analogue) artistic inventions question our understanding of reality? [digital innovation, decolonisation]

An open call leading to a (virtual?) route or a series of unexpected artistic interventions in public space, playing with people's fixed perspectives on their familiar environment – from a groundbreaking augmented reality game along the lines of Pokemon Go to the installation of statues as an alternative to all the 'colonial' monuments that shape our streets. This toop will actively take people to new places and question the limits of our experience of reality.

**Possible partners:** [B] Diverzity (Voem vzw), Larian Studios, Nerdlab, Wintercircus, De Vloer, KASK, Ghent University, imec, Action Zoo Humain, Black History Month, etc. [& EU] Komplex Kapharnaum (Marseille, FR), Riga City Theatre (LV), Oulu2026 (FI), Forensic Architecture (UK), etc.



### MARKING THE MAP (S)

**Theme:** How can we map out our position(s) and playing field, to be able to document our past and future actions more widely? [mapping]

This toop will ultimately deliver the catalogue for Ghent2030, by developing a mapping method that can document the entire scope of each toop's activity. In this way, we will simultaneously develop the Subjective Atlas of Europe: an overview of all the insights gained during the ECoc year, to pass on to others.

**Possible partners:** [B] Gent Gemapt, Subjective Atlas, etc. [& EU] Limassol2030 (CY), Kiruna2029 (SE)

## VERY OPEN CALL

Clear space for two toopen for people's own project proposals based on the idea of 'margin'.

*Q12 A cultural programme that combines local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative and experimental cultural expression.*

'Ghent is a mediaeval gem on the outside, but utterly contemporary as well.' This quotation from a promotional brochure perfectly encapsulates Ghent today.

### People arriving in Ghent today might take this walk:

**Starting point: Gent-Sint-Pieters railway station** - You start your walk at the historic Gent-Sint-Pieters railway station, an impressive building originally constructed in 1913 for the World Expo held in Ghent that year. The station is currently undergoing thorough renovation work to meet the modern demands of 21st century mobility.

**Stop 1: Museum Quarter** - A fifteen-minute walk brings you to the GUM: far from a boring university museum, it is a dynamic place where science, doubt and art come together in inspiring exhibitions and activities. The other museums nearby, S.M.A.K. and MSK, also bring old and new together.

**Route: Citadelpark** - Follow the path through the Citadelpark, a green haven that is also a remnant of the 1913 World Expo. It's a shame that you'll miss the plays in the All Greeks Festival: free morning theatre productions of Greek tragedies in different districts of Ghent.

**Stop 2: Bijloke site** - A short walk brings you to the Bijloke site. There are several interesting places and events to discover here, including a beautifully renovated concert hall in a former hospital complex and the STAM, the museum of Ghent history, which presents the heritage of Ghent in innovative ways.

**Route: University** - You walk past buildings belonging to Ghent University, an institution with a rich history and a strong focus on innovation.

**Stop 3: Wintercircus** - Your walk takes you onwards to the legendary Wintercircus. Once this was an indoor circus, and later a garage, but now it is an imposing meeting place for entrepreneurs and creative minds. The basement houses a high-tech concert hall.

**Route: De Krook** - You pass De Krook, one of the most striking architectural landmarks in Ghent. This multi-award-winning building on a bend or 'krook' in the River Scheldt houses the city's main public library, Ghent University labs and offices and the nanoelectronics and digital technology research centre imec. It also has a café with a splendid view.

**Stop 4: Ghent Altarpiece visitor centre** - Your final stop is a visit to the Adoration of the Mystic Lamb in St Bavo's Cathedral. In 2021, the famous painting by Van Eyck was brought to life with AR here, so that you can experience this masterpiece in a unique and interactive way.

This walk is about 4 km and takes a little over one hour.

As you see, this walk offers an abundant mixture of historical and modern, even hypermodern, sights and experiences.

**Can we generate more new cross-pollinations between the past, present and future with Ghent2030? Of course!** Ghent still needs to update the way it deals with the past in several ways, as our surveys during the run-up have revealed. We are committing to three enriching cross-pollinations:

1. **Traditions & migration:** the toopen 'Moving Migration' and 'New Urban Fairytales' bring parties together that have never really worked with each other before.
2. **Heritage & pioneering technology:** the toopen 'Something Old, Something New' and 'Disrupted Reality' will use new technology to make (historical) experiences vividly real.
3. **New forms of celebration:** the toopen 'Festivities 2.0', 'The Day After Tomorrowland' and 'A Different Programme' open up new perspectives on our ingrained culture of festivities in Ghent.

We are also aiming for **crazy, innovative artistic expressions**, e.g. in the toop 'We, Myself & AI' and wild productions in 'Irresponsible Ideas' or new art forms in 'Don't Talk, Just Dance'.

An aspect that is new for Ghent is our approach to identifying and addressing 'wicked problems' and disruptions through diverse forms of heritage, art and culture. We tackle these issues collectively, in a way that is deeply rooted in our 12 values, and emphasizes solidarity and care. For example, there is particular attention to issues such as mental health and solidarity ('Have You Tried Turning It Off', 'Healing Space'), ecology ('Just Cruising') and poverty and hunger ('Monday Mealday').

In Ghent, we believe in innovation and experiment, but these are not ends in themselves. Instead, they are a way of doing things that, like art and culture, contribute to societal change. Our approach **distinguishes between 'innovation for culture' and 'culture for innovation'**:

1. **Innovation for culture:** to restore the *resistilience* of our cultural system, we will seek new responses to how it operates from day to day. What innovative practices, new solutions, digital technology, etc. can you use to enrich culture, enable it to be experienced more widely, open it up to new target audiences? How can we experiment with that? And what are the pitfalls of certain applications?
2. **Culture for innovation:** how can culture be a way to bring more empathy, multiple voices and different perspectives to all kinds of innovations (both analogue and digital), and thus arrive at more inclusive and more efficient innovations? How can we experiment with that?

This is precisely why the toopen are based on relevant **learning goals concerning the impact of innovation and experimentation on art and culture**. There are plenty of them today. One example:

How can you ensure that the traditional character of heritage is respected while aiming for climate neutrality and accessibility? How do you combine care for protected monuments and cityscapes with quality of life and liveliness in the city?

These issues may be tackled in toopen such as 'Open to the Public', with attention to heritage sites, etc., and 'Grounded' that focuses on historically acquired public land. Furthermore, there are specific, traditional heritage sites that will be renovated by 2030, which will give them a more contemporary purpose (see Q38). These include St Joseph's Church, the Floraliën Hall and the opera house. There are certainly lessons to be learned here from other European heritage practices that contribute to the digital, green and social society of tomorrow.

So we can promise you another great walk in six years time, in 2030. It will offer different sights to those we see today, but it will be equally rich in its diversity of relationships with the past and future.

### Q13 Involvement of local artists and cultural organisations

*"What a challenge! Ghent2030 is not resting on the laurels of the cultural sector as we know it today, but asking awkward questions to bring about a system change for the entire sector in the city. That's uncomfortable, but it's really necessary. I'm convinced that the excellent contacts within the cultural sector and between the city and the sector will enable Ghent to initiate fundamental steps here that will be inspiring for many cities in Europe."* (Franky Devos, general coordinator, VIERNULVIER)

*"I was involved in the process as a member of the artistic team, and I experienced the process as extremely enriching and inspiring. My perspective has really been opened up to the multitude that is already present in this city, the endlessness of our potential. At the same time, it's striking to see how many sectors there are where people are facing the same questions and challenges without ever having engaged in dialogue with each other. My hope and desire is that the process will bring the landscape of the city closer together and result in unexpected connections emerging."* (Madonna Lenaert, trans-non-binary drama artist, actress, theatre maker, podcast host, writer, KASK Drama)



*"As one of the facilitators in the '30 of 2030' group who helped to design the initial concept for 2030, I find it fascinating to watch the story of Ghent2030 growing into a city-wide relay race in which the writer's pen is also passed between many hands. This is giving it many layers and credibility, with an enormous regenerative power. This is something the city really needs today so that it can breathe again."* (Noemi Declercq, director, Circus Centre)

We practice what we preach: in line with the mission of Ghent2030, the entire run-up to this candidacy has been a broad participatory process involving artists, cultural organisations, civil society, entrepreneurs and citizens. Ghent2030 has been working on its own sense of belonging since 2021, in connection and shared ownership. Three fundamental choices have directed our entire preparatory process:

1. **Linking art and culture directly and structurally to other sectors**, by surveying artists, cultural organisations, civil society and citizens together from the outset and getting them to brainstorm our candidacy.
2. **The philosophy of the relay race baton**: we see the programme as commons with no protecting copyright, and as such the concept for Ghent2030 is being developed in different phases by different groups. As a small country with three official languages, we know that collaboration is needed to make progress.
3. **Start with the periphery, not the centre**: the foundations of the content of Ghent2030 were laid by the '30 of 2030': thirty future thinkers with a cultural profile, but mainly people from outside the institutions. A system shift is not possible without the direct involvement of players from outside the system.

After a broad, open-format survey of stakeholders, open calls were used to create an alternation of groups that were given the space to **determine the principles of the rest of the process themselves**. Even resistance in Ghent was embraced. Thus the 30 future thinkers were tasked with developing a concept for Ghent2030, but they believed it was crucial to

create a framework of values first: 12 values as a compass for the entire process leading up to and after Ghent2030 (see fold-out page). Within that inclusive framework, the baton was passed to a temporary artistic team to develop the programme lines.

The concept of Ghent2030 as a collective learning environment also came about by pooling expertise and skills from the entire city: various city departments (such as Policy Participation), the institutes of higher education, civil society, creative entrepreneurs, etc. At each consultation, participants were asked to **bring a guest, 'someone who isn't like you'**, to diversify the overall perspective even more. There have also been frequent consultations on topics such as sponsoring, communication and regional collaboration. Consequently, the bidbook you see now is not a recipe cooked up by a few enlightened Ghentish minds, but the shared creation of hundreds of voices. We believe that such creations are richer and more resilient because they are brewed over a longer period. We are continuing to apply these principles through the toopen and in the final programme.

Simultaneously, several **key stakeholders have now been structurally embedded in the non-profit organisation 'Ghent2030 vzw'**. Besides the City of Ghent, these are Ghent University, North Sea Port, GKO and Community Ghent. The two latter players are network organisations, platforms for the broad field of the arts in Ghent and wider civil society respectively, including cultural and social organisations, companies and the umbrella organisations VOKA and Unizo for entrepreneurs. This broad basis and great engagement are precisely what give our project such a strong support base.

#### A chronological overview of our participatory run-up process:

|                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>2021</b>                        | Ghent2030 began with an in-depth survey of 400 of Ghent's key figures, departments, institutions and organisations in the cultural, economic and academic sectors in the city. Their insights were incorporated into a final report: how do they view Ghent as the European Capital of Culture in 2030, and what ambitions, expectations and concerns surround it? This report was presented at an open public event (with 216 attendees). Simultaneously, we organised inspiring online sessions (in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic) on the lessons learned from previous European Capitals of Culture and relevant trends and developments for the future. Anyone could register for these sessions (number of participants: 350). |
| <b>Dec 2021<br/>–<br/>Jan 2022</b> | After that came a call for 30 future thinkers who would bring the rationale behind Ghent2030 into clear focus based on the wide survey of stakeholders. Almost 200 people responded to the call. The final group was made up of a limited number of people working in the broad cultural field (arts, museums, education), but it was highly diverse in terms of age, gender identification, origin, discipline, sector and domain. The '30 in 2030' delivered a concept paper and a framework of values for Ghent2030.                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>March – May<br/>2022</b>        | Two open forums gave everyone in Ghent with needs and ideas the chance to give feedback on the two proposals. A total of 215 people in four locations in different districts participated in the first forum, and the second was attended by 190 people in Ghent University Forum (the UFO building).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>May &amp; Nov<br/>2022</b>      | Two networking events by invitation were held for: key persons from the worlds of culture, politics, society and economics. They were updated on the candidacy and helped to initiate the launch of the non-profit organisation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>End of 2022</b>                 | Founding of the non-profit organisation Ghent2030 vzw, with cross-sectoral representatives. See above.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Spring 2023</b>          | The non-profit organisation appointed facilitators to distil the first bidbook out of all the material collected: these were city officials and cultural players, including representatives of the GKO and Community Ghent.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Summer – autumn 2023</b> | At three open walk-in sessions, spread around the city, the facilitators engaged in conversation with interested citizens of Ghent to gain their input (approx. 40 participants per meeting). Extra input was also collected at the Culture Market and the city-wide festival Odegand: many passers-by (from Ghent or elsewhere) could indicate on a big map where they feel at home in the city and why.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Summer – autumn 2023</b> | After an open call, the GKO appointed an artistic team of 8 people to develop the artistic lines and the programme itself. This was also an intentionally young and diverse team, with nobody who is structurally active within cultural institutions in Ghent that are recognised by the city.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>October 2023</b>         | The facilitating team organised the five-day 'Doeners- & (Om)denkersfestival' at 13 different locations in the city, to connect doers, thinkers and transformers from parallel worlds. Its broad and inspiring mix of activities was aimed at key players in all areas. And it was a success: 1,343 people enrolled, there were 2,410 participations in 121 sessions, with 175 organisations and 152 speakers.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Aug – Sept 2023</b>      | Widespread external communication about Ghent2030 was rolled out, including an article in the free City Magazine that all Ghent residents receive in their letterbox and a fun press conference / flashmob under the open City Pavilion.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>June 2023 onwards</b>    | A communication sounding board was also launched with experts from government bodies, the cultural sector and civil society organisations (a total of 60 participants), plus a 'Learning' sounding board group (with 40 members from the social, (arts) education and academic sectors) to consider how we can turn Ghent2030 into a European learning lab. That group inspired a 'Learning' design group (6 members) that formulated the 'learning principles' for Ghent2030 (see fold-out page)                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Jan 2024</b>             | On 11 January, the artistic team presented their provisional programme lines at the General Meeting of the GKO, with 120 participants and working tables to flesh out these lines with concrete ideas. On 17 January, the same thing was done for around 40 staff of Ghent-based cultural centres (city-funded and otherwise), with a call to commit themselves. It met with great enthusiasm.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Feb 2024</b>             | After the Doeners & (Om)denkersfestival, a 'Sprokkelweek' or idea-gathering week was held to gain further input into the programme and learning principles, with five days of collective sessions and individual conversations with players in the cultural sector and civil society.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>March – May 2024</b>     | We presented our concept to about 200 university college students studying communication, journalism and graphic design, with feedback on content and marketing. We also asked some students at Ghent University to conduct a benchmark study for the subject Community Service Learning, which provided tips & tricks on lobbying from other ECoCs. In the meantime, the team of facilitators was focusing on the bidbook to make their ideas more concrete through meetings with the cultural sector in Zeeland and with Jo-Annes de Bat, the Zeeland deputy for culture, the Province of East Flanders, cultural staff in the region, directors of the major French cities, the culture department of Espoo, etc. |
| <b>May 2024 – summer</b>    | Around 100 guests from the business community attended a breakfast session for economic players to explain the candidacy (see Q26). Workshops followed in the summer to explore the socio-economic narrative in greater depth.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>June 2024</b>            | Many cultural and non-cultural key figures from earlier in the process gave feedback on a draft of this bidbook. Many of their comments and suggestions have been incorporated into this text. We are also inviting everyone involved over the last few years to the GKO Festival, where we will celebrate bidbook 1 and thank everybody for their contribution.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

All these activities and encounters generated the contact details of more than 2,000 people interested in and engaged with our candidacy. The Ghent2030 newsletter (since 2023) now has about a thousand subscribers.

Ghent2030 is building on a very open relationship with the cultural sector and civil society, without relying on established patterns of participation and consultation. **We are already noticing the effects** of this original participatory approach, ranging from new insights in the culture department to enthusiasm among minoritised artists, a wider network and a greater European awareness. The **cultural and arts institutions are also following the process with confidence**, and large numbers of them have already agreed to commit their infrastructure, resources, European networks, production and staff.

### So what next?

Ghent2030 will perpetuate this broad engagement from the end of 2024 onwards by means of the toopen. It should already be clear from the example programme in Q11 that local artists and cultural organisations from Ghent and the surrounding region are playing a **leading role in both the process and the intended programme**. They are Ghent2030. That is the only logical consequence of our mission to transform our own cultural system on a human scale as we go along, based on greater resilience and a greater sense of belonging throughout the city, in close connection with other players and experiences in Europe.



### 3. European Dimension

*Q14 How do we promote the cultural diversity of Europe, intercultural dialogue and greater understanding between European citizens? How do we highlight the common aspects of European cultures, heritage and history, European integration and current European themes*

Did you know we have an **Europalaan** – Europe Boulevard – in Ghent? Until 1953, it was a marshy stretch of wasteland on the outskirts of Ghent, lost between two arms of the river Lys. But when the Watersportbaan, a rowing course that is a stunning 2.3 kilometres long and 76 metres wide, was created for the European Rowing Championships in 1955, the excavated soil was used to raise the marshes and create reliable building land. Between 1959 and 1965, three large blocks of social housing were built there, eleven storeys high, to meet postwar housing needs. The result was our Europalaan, almost exactly the same age as the EU itself: a stately manifestation of the postwar dream of prosperity, progress and comfortable housing for everyone, even the ordinary people.

Today the Europalaan is still very atmospheric, with lots of greenery (picture below). This is exactly why the real lives behind the dozens of balconies that look out over the Watersportbaan have remained invisible for so long. Many poverty indicators in Europalaan have risen to become the highest in Ghent, partly due to the influx of many vulnerable people into the social housing blocks. Social cohesion and the general quality of living are under huge pressure, and social isolation and loneliness are great.

Since 2021, the city has been working hard on renovations and new neighbourhood facilities in the area around the Watersportbaan. All the same, the evolution of Europalaan is a **wake-up call** that symbolises many other places in Europe. So many towns and cities have their own Europalaan. How can we continue to safeguard the great postwar values of the European Union – almost 70 years after the Treaty of Rome – in an age of war, climate threat, fake news, increasing cultural differences and social inequality? How can we stay in touch with so many alienated Europeans behind the shiny façade of our European welfare state?

The decline of Europalaan teaches us that there is no single explanation. Instead, there is a complicated interplay of very wide-ranging dynamics, from major social and economic developments to smaller issues that are specific to the neighbourhood. If we want to change the future, our approach must be equally widespread. Culture can offer a key, but never on its own. The city has many assets at hand, but not the only ones. And **the same rule applies even to the mighty EU: you can't do it on your own.** The only way to create a sense of belonging again in places like Europalaan is with a combined story in which different systems work together and transform together. This is why Ghent believes that the system switch it is aiming for only makes sense as part of a European story.

**Although the three lines of our programme feel Ghentish through and through, we don't believe that makes them any less European.** They have the potential to resonate from Cyprus to Norway:

- **Wasteland** does more than simply put the way we treat our (public and private) space and our relationship with nature on the agenda. It also relates to the farmers' protests in several parts of Europe, the growing ideological polarisation between the city and countryside and the need for a short-chain economy in the future. How can Europe continue to reinvent itself as an innovative space for experiments that are not determined in advance?
- **Water** is - or should be – a top priority on the European agenda, as droughts, forest fires and floods increasingly threaten the continent. Our relationship with the commons of water will become one of Europe's biggest geopolitical problems for the near and more distant future. If only for this reason, Zeeland is a partner that

has much to teach us: people there know exactly what water means and how to deal with it. Metaphorically, too, social cohesion (water as a weaver of the social fabric) is the number-one brainbuster for many policymakers. How can we merge the worlds that people live in, overcoming the ever more insidious filtering algorithms of social media?

- **Margin** brings the question of power balances and imbalances within the geography of Europe into sharply contemporary focus, as well as issues of ownership within any cultural system. The interaction between core cultural institutions and the grassroots of culture is one of the most pertinent questions for the whole of cultural Europe: how can our institutions become more open and connective? Migration and European border politics are our hottest topic. With mental vulnerability not far behind.



As well as in terms of content, these three programme lines have been developed conceptually and strategically in the form of **three basic principles underlying the European perspective of Ghent2030**:

1. **Wasteland as a wellspring** – This orientation towards the ‘outskirts’ of Europe is not paternalism in disguise, nor is it one-dimensional ‘solidarity’. As a well-developed city of culture, we also have **much to gain and learn from cultural organisations that have worked for many years outside the traditional systems and networks, by choice or necessity**, without the highly developed cultural systems and the government support we take for granted in Belgium. We can learn a lot from finding out how people make culture meaningful in Zagreb, Naples or Belfast. Might the rebelliousness we aim for so hard in Ghent be easier to find today in Poland or Finland? And when it comes to regional cultural policy – something that is still in its infancy in Ghent – we have much to learn from ECoCs that have created brilliant narratives in their regions. So there are plenty of reasons to break out of our Ghentish silo and draw inspiration from other cultural contexts in Europe. The most important aspect of our context might indeed be the lack of ‘space’ in Ghent. How can the interaction with more rural areas become a win-win for everyone? These are issues for which we are determined to seek European exchanges in toopen such as **‘Let the Sun Shine Everywhere’** and **‘Grounded’**. And might the most expertise concerning the use of ‘semipublic spaces’ (the **Open to the Public** toop) be found in the MENA region? Our cultural sector mainly aims to learn through Ghent2030, rather than distributing our ‘top-quality art’. We will only become truly European when we learn to look beyond Brussels.
2. **Water as a weaver** – Ghent2030 aims to create **surprising connections by giving the keys to others** and offering foreign artists all the space they need for their own ideas. Genuine connection is a two-way process, not one-way traffic in which Ghent2030 merely acts as a programmer and presents international artists as ‘our idea’. This shared ownership is the guideline for the toop **YoungStars**, for example: young people from all over Europe and other ECoC cities create their own programme based on an encounter with each other at a summer school – a principle that has also been thoroughly tried and tested in Ghent as the EYC 2024. We are also curious how international artists will tackle a neighbourhood context that is not their home in **‘Triangle’**. We see our own role mainly as the creation of direct contacts between people, so that they can figure things out with each other as they go along. This is precisely where European citizenship and capacity building emerge: in practice. Even our choice to use the ‘open call’ as a method for programme development is rooted in that philosophy. We don’t simply look through our own list of familiar phone numbers: instead, we encourage others to call us. This is why we will be developing an alternative European circuit from 2025 onwards to distribute these calls.

3. **Margin as a measure** – Our programme gives **priority to those European artists and cultural spaces, as well as some from beyond Europe, that currently benefit less from international mobility** throughout European territory. Artists from Ghent do travel all over the world to show their work. They can do so because they have the financial, cultural and symbolic capital they need to mobilise contacts and obtain financing for their practices. We are more aware than ever of this central West European position in a relatively well-subsidised cultural system. Artistic exchange in Europe remains largely one-way traffic, we seldom get to see artists or creations from areas such as the Balkan States, Estonia or Greece. That is why toopen/projects such as **‘Unjustified Ideas’**, **‘A Different Programme’** and **‘On the Edges’** are consciously focused on the ‘periphery’, artists we rarely know, let alone ones we’ve often seen in Belgium up to now. We will pay special attention to makers from Cyprus (where there will also be an ECoC city in 2030) and to the third ECoC city in a candidate EU country.

### **What about Ghent2030 outside Ghent, elsewhere in Europe?**

Ghent2030 and the sector will seek alternative solutions **to tours with travelling products or productions** - for ecological reasons and to question and rethink the traditional distribution model. We would like to see **the fluid ideas and methods** of Ghent2030 – rather than its products – travelling throughout our networks and partnerships to encourage mutual enrichment. These can be adapted and appropriated in very different contexts and forms. Shared ownership and working participatorily start with letting go and passing on.

As such, our aim is to hold one **Monday Mealday** throughout Europe in December 2030, with a different flavour everywhere, as the closing event for our ECoC year. Ambitious? Certainly, but it’s also feasible. Thursday Veggie Day began in Ghent in 2009 and has since been adopted by many other cities. Learning begins by doing things differently yourself. And we have a lot to gain from seeing how an idea from Ghent2030 is picked up elsewhere.

After our ECoC year, we want to bring all our experiences together in a **Subjective Atlas of Europe**, as the outcome of the toop **‘Marking the Map’**. That will also serve as the catalogue for Ghent2030: a collection of all the learnings acquired and passed on, on a human scale.

**In 2025**, we will **develop a new vision for ecologically sustainable mobility** for incoming artists and visitors to Ghent, inspired by European programmes such as Perform Europe and Culture Moves Europe, and the insights of the ECoC city Uppsala. There will also be input from Greentrack, the networking organisation from Ghent, now active throughout Flanders, which aims to reduce the ecological footprint of the cultural sector.

## Cultural democracy and culture as an SDG

As a guideline for these principles, we have been greatly inspired by the Porto Santo Charter (2021) on cultural citizenship. The charter was put forward during the Portuguese presidency of the EU and promotes a necessary paradigm shift from the **'democratisation of culture'** (spreading 'culture and art the way we do it') to **'cultural democracy'** (shared ownership with no prescribed definition of culture). Its closing recommendations have helped to determine our direction:

*"Cultural Democracy" implies a new relational model between institutions and communities: culture becomes a platform where each person can participate and be responsible. (...) It implies the valuing of distinct cultures and publics and recognises the right for emancipation and empowerment of people as active cultural subjects who participate in and decide the cultural life of their communities. To this end, access to the means of cultural creation, fruition and protection and the democratization of decision-making processes are required."*

Similarly, during the 2023 Spanish EU presidency, the Cáceres Declaration emphasised the importance of cultural democracy. It advocated urging the UN to **make culture a new, 18<sup>th</sup> SDG** by 2030, given the transversal power of culture. This call has since been spread more widely by many international networks, organisations and campaigns. Ghent fully supports this.

### Q15 Overall strategy to attract the interest of a broad European and international public

Our international recruitment strategy follows our general vision: we will build on the existing expertise and human capacity in Ghent as well as using the ECoC year to put the emphasis on new areas and thus embed them structurally.

Ghent already has an **experienced and well-developed mechanism** for general, international marketing and communication, with widespread distribution throughout Europe and tried-and-tested recipes for appealing to visitors, such as our specific combination of content creation and storytelling (see also Q34). This approach has demonstrated its success: Ghent is attracting increasing numbers of tourists and other international visitors. In 2022, we recorded 1,477,654 overnight stays, an increase of 46% on 2016. A third of the overnight tourists are Belgian, with another 20% from the Netherlands. They are followed by visitors from Germany, France, Great Britain, the United States, Spain and other countries. The Ghent2030 programme will provide more than sufficient opportunities to continue to expand this international appeal through specific communication (see Q11, with 30% of productions for a European audience).

At the same time, we are experiencing the need for a transformation in our approach to tourism. A particular challenge we want to tackle in 2030 is the **'tourism dilemma' in Ghent**. Annual surveys of residents have shown that 65%

of Ghent residents believe the city centre is now 'too full' of tourists, whereas 75% of tourists experience Ghent as quiet in combination with other cities. Tourists call Ghent 'a city of the good life'. How can we build upon those satisfied visitors without creating dissatisfaction among residents? How can we continue to offer every tourist a warm welcome?

Ghent2030 will be the ideal learning environment for developing a system shift for tourism as well. We want to commit especially to higher quality tourism: visitors who have meaningful travel experiences in line with their personal 'ikigai' (Japanese for 'reason for being'), whilst having a positive impact on the city they visit and its residents. The crux is to stimulate **more direct human connections**. We do this in three ways, both physically and virtually:

#### 1. Through Ghent's 'internationals'

One in three Ghent residents have ethnic minority roots, accounting for a good 140 nationalities of origin in total (with Turkey, Bulgaria and Morocco as the top three). Through contact with family or friends in their home country or elsewhere in Europe, they automatically connect Ghent to the world. Ghent also has increasing numbers of international students: in 2022-2023 there were over 8,000 of them, or 9% of the entire student population. The number of foreign researchers and temporary workers in the creative and cultural sector is also growing steadily.

We are involving this diverse group of international Ghent residents in Ghent2030 as local cocreators, and partly as ambassadors for our European Capital of Culture among their own international networks. We are engaging in dialogue with them about what they need to invite extra family and friends to Ghent, and what barriers we can remove for less wealthy visitors (including those from outside Europe). We are also focusing on international art students, e.g. at the International Opera Academy or the degree in animated film at KASK School of Arts.



## 2. Upgrading the content of international visits

Besides our tried-and-tested attraction strategies, we are also working on some innovative responses to our 'tourism dilemma' based on the three programme lines and learning principles:



### Wasteland as a wellspring

We are learning about regenerative tourism, which strengthens destinations rather than exhausting their resources. We are exchanging knowledge about this with the ECoC city of Budweis and Uppsala.



### Water as a weaver – surprising connections

We encourage direct exchanges between European visitors and local residents. We will build bridges with initiatives such as couch surfing, house swapping, 'Warmshowers', 'Welcome To My Garden' and – as a cycling city through and through – 'Friends on Bikes'. We will invite residents to give a fellow European a place to sleep or offer them another special encounter. We will reinvent the true spirit of hospitality and European exchange.

We will pay extra attention to increased accessibility/inclusiveness for tourists with specific needs, e.g. mental health needs. Museum Dr. Guislain is currently running an Erasmus+ project on this with partners including Tartu2024: 'Inclusive Heritage Tourism – Open Minds, Open World'. We will generalise these insights for Ghent2030.



### Margin as a measure – shared ownership

In 2030 we will support 2030 Ghent residents who want to invite a contact person from the margins of Europe for an unforgettable experience in our city (e.g. an old Erasmus friend, a distant family member, a former holiday romance, etc.).

We will also offer support for 2030 non-European visitors with limited resources, partly through solidarity contributions from Ghent residents. We will consult with tourism partners from the Ghent and Zeeland region (see Q2) on shared promotion of accommodation and spreading tourists, e.g. by offering shared packages for cultural tourists. We will ask Aarhus and other ECoC cities that are committing to regional tourism for tips on this.

## 3. Space for virtual visits and hybrid experiences

It is difficult to predict what will be trending in 2030, but Ghent2030 will certainly be keeping its finger on the pulse to offer European audiences the chance to enjoy it from afar. In several toopen, that requirement is explicitly on the table. We are keeping a close eye on Budweis' quest to make activities virtually accessible. Along with Paphos2017 and Matera2019, we will be working on the theme of opening up heritage digitally.

## Q16 Links between our cultural programme and the cultural programme of other ECoC cities

Since the start of Ghent's candidacy in 2021, we have sought contact with other ECoC cities:

- **Public inspiration webinars.** We began by engaging in conversation about the do's and don'ts of being an ECoC, and especially about their lasting effects on cities. In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, we organised well-attended, open webinars with Lille, Rijeka, Leeuwarden and Aarhus.
- **One-to-one conversations with other ECoC cities.** These have been held, for instance, during meetings of the Eurocities Culture Forum, UNESCO Creative Cities and Culture Next, and during visits by cultural delegations from the ECoC cities Lille, Aarhus, Leeuwarden, Chemnitz, Bad Ischl and Lublin to Ghent.
- **Networking with the 2030 candidates.** We had a joint meeting of the Belgian and Cypriot candidate cities and Nikšić (Montenegro), held in Larnaca in May 2024.

### First selection of sustainable partnerships

Based on our explorations, we have drawn up an initial selection of ECoC cities that we will work with. With a view to our legacy, we are committing to partnerships that are sustainable beyond 2030. Furthermore, Ghent is already a partner in projects by other ECoC cities, which may lead to further collaboration in the toopen and our ECoC year.

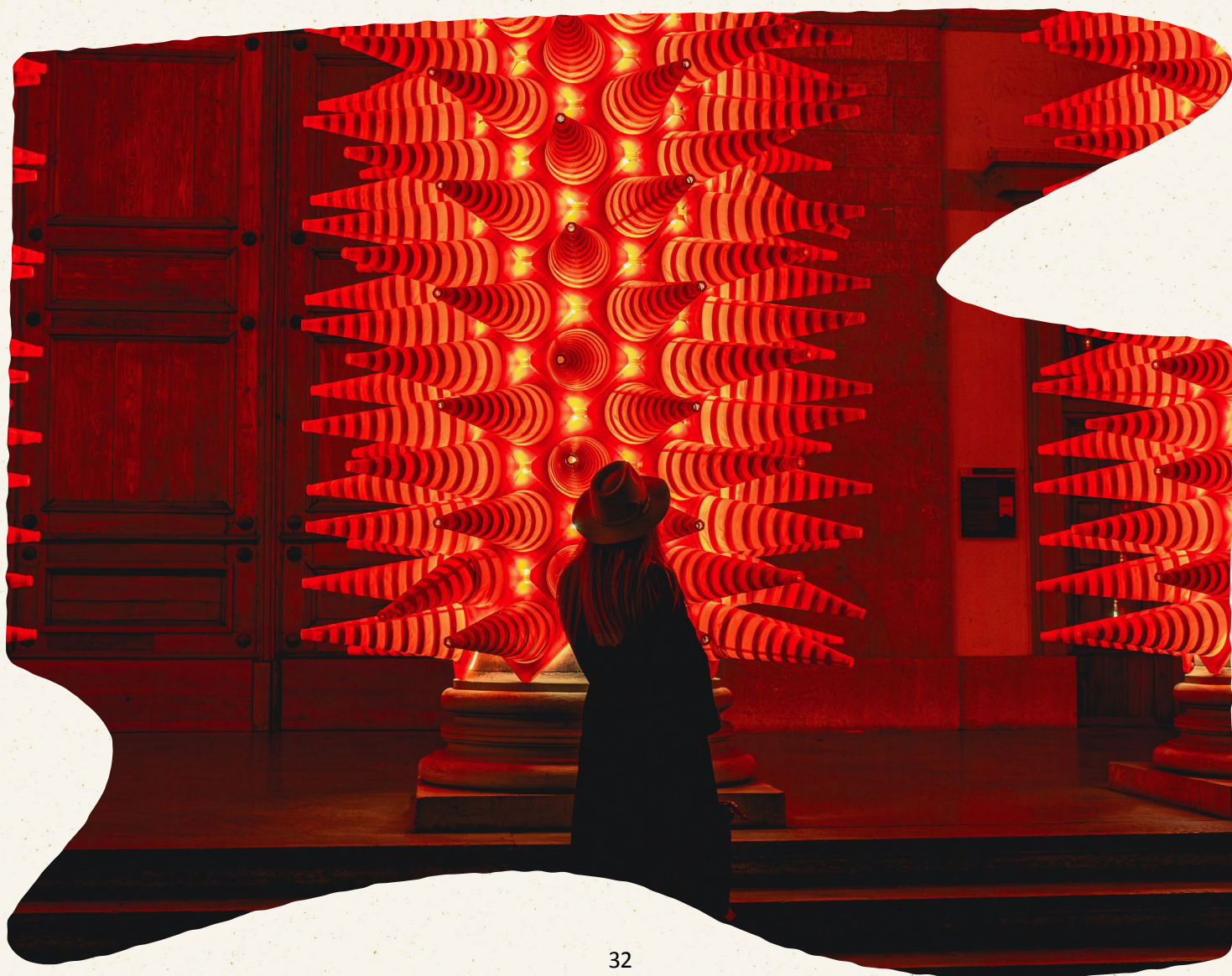
We have already received a commitment to collaboration from many ECoCs: Aarhus2017, Leeuwarden2018, Bad Ischl2024, Chemnitz2025, Budweis2025, Nova Gorica2025, Oulu2026, Evora2027, Rouen2028 (candidate), Uppsala2029 (candidate), Lublin2029 (candidate), Bielsko-Biala2029 (candidate), Larnaca2030 (candidate), Limassol2030 (candidate) and Burgos2031 (candidate). These partnerships are based on themes of content (which will be incorporated into toopen and the programme) and/or the vision and methods for supporting processes (communication, participation, financing, monitoring, organisation, etc.). Further clarification:

- The libraries in **Aarhus** and Ghent have worked together in the past. In its ECoC year, Aarhus focused on regional themes and is continuing this towards 2030 with Ghent. We will also collaborate on the themes of youth, participation and ecology.
- We are joining **Leeuwarden** in working with **Oulu** on the Erasmus+ project 'Wanderful Journeys', a project in the submission phase on 'the artistic mindset and meaningful citizenship education'. In 2030, we will concentrate on learning and youth.
- We want to work on the theme of youth with **Chemnitz and Nova Gorica**, starting with a summer school for young people in collaboration with the Ukrainian city of Lviv (EYC 2025). A first edition of the summer school was held in Ghent in 2024.

- At the beginning of 2024, a delegation from **Bad Ischl** visited Ghent, and we attended their ECoC opening in early 2024. We decided to work together on makers and textiles. We also made arrangements relating to textiles with **Bielsko-Biala** in Bad Ischl.
- We are involved in the submission for the Creative Europe project 'Delta Life' with **Budweis, Oulu and Rouen** aimed at cities on the water and the impact of water on mental health. This will remain a focal point in 2030.
- **Evora's** 'Vagar' concept and their approach has inspired us to work together on participation and communication.
- We have had contact with **Lublin** in the past as another EYC city, and we will work together on youth in 2030.
- We want to put our backs into the project 'Resilience in Culture Lab' with **Burgos and Lublin**, on mental well-being and safe spaces in the cultural sector.
- We are continuing our collaborations with **Oulu** through various European projects on technology and entrepreneurship, as well as learning, youth and mental well-being.
- We are paying particular attention to **Uppsala**, which wants to use the ECoC title, as Ghent does, to accelerate regenerative tourism.

## Work in progress

Our process-based approach in the toopen and the plan to work with open calls also offer many opportunities in the coming months and years to develop our programme further with input from interested ECoCs. Bidbook 2 will provide more clarity, although we want to continue seizing opportunities even after that to increase the involvement of partners from other ECoCs, in line with how our themes and projects develop. These talks are initially being held by the ECoC team in Ghent, but they are also organically embedded in wider sustainable networks of Ghent-based cultural players, civil society and Ghent city council (see Q35).



## 4. Outreach

### Q17 Involving the local population and civil society in preparing the application and implementing Ghent2030



*"When I heard for the first time in 2021 that Ghent wanted to be a candidate for the European Capital of Culture, I felt so much resistance that I immediately felt like organising a counter-festival in 2030. Back then, I was still a social worker in the socio-cultural organisation*

*VOEM, that connects people and organisations across boundaries. I could imagine exactly what Ghent2030 would be like. Lots of money would be poured into a small cultural bubble again, while so many other good cultural projects were begging for funding. But they'd be judged 'too social', 'too much wellbeing and not enough art'. Ghent would mainly want to put its attractive, European allure in the spotlight. And no doubt everything had already been decided in the back rooms of arts institutions and in politicians' teams. That's the kind of thing I was thinking back then. No way was I going to get involved in that Capital of Culture! And I wasn't the only one."*

So how did **Amani El Haddad** become **the coordinator of the GKO** that is one of the big driving forces of Ghent2030?

*"This is what the whole process has achieved: many other critical voices from within and outside the arts are still involved in Ghent2030 as well, because they were brought in at the outset. They felt valued by the way it was all approached. People really listened, and criticisms were taken on board. In the Doeners- & (Om) denkersfestival in 2023, we found a concrete method for sharing ideas, our own expertise and the dissatisfaction that many people experience with each other. More than a third of the organisations involved in that festival were run by ethnic minority people. And that's new in Ghent. For so many years, I've heard people saying the same things over and over again. In white cultural circles, they say: "They don't come." And friends of colour always say: "There they are again." With Ghent2030, you sense that we really can do it together. Precisely because key figures were involved from the outset and because the artistic team is genuinely diverse. Confidence was put in them, and that's something they can continue to pass on to their peers. You are already seeing the patterns of city departments changing, for example in the people they ask to attend meet-up days, etc. Ghent2030 is really setting something in motion. I am starting to notice more love for Ghent."*

In Q13, we provided an overview of the broad, participatory relay race used to shape Ghent2030. In this process we made no distinction between civil society and cultural players, because this crosssectoral entanglement is 'very Ghent'. For example, our Ghent Arts Platform, the GKO, is also open to non-artistic players. In fact, collaboration with other sectors

(tourism, education, economy, urban development, media, etc.) is deeply embedded in its basic mission. Everyone is welcome to the GKO's 'Big Meetings'.

However, the first stakeholder survey for Ghent2030 revealed that the **original cooperative flow in Ghent has been somewhat lost** in day-to-day institutional practice. For example:

- There is an 'undesirable and artificial split' between the arts and cultural sector and creative entrepreneurs.
- More bridges are needed between the regular cultural system and the many (grassroots) initiatives coming from different ethnic minority communities.
- More structural interaction with young people, (social) youth work and education would help to free up so much more creative talent and potential.

This is why Ghent2030 has opted for a single, uniting spirit from the outset: 'tuupetegoare or not at all'. From the 'Doeners- & (Om)denkersfestival' to the Sprokkelweek: no culture without civil society, no civil society without culture. Ordinary Ghent residents and those whose voices are less heard are deliberately involved: by engaging key figures in crucial positions, simply by taking Ghent2030 into the marketplace, by presenting the initial artistic concept for our European Capital of Culture – 'the 30 of 2030' again at two Open Forums in the districts, etc.

We would like to let that wide range of voices speak for itself here. How have they experienced the run-up to Ghent2030? How do they dream of our European Capital of Culture?

*"As a member of the Sint-Pieters-Buiten neighbourhood working group, I attended several participation sessions for Ghent2030. The redesigned Paul de Smet de Naeyer Park is in my neighbourhood. Temporary and permanent sculptures could be placed here in 2030.*

*Although our park is in the 'Millionaires' Quarter' (a neighbourhood of very impressive mansion houses from the early 20th century), it is also a place where people from the social housing in Nieuw Gent come to play and meet up. That diversity is an asset. In 2030, I'd like everyone to be able to help create our park and other parks in the city, and to feel welcome there."* **(Karl Musschoot, active resident of Ghent)**





*"I'm actively involved in the European Youth Capital and so I've also joined a couple of the conversations at meetings for Ghent2030. The vision of the Capital of Culture is similar to that of the Youth Capital: the focus isn't on short, prestigious events but on sustainable tools for bringing*

*people together, such as culture. That sounds woolly, but I really believe in it."* **(Youness Iken, editor and graphic designer)**

*"Thanks to the open meetings for Ghent2030, I have been able to extend my network and even set up a new cultural partnership for TAJO, our organisation that gives young people from vulnerable situations the skills to be autonomous members of society. I believe it is a very meaningful search, to put something in motion with so many different players. It can have a genuine impact: real inclusiveness in every sense."* **(Claudia van Egmond, director of TAJO)**

*"Our city has a long tradition of building intergenerational projects and working together on culture and participation. But Ghent2030 can give this an extra boost. It can increase the cultural sector's enthusiasm for working with older people. At present, we're still searching for ways to portray older people in a positive light. It often depends on people who just happen to know each other. Ghent2030 can help us construct more sustainable partnerships. For example, we are creating a context in which intergenerational work and a commitment to positive images of older people is structurally embedded."* **(Els Lecompte, Director of the Health and Care Management department, City of Ghent)**

*"At Volvo Group, we want to shape the world we live in, which is why we want to work with the City of Ghent and all the stakeholders involved to become a European Capital of Culture. Culture is one of the basic elements that determine our lives and working environment, culture connects us and creates a platform for partnerships. By working together, we can add value to all parts of society."* **(Pascal Meersschaert, Director of Strategy & Industrial projects, Volvo Group Truck Operations)**

This bidbook does not have the space to include the hundreds of other voices that have contributed to it. So we will hold space for all these dreams in the toopen, which will be starting from 2025 onwards. We will do it tuupetegoare, with the whole of civil society and our residents, or not at all.

## Q18 Creating opportunities for marginalised and disadvantaged groups to participate

Ensuring that Ghent2030 belongs to everyone is part of the programme itself. Such a switch from outreach to shared ownership, from the 'democratisation of culture' to 'cultural democracy' is the only way for Ghent2030 to achieve its mission. The aim is for people and groups forced into the margins to come into central focus. We want to reinvent the systems and make them more inclusive. How will we go about this?

To make a difference for specific groups, we combine two key attention points:

- We are taking their own existing knowledge and practical experience as a starting point: we are surfing on the energy of their initiatives, key figures, expertise, networks, etc.
- We are bringing certain key strategies for shared ownership into the mainstream systems: by embedding them centrally in the toopen, they can be shared more widely, and we can all learn from them together.

*"In an inspiration session for Ghent2030, we shared everything we had learned from people living in poverty at De Zuidpoort: the importance of clear communication and involving your target group in the core of your project. We felt that our message hit home. In the future, we hope to see that converted into the communication of policymakers, departments and organisations in Ghent."* **(An Bismans, volunteer at De Zuidpoort)**



*"I'm a Ghent-based artist with a disability. That's why I felt called to contribute to Ghent2030. I see the difficulties of getting around Ghent in a wheelchair every day, with museums and events that are very often impossible to access. I hope that Ghent2030 will make us more attentive to people with a disability, and that we will involve more people, including those who cannot join in for health reasons. Let's turn it into a festival for everyone! If I can contribute, I'd be very happy to do so!"*



**(Karen Vande Gastele, volunteer for the Asthma and Allergy Network and Amethyst vzw)**

*“As the head of a European project to help asylum seekers in reception centres find long-term work, I have been closely involved in Ghent2030 from the outset, helping to challenge the traditional view of culture. Besides being a member of the Ghent2030 board, I also helped*



*direct the Doeners & (Om)denkersfestival. I have an eye for ‘unusual suspects’, new practices and opportunities for new makers. At Jobroad, for example, we don’t like using CVs, but prefer to bring motivated parties together. That’s exactly what culture is good at as well: creating genuine encounters and asking each other questions as equals. This exercise for Ghent2030 has already changed the city a bit, simply because it was started up in an unconventional way. I’m already seeing organisations emerging and growing to gain a more visible place in Ghent. That makes this candidacy a genuine movement, which is capable of surprising this remarkable city again with the abundance we possess.” (Aristide Bandora, project coordinator at Jobroad for Refugees2work)*

### **Working with knowledge and practical experience that is already there**

Ghent2030 does not intend to reinvent the wheel, but to bring together existing circuits and **connect up ‘charted waters’, encouraging them to flow into each other.** This is the only way to make a system switch work: getting to know each other by working together and joining forces. We don’t understand participation from the ‘inside out’ but from the ‘outside in’: participating in the worlds where people whose voices are less heard actually live, and giving them the keys.

Specifically, Ghent2030 is extending a hand to a wealth of players and organisations. That has to do with our initial starting point: to invent the programme of the European Capital of Culture year together, as we go along. We are trusting in a double source of capital for this:

1. **Ghent2030 can rely on a long tradition of participation in Ghent**, both in terms of policy and thanks to a highly developed socio-artistic network and practical experience of 25 years of focus on the districts. An inspiring example is the Ghent heritage project ‘The Square Kilometre’, which makes history with human stories in different neighbourhoods. It was awarded the prestigious European Herita/Europa Nostra Award in May 2024 for the naturalness with which it allows all voices to be heard, as “an example to museums that want to work with and for their communities”. “Superdiverse neighbourhoods turned out not to be a ‘challenge’ for heritage, but rather an opportunity to write history from the bottom up”, as city historian Tina De Gendt explains. “Something that always began with walking and talking has spread like wildfire, with dozens of enthusiasts activating their neighbourhoods and communities and setting up new neighbourhood projects.” Creating energy starts with listening and taking what you hear seriously.

2. **By now, Ghent2030 has a wide network of people and organisations working with or for people whose voices are less heard: for example** neurodivergent people, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, those living in poverty, people with dual diagnosis issues, young people, LGBTQIA+ people, artists and others. Many of them helped to programme the Doeners & (Om)denkersfestival in 2023 and have been actively involved in the preparation of this bidbook. They are ready to take the plunge once the toopen are set up after the launch of the Mother Toop in autumn 2024.

### **Strategies for shared ownership by ‘marginalised groups’:**

We have begun by formulating the following guidelines to help toopen achieve shared ownership in practice:

- **Build trust, create safety and openness:** toopen are environments where participants feel safe to share their ideas and perspectives, also offering space for emotions and conflict. They are safe spaces and also brave spaces.
- **Break down power and share responsibility:** the toopen are aware of existing power structures that will emerge and create horizontal structures in which various responsibilities are shared and can be taken, certainly by young people as well.
- **Be transparent about mandates and budgets:** the toopen ensure that roles are clearly allocated and regularly passed on to new facilitators, applying a clear framework for making budgets available and distributing them.
- **Make decisions based on consent:** the toopen set a minimum of rules for working together, paying attention to minority voices (deep democracy), and thus they remove the obstacles for unheard voices.
- **Encourage connective, transparent communication:** the toopen give transparent feedback on processes, choices and decisions, and share the same information with everyone.

This makes 2030 an ideal time to put the phrase ‘we are creating the city together’ from the City of Ghent’s mission statement into practice in culture as well. Toopen such as **Triangle, Don’t Talk, Just Dance, Unpublic Programme, Pass It On!, Moving Migration, YoungStars**, etc. will be crucial learning environments for removing social, financial, linguistic, infrastructural and other obstacles long after 2030.

We will not restrict ourselves to Ghent. Internationally, we will exchange learnings with other cities to stay in connection with people, groups and their needs even in globally challenging times. For example, one thing we want to do is to collect and further distribute guidelines and best and failed practices on the theme of ‘thinking beyond participation’, in partnership with ECoC cities and candidate cities.

## *Q19 Strategy for audience development, the link with education and the participation of schools*

**Our strategy for generating enthusiasm for Ghent2030 among a wide, local and international audience has a circular model, according to the metaphor of a stone falling into water or the rippling energy of particles connecting. The greater the central energy, the further its waves will ripple.**

You often see this in socio-artistic theatre projects: they sell out quickly, even for days in a row, because all the actors on stage feel so involved that they spontaneously attract an audience themselves from their own communities. Energy creates energy. Motivation motivates others. Ghent2030 intends to develop its audience using this simple **multiplicator effect**: by involving people as co-creators, they often become co-communicators.



*"As a lecturer in communication, specialised in innovation and ethics, I shared my insights into these plans at the Doeners- en (Om) denkersfestival. That was an immediate impulse to start working with a good 500 students on the city of the future. They came up with more than 30 future scenarios for Ghent!"*

*Right from the earliest preparations of the candidacy, there has been clear added value in working together with educational bodies and students, and exchanging ideas on what culture can mean in a human society."*

**(Jens Pas, lecturer at Artevelde University of Applied Sciences)**

Precisely because of that belief in multiplying energy, Ghent2030 sees **education as a privileged partner**. We can reach all the children in Ghent through their schools (and indirectly their families as well), to connect them with culture from an early age. Demand for this comes from the schools themselves. Schools see culture as a language and a way to take a positive approach to social changes and needs. Arts centres, art schools, museums, libraries and artistic organisations can play a helpful and inspiring role in this. Ghent2030 will facilitate this bridging process and give every young person in Ghent the chance to learn about culture or through culture, to develop personally, creatively and socially, and to acquire and strengthen their cultural skills.

One example is that we want to commit to a shared challenge which is causing scarcely imaginable shifts both at school and in the cultural sector: **AI and digitalisation in general**. Are cultural organisations actually prepared for a generation for whom the virtual world seems to be the real reality? And are schools ready for the great impact that AI is having on traditional learning? In the **toop 'We, Myself and AI'**, culture, education and the creative sector will search together for ways in which the digital evolution/revolution can be used

to generate more empathy and wonder and to counter toxic polarisation.

In doing so, culture introduces a way of learning that can be close (or closer) to young people's lives. In Ghent, we believe strongly in the link between education and culture and have mainly worked together at project level until now. For Ghent2030, we will seek a structural collaboration between culture and education, for example by appointing a specific employee as a bridge-builder.

*STATUS: the City Schools (where a significant proportion of pupils come from disadvantaged groups) have already agreed to participate. In 2024, the City Schools network consists of 45 primary schools, 9 secondary schools, 1 adult education centre (CVO) and 3 part-time arts education academies. That enables us to reach the entire spectrum of education, from preschool to adult education. The Childcare Service has also agreed to participate, with 32 daycare centres and 45 after-school centres, including those in districts with many disadvantaged groups. The other education networks (free and Flemish Community education) are also enthusiastic about participating.*

We are working with **higher education** to further develop Ghent2030 as a collective learning environment: we are involving several educational partners structurally in the various activities of the Mother Toop, e.g. in the **monitoring and evaluation process**, through work placements and assignments for marketing and communication students, in the toopen 'Open to the Public' on semipublic spaces or 'Don't Talk, Just Dance', etc. Together, we are learning to multiply in many ways.

*STATUS: In 2023, we brought the top management of higher education institutions together: Ghent University, Artevelde University of Applied Sciences, HOGENT, KASK and Luca School of Arts. They all announced their engagement to contributing to Ghent's candidacy as a European Capital of Culture. Several experts from education in the working groups have already helped to give our bidbook its concrete form, from a specialist in impact measurement to a researcher in decolonisation, a futurologist to an educational policy coordinator. Students from Artevelde University of Applied Sciences have offered input on marketing and communication and on AI. We are continuing to build on all these contacts and partnerships.*

**EDUCATION IN GHEENT:** Besides being a young city (with more 25 to 39-year-olds and more young children than the Flemish average, and fewer 65 to 79-year-olds), Ghent is also a genuine city of education, with a good 50,000 schoolchildren under the age of 18, a wide range of informal education for leisure time, the biggest student population in Flanders (with 87,000 students in 2021-2022 and an increase of 2,000 students each year) and a wide range of specific arts and culture education for children and adults.

## 5. Management

### 5.1. FINANCES

*Q20 Annual budget for culture in the city over the last 5 years*

| Year | City of Ghent's annual budget for culture (in euros) | City of Ghent's annual budget for culture (as % of City of Ghent's total budget) |
|------|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2020 | 54,156,201                                           | 5.20%                                                                            |
| 2021 | 56,166,201                                           | 5.10%                                                                            |
| 2022 | 56,613,966                                           | 4.79%                                                                            |
| 2023 | 55,736,122                                           | 4.48%                                                                            |
| 2024 | 55,725,896                                           | 4.33%                                                                            |

The annual culture budget for the city consists of the budget for the city's Culture Department, Festivities Department and the promotional budget of the Tourism Department, plus the operational budgets of the library, museums, historic buildings, De Centrale intercultural centre and De Bijloke music centre.

The percentages for culture in 2020 and 2021 are somewhat higher than in other years, because the city provided extra support to the cultural sector during the **pandemic**. **Due to the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis**, the City of Ghent's general operating budget has increased, with the result that the share for culture has dropped slightly in proportion over the past three years. As a result of these crises, the city has had to make several rounds of savings. However, **no cuts have been made in the budget for culture**.

*Q21 Funds from the annual budget for culture to finance the European Capital of Culture project*

In 2025-2029, the further preparation of Ghent2030 will be co-financed from the regular cultural budget, as part of the 2040 long-term cultural strategy. The city administration and Cultuur Gent see this period of preparation for Ghent2030 as an integral part of the City of Ghent's mission and a component of the cultural strategy (see Q 5). At the same time, this earmarked funding will not come at the expense of the regular subsidies to organisations and culture makers.

In 2025, an additional budget of 375,000 euros will be allocated on top of the regular budget. Starting in 2026, at least 5% of the approved funds for culture will be devoted to preparation for the title year. New projects will be aligned as far as possible with the objectives of 2030 and the 2040 cultural strategy.

*Q22 Overall annual budget for culture after the European Capital of Culture year*

**After 2030**, Ghent is aiming for **an increase in cultural expenditure to 6 % of the city's total budget**, to put culture closer to the heart of city life. This percentage includes the contribution of each policy area in the city that will help achieve the mission of 2030 and ensure the intended impact and legacy.

*Q23 Overall operating budget for Ghent2030*

The amounts below are estimates and intended as minimum amounts.

| From the private sector | From the public sector | Total income for operational expenditure |
|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| € 5,000,000<br>8%       | € 60,000,000<br>92%    | € 65,000,000<br>100%                     |



*Q24/Q25 Breakdown of the income to be received from the public sector for operating expenditure and commitments from the authorities*

The figures in this table are minimum amounts.  
The answer to Q25 can be found in the right-hand column.

| Income from the public sector for operational expenditure | in euros          | %           | progress of decision                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Belgian Federal Government</b>                         | 15,000,000        | 25%         | validated on 17 May 2024 by the Prime Minister, for all candidate cities in Belgium              |
| <b>Flemish Community</b>                                  | 30,000,000        | 50%         | validated on 25 April 2024 by the Flemish government, for all candidate cities in Flanders       |
| <b>City of Ghent</b>                                      | 10,000,000        | 17%         | Intention of the current city council, to be re-validated in 2025 by the new city council        |
| <b>EU programmes</b><br>(Not including M. Mercouri Prize) | 5,000,000         | 8%          | See Q30                                                                                          |
| <b>Province of East Flanders</b>                          | TBA               | TBA         | negotiations underway, to be completed in 2025 after the provincial elections on 13 October 2024 |
| <b>Province of Zeeland</b>                                | TBA               | TBA         | negotiations underway                                                                            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                              | <b>60,000,000</b> | <b>100%</b> |                                                                                                  |

*Q26 Fundraising strategy to seek support from private sponsors.  
Plan for involving sponsors in the event.*

Seeking support from private sponsors for Ghent2030 is not focused merely on obtaining extra funding. It is also aimed at stimulating inclusiveness and cooperation between citizens, organisations and companies. In line with the cultural strategy for 2040 and the mission of Ghent2030, it aims specifically to encourage:

- **shared ownership:** more engagement among individual citizens to contribute to cultural and artistic initiatives after 2030 by reducing obstacles.
- **surprising connections:** more structural connections between the cultural field and the business community after 2030, through new forms of collaboration.
- **radical learning:** the introduction, implementation and evaluation of a few new forms of private financing systems and public-private partnerships, which will continue to operate after 2030.

Other starting points for seeking private funding and sponsoring:

- Donors have no extra control over the artistic work in the toopen.
- Capital means more than merely 'financial resources'. The underlying principle is that everyone – from an entrepreneur to a resident in Ledeborg, a small company to an 80-year old volunteer – may be a potential donor or sponsor.

- Fundraising is an ongoing process that will be started in 2025 at the same time as the toopen.
- The intended goal of fundraising is to generate 8-10% of the total operational budget, or a minimum of 5 out of 65 million euros.
- The funding generated will be allocated to the non-profit organisation Ghent2030 vzw and (after auditing and approval by the board) managed by the business coordinator.
- We will make every effort to ensure that seeking support for Ghent2030 does not have a negative effect on the existing fundraising efforts of cultural institutions or organisers.

From 2025 onwards, we will finalise four pillars of fundraising and sponsoring. They are the result of inspiring workshops with participants from the fields of economics, culture and art in 2024. They will build on four understandings of 'capital', aimed at as wide a range of donors as possible:

| Pillar 1<br>MONEY           | Pillar 2<br>SPACE                                      | Pillar 3<br>TIME                              | Pillar 4<br>SKILLS/<br>MATERIAL                   |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Financial partners/sponsors | Partners/sponsors who want to share and open up spaces | Partners/sponsors who want to contribute time | Partners/sponsors with specific talents or skills |

## PILLAR 1 – MONEY

Within the financial pillar, we are aiming for a combination of existing systems and new concepts. The core of this pillar is the foundation of ClubGhent2030, a business club+ including:

1. Three major financial partners, which will contribute to funding the run-up to the ECoC year from 2025 onwards with annual amounts and provide a minimum of € 500,000 each in the title year itself.
2. Various other possibilities for the business community to participate:
  - Service and business clubs (Lions, Rotary, Inner Wheel, etc.) could request 30% extra membership fees per year and pass that on to Ghent2030 vzw.
  - Companies and small businesses could contribute at least € 300.
3. We could make extra space for individual donors of all sizes who want to do their bit.

As a return for these financial sponsors, we will mainly provide **cultural items that are not for sale**, such as exclusive (one-off or special) experiences that offer insights, spark conversations or generate new connections. In this way, we can include companies and donors in our learning principles as well. We are brainstorming and negotiating with the cultural field on the possibilities that exist here.

**Two funds** will be set up and financed with the financial contributions of ClubGhent2030:

- **A community fund** that supports the work and artistic results of the toopen.
- **A rolling/circular fund:** an accessible fund that can provide artists with interest-free loans of up to 5,000 euros to start a project (equipment, marketing, raw materials, etc.) They pay back the money within a predetermined period. The intention is for this fund to continue to exist after 2030.

We are setting up ClubGhent2030+ **in partnership with Community Ghent**, a network organisation for the Ghent business community that is also a member of Ghent2030 vzw. It organised a first major breakfast event for Ghent companies on 27 May 2024, at which the mayor called upon 'Captains of Industry' and the broad socio-economic field to support Ghent2030 financially or in other ways. They also organised extra workshops to continue the **matchmaking between culture and the business community**.

## PILLAR 2 – SPACE

The unique **Ghent database of spaces, 'Open Creatives'**, already exists to help many artists, creative people and cultural organisations in their ongoing search for space to work and present their creations. It brings together all the available infrastructure belonging to the city, in education and in the cultural sector on one accessible platform, for everyone seeking extra space or with space to share.

We will extend 'Open Creatives':

- **Spatially:** to include Zeeland, the region around Ghent and other Flemish cities, etc.
- **Across sectors:** to the business community (offices, factory spaces, shop windows, wastelands, warehouses), the care sector (hospitals, residential care centres, etc.) education and even private citizens (gardens, living rooms, garages, etc.)

## PILLAR 3 – TIME

Time is capital that many people lack, but some people have time to share. There are many people who would like to contribute more to society than they do at present. This is why Ghent2030 will be developing a specific **time bank for volunteers who want to support the toopen** from 2025 onwards, e.g. by acting as a guide for an international artist, being an ambassador for our city in their own community, fetching equipment, translating into Polish or Pashtu, etc. The time bank will open up available time in the city as extra 'capital', matching it to existing needs. In collaboration with a wide network of socio-cultural partners, care institutions, neighbourhood activities, etc., the time bank will generate surprising connections and an extra sense of belonging among people.

## PILLAR 4 – SKILLS AND MATERIAL

The availability of specific talents, abilities, skills and crafts is a form of capital that is often still underexploited. It can support the toopen of Ghent2030, strengthen **capacity building in the cultural field** and help to achieve the cultural strategy for 2040.

Consider a company that provides an employee to help with a specific problem or project, a grandfather who can cook delicious couscous and wants to do the catering for a collective, a carpenter who wants to help build a stage, a welder or weaver who helps an artist make a piece of art, etc. This **focus on technical skills and handicrafts** also engages a broader 'cultural capital' than the mainly highly educated profiles.

Materials can also be shared (temporarily) and/or loaned (transport, tools, raw materials, etc.).



## Q27 Breakdown of operating expenditure

The stated amounts are an estimate, based on a minimum operating budget of 65 million euros. The allocation of this

budget is based on a benchmarking of ECoC cities, but with a higher proportion of salary and overhead costs, given the **relatively high cost of salaries in Belgium**. 'Other expenditure' means the costs of research, monitoring and evaluation, inflation, risk management, reserve budget, etc.

| Programme expenses |     | Promotion and marketing |     | Salaries, general costs and administration |     | Other     |    | Total operational expenditure |
|--------------------|-----|-------------------------|-----|--------------------------------------------|-----|-----------|----|-------------------------------|
| in euros           | %   | in euros                | %   | in euros                                   | %   | in euros  | %  | in euros                      |
| 37,000,000         | 57% | 9,800,000               | 15% | 13,000,000                                 | 20% | 5,200,000 | 8% | 65,000,000                    |

## Q28/Q29 Income from the public sector to cover capital expenditure and financial commitments

Ghent **is not planning any new infrastructure for Ghent2030**, so there are no extra capital investments specifically targeting the title year. We are deliberately starting from what is already here, extending and/or optimising its use. However, we will be investing in sustainability, in both the ecological and social sense. For an overview of the infrastructural plans within the city and government commitments, see Q37a and 38.

## Q30 Fundraising strategy for financial support from Union programmes/funds

The City of Ghent has a **'Strategic Subsidies' team** to make optimal use of Flemish, Belgian and European subsidies and to approach planned projects in a more innovative, sustainable and ambitious way. It is closely involved in Ghent2030, both in finding the right partners and subsidy programmes and also in supporting the system shift from public to public-private financing. Simultaneously, many cultural institutions in Ghent have considerable expertise in European applications.

As such, Ghent has **considerable experience of projects with European funding** (Interreg, EFRO, URBACT, European Urban Initiative, Horizon Europe), as a lead partner or project partner. These include the recent project CoGhent (5 million euros from Urban Innovation Action, completed in June 2023). Institutions such as VIERNULVIER also have one or two Creative Europe projects running at any given time.

Now that the goals, learning principles and programme lines of Ghent2030 are clear, we will start **actively seeking corresponding European subsidy programmes**. Ghent2030 will act as the lead partner in several projects. Additionally, the City of Ghent will identify itself actively through networks such as Eurocities and ICLEI as a valuable partner for projects with other countries, and we will support smaller and larger cultural players from Ghent in their own search for European calls and resources – a service that can continue after 2030.

We are dedicated to bringing in **5 million euros in EU subsidies** for Ghent2030 and its partners.

## A few examples of (current or future) projects by both the City of Ghent and Ghent's cultural sector:

**CREATIVE EUROPE** – Ghent's city library is participating in the project 'Libraries of Emotions for Good' on reading and well-being, resilience and climate awareness. For Ghent2030, we are planning applications for the toop 'Open to the Public' and for alternative financing for cultural development.

VIERNULVIER arts centre is part of the 'Cultural Transformation Movement Project' that interrogates the relationship between making art and making policy, involving underrepresented groups in this process.

De Koer, a place for creations and encounters in the heart of the working-class Brugse Poort neighbourhood, is involved in KinoClimates, a network for bottom-up cinema projects all over Europe. Both of Ghent's arthouse cinemas are also in the Network of European Cinemas.

The Flemish Poetry Centre, located in Ghent, is focusing on the role of poetry in times of crisis with five European partners in 'ArtACT: Art Activism in Post-COVID Europe'.

**CULTURE MOVES EUROPE** – These mobility grants will be actively promoted in the toopen and programme for Ghent2030.

**ERASMUS+** – The City of Ghent is already active in various projects and is extending its accreditation for projects such as the toop 'YoungStars' in the Erasmus+ 'Youth' category until after 2027. The City of Ghent is also committing to the possibilities within Erasmus+ for collaboration between organisations and institutions (KA2), including those for training.

VIERNULVIER arts centre is part of 'Art Beyond & Participation – BE PART', an Erasmus+ project with 10 EU and non-EU partners focusing on participation in the arts.

CAMPO arts centre is connected with more than 100 arts centres around the world and a member of the Platform for European Emerging Research Spaces (Erasmus+).

**CERV** – For cultural projects on citizenship and equality, we use the CERV programme. The City of Ghent's HR Department is involved in the 'DiGiN' project for inclusive workplaces in government bodies.

### FLANDERS-NETHERLANDS INTERREGIONAL PARTNERSHIP –

The partnership with Zeeland offers opportunities, as does the toop ‘(Just)Cruising’ from Middelburg to Ghent.

### FLANDERS-WALLONIA-HAUTS DE FRANCE INTERREGIONAL PARTNERSHIP –

VIERNULVIER arts centre is participating in ‘Emerge’, which aims for innovative production methods for performing artists.

**HORIZON EUROPE** – The City of Ghent is often a partner in Horizon projects, such as ‘Greenscape’ on circular products linked to cultural heritage and ‘Lib4Dem’ for multiple voices in the library.

**NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS** - The City of Ghent is actively monitoring the calls that appear.

See Q35 for more EU partnerships and networks.

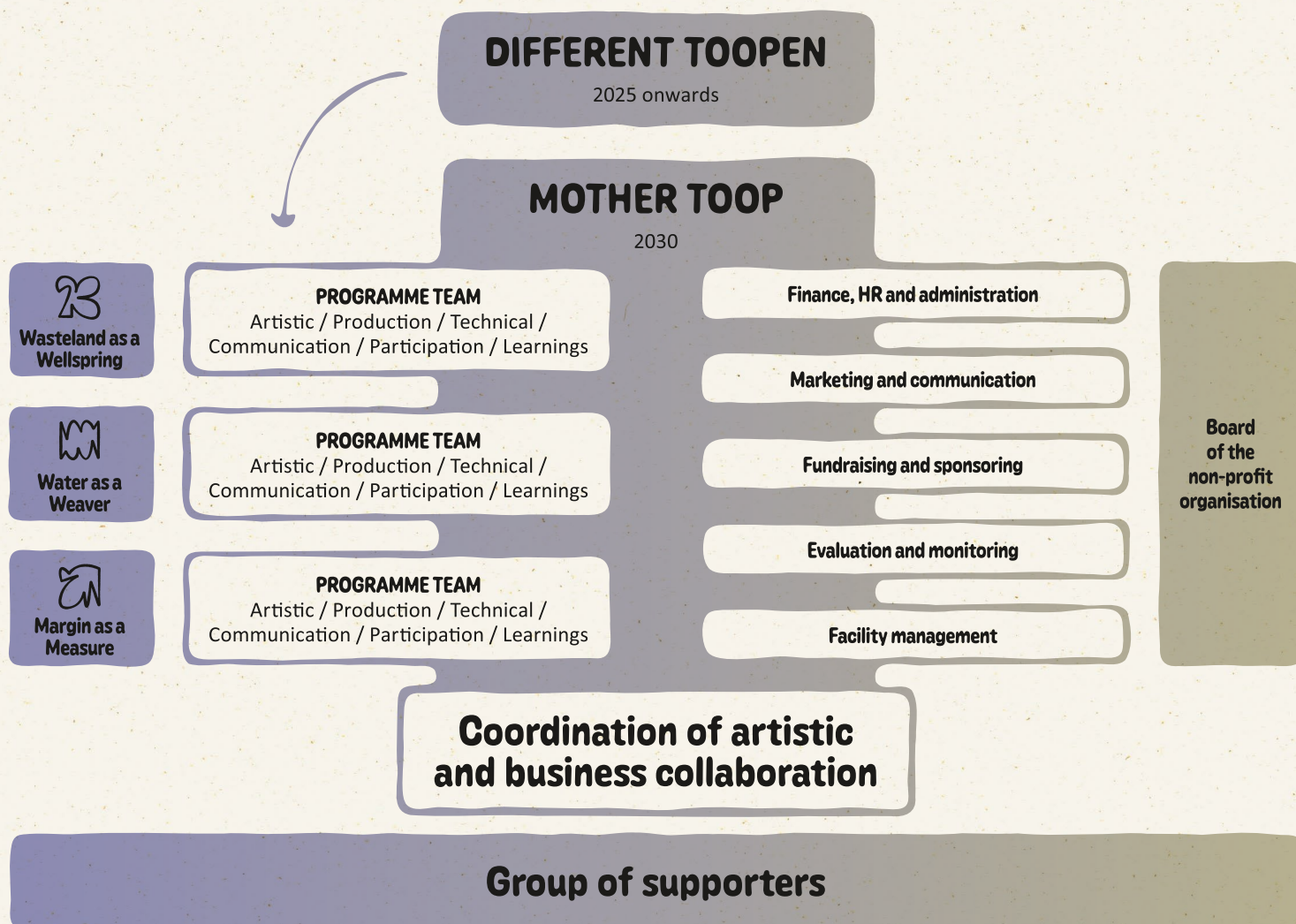
*Q31 Which amounts will be spend for new cultural infrastructure to be used in the context of the title year*

Ghent is not planning any new infrastructure specifically for Ghent2030.

## 5.2. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

*Q 32 Intended governance and delivery structure for Ghent2030*

For the organisation of the entire process (2024-2029) leading up to the programme: see the process framework in Q10. Here is a sketch of the entire **management and operational structure to implement the title year itself:**



## Non-profit organisation structure with a board and general assembly

Since 2022, Ghent2030 has been managed by a non-profit organisation (vzw) that is responsible for the entire bidbook process. Its members are the City of Ghent (with the mayor, alderpersons and members of local government), the GKO, Ghent University, the North Sea Port and the socio-economic network Community Ghent. If Ghent is awarded the title of ECoC 2030, we will provide extra representation for stakeholders including Zeeland and individual citizens (such as young people from the EYC legacy). The board of this non-profit organisation will be responsible for:

- **Following up the strategic goals** of Ghent2030 and reaching milestones
- **Accountability:** allocation of budgets and supervision of the financial realisation of Ghent2030

### Coordination team (Mother Toop)

This team has **ultimate responsibility for the entire content and practical realisation** of the title year and everything required to make Ghent2030 go smoothly. It brings the different teams together, translates strategic goals into concrete implementation and directs all the activities.

From 2024 onwards, this 'Mother Toop' is coordinating and facilitating the process leading up to bidbook 2 (in 2025) and the preparation of the programme in the toopen (2025-2029), plus all the contextual work required to make a success of Ghent2030. From 2026 onwards, this coordination team will be systematically extended to form a complete operational team that will keep the entire title year on track.

The Mother Toop will be **led by two collaboration coordinators** from 2026 onwards, who report from this team to the board and general assembly of the non-profit organisation. They will be appointed following an open call and selection by the board:

#### Business collaboration coordinator

- Responsible for the business coordination of the entire project (obviously with respect for artistic freedom), financial management and directing the business teams (the right-hand side of the organisational chart).
- Ensures good cooperation and consultation between the different parts of the organisation, facilitates decision-making within the Mother Toop and makes final decisions where necessary.
- Monitors risks and strategic lines.

#### Artistic collaboration coordinator

- Responsible for the coordination of artistic staff, process coaches and the production team.
- Facilitates decision-making and supervises the artistic quality of the content and its timing.
- Responsible for managing the budgets allocated to the toopen/projects
- Involves and consults the group of supporters.

## Organisational teams

Several teams will realise different aspects of Ghent2030, within a value-driven organisation that has a **transparent division of roles and clear working principles**. They are subdivided into an artistic and business side, and they are managed and supported by their respective collaboration coordinator. They also remain in constant dialogue with each other in the Mother Toop.

- **Artistic teams (left-hand side of the organisational chart)** support the toopen and the high-quality implementation of their projects: 1) Artistic staff for the three programme lines, 2) process coaches for networking, public outreach and documentation of learning, 3) producers, for the practical realisation of the programme.
- **Business teams (right-hand side of the organisational chart)** provide specific forms of expertise to support the organisation overall and/or a specific artistic team: 1) Finance, HR and admin (incl. volunteer support), 2) marketing and communication, 3) fundraising and sponsoring, 4) evaluation and monitoring, 5) facility management

### Group of supporters

This group of 30 experts will support the Mother Toop from 2024 onwards as a sounding board for content and strategy, feedback on the programme and the composition of the toopen. It will also help open up new networks, etc. (see Q10). In the title year itself, it will serve as a frequent feedback platform.



## 5.3. CONTINGENCY PLANNING

*Q33 Main strengths and weaknesses;  
plans to overcome the weaknesses*

| Risks                                                                                                                                                                   | Likelihood | Impact   | Strengths/solutions to avoid risks                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Financial and political</b>                                                                                                                                          |            |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Insufficient financial resources                                                                                                                                        | Possible   | Critical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Realistic budget plan and regular monitoring</li> <li>- Commitment to diverse and alternative forms of financing</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                        |
| Loss of political support                                                                                                                                               | Limited    | Critical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work actively on raising awareness of the value of ECoC candidacy and gaining support from politicians both in the majority and the opposition</li> </ul>                                                                                                          |
| <b>Performativity and ethics</b>                                                                                                                                        |            |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Failure to achieve goals                                                                                                                                                | Limited    | Critical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear framework, process and roles to monitor, evaluate and follow up goals</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Co-creative process does not lead to high-quality programme                                                                                                             | Limited    | Critical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Qualitative and quantitative monitoring of artistic programme</li> <li>- Commitment to capacity building and coaching of toopen</li> </ul>                                                                                                                         |
| Framework of values and learning principles is not adhered to in practice                                                                                               | Limited    | Critical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Artistic and business coordinators are responsible for supervision in practice</li> <li>- The group of supporters and the board ensure compliance</li> </ul>                                                                                                       |
| <b>Management skills and capacity building</b>                                                                                                                          |            |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Complexity of 'horizontal' and shared leadership                                                                                                                        | Possible   | Critical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop an organisational culture that strengthens horizontal leadership skills.</li> <li>- Develop our decision-making procedures according to the principles of deep democracy and consent and committing to these skills throughout the organisation</li> </ul> |
| Inadequate cooperation between the partners, leading to inefficiency                                                                                                    | Possible   | Critical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Project coordinators who are responsible for coordinating the concerned, with regular meetings and evaluations</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                          |
| Cultural professionals do not acquire the expected capacities                                                                                                           | Limited    | Critical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop capacity-building programmes, partly by calling on specialised national and international expertise</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Participation, Communication and Marketing</b>                                                                                                                       |            |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Insufficient visibility or awareness of the project among the target audience and/or insufficient engagement and participation among the population, key partners, etc. | Possible   | Critical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Commitment to a widespread communication and participation plan from various perspectives: working from different channels, networks, contents, key figures and groups</li> <li>- Make the process enjoyable and fun</li> </ul>                                    |
| Marketing/communication doesn't reach target audience and media.                                                                                                        | Limited    | Critical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Draw up sophisticated marketing and communication plan</li> <li>- Monitor and follow up goals and adjust where needed</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                   |
| Negative perceptions of the project                                                                                                                                     | Possible   | Limited  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Professional communication management and clear plan for crisis communication</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>European and regional collaboration</b>                                                                                                                              |            |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| International collaborations do not go as planned                                                                                                                       | Possible   | Critical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue to invest strategically in network and strong alliances</li> <li>- Commit to strong regional and international project coordination</li> </ul>                                                                                                            |
| <b>Infrastructure, health and safety</b>                                                                                                                                |            |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Infrastructure projects are not completed in time for 2030                                                                                                              | Possible   | Critical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Back-up plan and distribution of programming across region</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Safety problems at venues                                                                                                                                               | Limited    | Moderate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Safety plans and risk analyses for each venue</li> <li>- Use of existing city safety coordination platform for bigger events</li> </ul>                                                                                                                            |
| Poor accessibility of venues                                                                                                                                            | Possible   | Critical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conduct accessibility analyses and remedy problems</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Crisis in data infrastructure, climate, health, mobility, etc.                                                                                                          | Possible   | Critical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop plans for crisis management for the different themes and allocate responsibilities</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                              |

## 5.4. MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION

### Q34 Ghent2030 marketing and communication strategy

The marketing and communication for Ghent2030 is aimed at **inviting as many people as possible to participate** in the Ghent2030 programme and the toopen in the run-up to the title year, locally, regionally and internationally. The communication and marketing strategy is 'value-driven' by our 12 values and includes an ongoing process in which the focus shifts in each phase:

- **2021-2024:** Announcing the candidacy and involving as many people as possible in the project.
- **2025 onwards:** Inviting partners and citizens to participate in the toopen.
- **2028 onwards:** Making everyone enthusiastic about participating in the programme with local, national and international marketing.
- **In 2030:** Communicating about achievements and activities.
- **Afterwards:** Evaluation and focus on legacy.

### Communication and marketing plan

The matrix below is a first proposal for a communication and marketing plan, constructed according to our three learning principles, which we are **developing further step by step**. We can expect many unpredictable technical developments and social changes by 2030 in areas such as participation, digitisation, social contact, sustainability, etc. This is why this plan mainly focuses on **extra capacity building and resilience**, combined with the rich experience we have in Ghent with communication, marketing and participation. In Q17-19 we mainly focused on active participation in the toopen (2025-2029). Here, the emphasis is more on **attracting visitors from 2028 onwards and during the title year in 2030**.

**I. SUPRISING CONNECTIONS** - How can we create collective marketing and communication for Ghent2030 that unites partners, invites as big as possible a network to participate and communicate, and integrates new and existing tools and expertise?

| STRATEGIES                                                                                                                             | ACTIONS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ① We will create a network of marketing and communication specialists to share expertise, gather new knowledge and update practices.   | <p>1/ The communication and marketing team will be supported by students (through work placements and classroom assignments), creative maker communities and a cross-sectoral working group of communication advisers. We might involve non-human (AI) communication talent at some point.</p> <p>2/ We will build upon the experiences we have gained during the EYC year and enable young communication talents in Ghent to do work placements in other ECoC cities. In 2030, we will welcome international communicators in our turn.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| ② We will provide customised communication and align its form, message and tone to the specificity of our partners and their channels. | <p>1/ Our content strategy leads to toopen and the programme by way of various channels, new tools and touchpoints. All our local, regional and European partners will communicate on Ghent2030 with their tools (on and offline).</p> <p>2/ Central to this co-branding is our new house style, consisting of modular graphics that refer to the 12 values and our network- and process-based approach. Partners can use this style co-creatively, for example by integrating the colours of their own house style, with the help of a user-friendly brand guide including an AI chatbot.</p> <p>3/ We will develop merchandise in a circular, co-creative way with social custom work companies (i.e. sheltered workplaces) and young makers from Ghent. Some of the revenue will be returned to the community. We use sponsored, sustainable materials.</p> |
| ③ Our marketing and communication will create connections within and between districts, the city, region, Europe and the world.        | <p>1/ We will use neighbourhood-based, off and online tools, neighbourhood platforms and striking promotional campaigns at unexpected places for communication in districts and sub-municipalities, in line with our outreach strategy (see Q17-19).</p> <p>2/ We will experiment with new and creative applications with wide coverage, such as communicating about Ghent2030 through an artistic upgrade to the municipal waste collection calendar delivered door to door.</p> <p>3/ We will appeal to visitors with content creation on various tourist channels and through influencers, international press contacts, etc. Regional tourist players and Tourism Flanders will also do promotion (see also Q15).</p>                                                                                                                                      |
| ④ We will use storytelling as the key to our content strategy: connecting people by sharing personal stories.                          | <p>1/ We will tell the story of people behind Ghent2030 in testimonials (see also the quotes in this bidbook) and portraits.</p> <p>2/ We will extend the online platform for EYC, where young people from Ghent share inspiring stories that reflect the diversity and energy of our city, to include other generations.</p> <p>3/ We will organise artistic and communicative initiatives to encourage storytelling, such as writing letters in the city for a whole year or sending postcards between Ghent and Europe (see the toop 'Right to Repair').</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

**II. SHARED OWNERSHIP - How can we adapt our marketing and communication for maximum engagement and so that less-heard voices are genuinely heard?**

| STRATEGIES                                                                                                         | ACTIONS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ① Our marketing and communication strategy is inclusive and accessible, and as such it responds to specific needs. | 1/ Besides Dutch and English, we will look at which other relevant languages would add value, such as Bulgarian for the toop 'Moving Migration'.                                                                                                     |
|                                                                                                                    | 2/ We will collaborate structurally with key figures and civil society organisations to test how well our communication is understood. Some of these have already inspired our process up to now, such as De Zuidpoort for people living in poverty. |
|                                                                                                                    | 3/ We will make our communication accessible to deaf and visually impaired people and people with limited mobility, and explore the use of silence, music/ soundscapes, non-verbal and low-sensory communication and pictograms.                     |

**III. RADICAL LEARNING - How can we experiment with new learning environments for marketing and communications, including frequent evaluations and ongoing learning, to find innovative solutions for current and future challenges?**

| STRATEGIES                                                                                                                                                                       | ACTIONS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ① We will constantly evaluate and refine marketing and communication activities, before, during and after 2030.                                                                  | 1/ We will evaluate the impact of our communication in partnership with the marketing and communication departments in higher education: besides familiar methods (e.g. press and web analysis, focus group conversations, etc.), they will also offer new methods.                                            |
|                                                                                                                                                                                  | 2/ We will measure and monitor the climate impact of our campaigns with tools such as Comm.zero.                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| ② We will find out how we can use public space as a canvas for communication.                                                                                                    | 1/ We will use places such as stations, squares and shop windows to inform passers-by about Ghent2030 and appeal to them. And what possibilities are there for street art and murals?                                                                                                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                  | 2/ From 2023 to 2030, there have been and will be temporary meeting and information points at different, alternating locations in the city. Designers will create a mobile concept for an info desk for the information points yet to be set up.                                                               |
| ③ We are learning and experimenting with new technologies and innovation trends (including digital ones). We are focusing on the opportunities while being wary of the pitfalls. | 1/ We will investigate the integration of gamification, AI and other digital tools in future marketing communication whilst maintaining our authenticity. This aligns with the Ghent Manifesto launched in our city, in which we emphasise the value of new digital tools and data analysis at European level. |
|                                                                                                                                                                                  | 2/ We will pay attention to digital overload and digital illiteracy in our communication. We will sometimes deliberately opt for offline communication and organise digital detox initiatives.                                                                                                                 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                  | 3/ We will use social media, but we are aware of the impact/power of market-driven platforms such as META. We will also experiment with alternative social media platforms, such as Digital European Public Spaces.                                                                                            |

*Q35 How Ghent2030 highlights  
the European Capital of Culture as an  
initiative by the European Union*

We will **communicate** the fact that ECoC 2030 is a European Union action in various ways. For example:

- Within European networks of which we are a member, and at relevant international meetings (e.g. EuropCom or the Week of Regions and Cities), we will introduce Ghent2030 as an EU action. We will also use the existing international communication channels that the city government has (especially our international digital newsletter) and those of other parties (e.g. Ghent University, the NSPD, arts centres in Ghent) to communicate about the ECoC and the link with the EU.
- We will ask Ghent's Members of the European Parliament for their support for Ghent2030: how can they help promote our themes in their own networks? We will also work as much as possible with European content creators, bloggers, influencers and young media activists. We will bring them to Ghent and ask them to communicate on Ghent2030, as well as reflecting on the role of Europe.

We will hold **events and meetings with international guests**, including representatives of the European institutions. For instance:

- As we have done during the EYC in 2024 (the year of the Belgian EU presidency), we will try to attract **several relevant European meetings to Ghent** in consultation with Event Flanders and the Belgian and Flemish representations at the EU.
- We are planning celebratory activities for a number of European anniversaries in 2030 during Ghent2030, such as 26 March (35 years of the Schengen Zone), 3 May (70 years of the European Free Trade Association) and 9 May (80 years of the Schuman Declaration, the first Europe Day). We will develop these in creative and surprising ways in the toop **Festivities 2.0** (see Q11).

For the people of Ghent, Ghent2030 will organise public activities that consider **Europe, the European institutions and their role** from a co-creative and constructively critical angle. For instance, we will investigate how Ghent2030 can tie into public activities in 2030 by Ghent-based initiatives focusing on Europe – such as Europa Direct, Ghent's EPAS schools (European Parliament Ambassadors Schools), the degree course in European Politics at Ghent University, etc.

Ghent already has considerable experience of close collaborations with/concerning Europe and all the communication this generates. For example, the City of Ghent has been engaged for many years in international networks such as Eurocities (of which Ghent is currently the vice president), PublicLibraries2030, ICLEI and UNESCO Creative City of Music. The city also has a long history of participation in projects with European subsidies, and thus also of promoting the EU as a financing body (see Q30). In fact, Ghent regularly

wins international prizes and titles: besides EYC 2024 and the European Heritage Award for the 'Square Kilometre', there was also the UN SDG Action Award in 2018 and the first 'EU Cities for Fair and Ethical Trade Award' for all its efforts around fair trade (2019).

Many **cultural players in Ghent** are also actively involved in European networks and projects with and about which they also communicate internationally. Here are a few current examples:

- Nucleo is active in the European Visual Artists network.
- Voem vzw, which connects people and organisations without boundaries through art, culture and social commitment, is a member of the United Religions Initiative.
- Platform-K, for performers with a disability, received an award in 2021 from FEDORA, a European non-profit organisation that stimulates innovation and creativity in opera and dance.
- Staff and former staff of the Festival of Flanders are members of the board of the European Festivals Association. Moreover, various jazz musicians from our city are members of the Europe Jazz Network, which is incidentally organising the European Jazz Conference in Ghent in September 2024.
- As protected heritage, the two beguinages in Ghent belong to the UNESCO network.
- Ghent University is active in ENLIGHT, a network of European universities focusing on sustainable solutions for complex challenges, including culture and creativity.
- Museum Dr. Guislain is a member of groups including the European Outsider Art Association and a partner in various European projects on art, culture and mental well-being. All the other museums in Ghent are also active at international level.

We will take a more detailed look at **international distribution** in bidbook 2, **also in the areas** of sport, well-being, education, ecology and the economy.



## 6. Capacity to Deliver

*Q36 Broad and strong political support and a sustainable commitment from the local, regional and national public authorities*

### Local level

The political administration of the City of Ghent actively supports the ECoC candidacy:

- On 18 October 2022, the non-profit organisation Ghent2030 vzw was founded for the development and elaboration of the candidacy. It is **chaired by the mayor**. Other members of the board include several alderpersons and a councillor from the current opposition, as well as the members mentioned in Q32.
- The city is providing the **entire working budget for the bidbook process**. For 2024, this is € 375,000 (approved by the city council on 5 September 2022).
- A **specially created city council committee** has scrutinised the content and state of affairs of Ghent2030 at regular intervals. This has given Ghent's ECoC candidacy support that transcends legislative terms. This committee gave its feedback on bidbook 1 on 24 May 2024.

### Recent political decisions:

- The content of bidbook 1 was validated by the Council of Mayor and Alderpersons on 20 June 2024.
- The content of bidbook 1 was also validated by the city council, which includes both the majority and the opposition, on 24 June 2024.

A process for a **long-term cultural strategy for 2040** (see Q5) is also underway within the City of Ghent, in which Ghent2030 plays a key role. In 2023, this resulted in a first vision text by the city management, 'Culture as a Lever', validated by the council on 27 April 2023.

### Support from the region and the Province of Zeeland

The board of Ghent2030 formally confirmed on 4 October 2023 that the Dutch **Province of Zeeland** will act as a partner to support the joint cultural programming. There is also a signed declaration of intent between Ghent2030, the partners in the **NSPD** and the Dutch city of **Middelburg** (see Q2).

Concurrently, talks are also underway between the 22 partner municipalities in the **Ghent Reference Region**, whose current mayors expressed their support for Ghent's candidacy at a Political Regional Forum on 29 March 2024. In the spring of 2025, this consultation can be formalised by the new administrative teams in all the municipalities (see Q2).

### Provincial level

The Province of East Flanders has confirmed its willingness to collaborate in a declaration of intent. It sees great potential in the policy areas of heritage, tourism and provincial collaboration. The Province of East Flanders can only confirm

financial commitments from 2025, when the new multi-year plans are created.

### Flemish level

The current minister-president of the Flemish (regional) government confirmed his support for ECoC candidacies on 25 April 2024, in consultation with all the Flemish ECoC candidate cities.

### National level

The prime minister of the Belgian (federal) government confirmed his support for ECoC candidacies on 29 April 2024, in consultation with the Belgian ECoC candidate cities.

*Q37 Ghent has adequate and viable infrastructure to host the title*

*Q37a How Ghent2030 will make use of and develop the city's cultural infrastructure*

The programme of Ghent2030 will be held at expected and unexpected places. We will make full use of the wealth of cultural infrastructure that is already available in the city, as well as viewing Ghent2030 as a lever to tackle shortcomings by means of targeted strategic choices and to create extra (physical and mental) space in the city and region, even after 2030. We will not do this by constructing new buildings, but by committing to the shared use of space, accessibility and ecological sustainability. We are aiming for surprising, collaborative connections both internally and in public and semi-public space.

### Mapping cultural infrastructure

In 2021, the City of Ghent took stock of both its existing cultural infrastructure and the most important needs in the field of culture. The inventory includes 347 cultural venues. These include driving forces and visible places in the city centre – such as the Vooruit building, Wintercircus and many other places. The inventory also revealed shortcomings, such as a high concentration of infrastructure in the city centre, as well as a great need for studio space in the visual arts and presentation opportunities in music and the performing arts, even for large, international productions. At the same time, it revealed a large amount of potentially available infrastructure, particularly outside the city centre, which could be used more for cultural purposes such as artists' residencies and for activities in the areas of creation, presentation, education and encounters. So there are opportunities for the future here.



There are also infrastructural opportunities in the region to distribute the programme more widely, e.g. in surrounding municipalities (through the cultural centres and theatres in the region) and in the port area.

This research supports the argument that there are many opportunities to host a diverse range of activities in 2030 (and in the run-up to the title year) throughout the entire territory of Ghent and the surrounding region. Reinforced by this empirical analysis, we have therefore chosen not to build new cultural infrastructure for Ghent2030, instead committing to using the existing infrastructure throughout the entire city – including the outskirts – and optimising its use. The levers for tapping into this potential are threefold:

### 1. **Developing knowledge and expertise on the practice of the shared use of space and shared ownership**

Sharing infrastructure creates both physical space and shared ownership, also outside the busy city centre. This is why the city of Ghent and the cultural field are encouraging the shared use of space by both professionals and amateur cultural practitioners. For example, this might include sharing space in the renovated opera house or the makers' space at NTGent city theatre, etc. Good practices will be mapped and knowledge shared in a learning network. Along with the GKO, Cultuur Gent will start the 'School for Hospitality', aimed at a wide audience of local candidate managers.

In the run-up to the title year, the former city library will also be used as a deregulated, democratic space. This building in the heart of the city centre is currently managed by Ghent youth as part of EYC 2024. Afterwards, it will serve as a place where passers-by can help shape the city and the shared ownership of the future.

### 2. **Developing surprising connections with matchmaking between the city and region**

We are committing to new, cross-sectoral connections in various ways under the banner of Ghent2030 to free up extra space for culture. In June 2024, we held a second matchmaking event between economic and cultural players that met with a positive response. Matching supply and demand is also an aspect of the spatial database 'Open Creatives'. To facilitate the availability of large-scale stages, etc. in and around Ghent more effectively (see the toop 'A Different Programme'), we are committing to partnerships between cultural players in Ghent and the wider region.

Urban life needs raw edges and corners to experiment without many obstacles. By 2030, we want a venue in every district of Ghent that is managed by the neighbourhood or key figures.

We are also investigating the possibilities for opening up more semi-public space in the toop 'Open to the Public'. This is an intensification of the City of Ghent's tradition of using public land for cultural events (from closing streets to traffic for neighbourhood parties to taking over whole areas of the city of large-scale cultural events, etc.). The City of Ghent supports about 1,000 activities in this way every year. For the title year, we will extend our range further to every nook and cranny of the city.

### 3. **Investing in renovations to make the shared and (ecologically and socially) sustainable use of space possible**

The cultural sector in Ghent aims to play a pioneering role in innovation, inclusion and climate neutrality. For this, a vision is being developed with the GKO on ecological and social sustainability. The Vooruit building is a candidate for the title of UNESCO World Heritage. The derelict arthouse cinema Rex has been bought by the city and will be refurbished to help shape Ghent as a city of film in the next legislative term. Committing to accessibility for all will be a condition for investments and funding. Organisations are already reporting on their accessibility-related activities. This is a way for us to raise awareness in the sector, but Cultuur Gent is already gaining expertise in acting more proactively so that it can offer advice and support to the sector.

See Q38 for a list of planned renovations in which the City of Ghent is already investing.

*Q37b The city's assets in terms of accessibility (regional, national and international transport)*

**From Europe and the world**

Ghent is easy to reach from every corner of Europe:

- The closest airports, Brussels, Charleroi, Antwerp and Lille, are approximately one hour's journey away, with good rail or Flixbus connections.
- There are good railway and coach connections from the neighbouring countries and from cities such as Amsterdam, Lille, Cologne, Paris and London.
- Ghent is the second most important railway hub in Belgium after Brussels.
- Ghent is also a hub within the European road network.

**Regional and local**

- There are various local railway stations that strengthen local mobility.
- There is a widespread public transport network of buses and trams.
- Ghent is easily accessible by bicycle on the European long-distance routes (LF) and the Flemish recreational cycling network.
- Ghent has a bicycle-sharing network and extensive bicycle rental services offered by various players.
- People with their own boats can also reach Ghent easily along the many waterways in and around the city. There are five harbours for pleasure boats.
- Ghent has a lively car-sharing network: 24,000 residents already use it. We want to see that number rise considerably by 2030.

Ghent often has visits from mobility experts from all over Europe. Our car-free city centre and courageous traffic plan have inspired other cities.

A mobility plan is always drawn up for major events in the city, involving all stakeholders. The frequent organisation of major city events such as the Ghent Festivities (1,600,000 visitors) and Ghent Light Festival (approx. 700,000 visitors) means that we can continue to refine our mobility management and crowd management. Events like these have turned the stress-free reception of more than 200,000 visitors per day into a routine.



*Q37c The city's absorption capacity in terms of tourist accommodation*

Ghent's current tourist capacity consists of:

- **809 accommodation providers:** including 43 hotels, 142 B&Bs, 1 campsite, 7 hostels and 310 holiday homes.
- **4,955 rental units,** including 2,774 hotel rooms
- **12,693 beds,** of which 6,301 are in hotels

The current tourist absorption capacity is therefore **12,693 persons per night**. Additional accommodation is planned by 2030 to offer around 2000 extra beds: see Q38.

There is also **extra capacity in the surrounding municipalities and the region**. For example, the Province of East Flanders has a total of 2,158 accommodation providers, amounting to 44,376 beds altogether. Thanks to good transport links, you can reach Ghent city centre in half an hour with public transport or otherwise. We especially want to highlight and develop this extra capacity during Ghent2030, given our focus on changes of perspective between the centre and the periphery. This will enable the region to share in the rewards of our European Capital of Culture. Furthermore, there is plenty of accommodation in the Province of Zeeland, with a total of 148,000 beds. The Borsele, Middelburg, Terneuzen and Vlissingen area, the region on which we are focusing most, has 12,170 beds.

In the context of 'surprising connections' and the development of human capital, we also want to **highlight alternative accommodation systems** in our communication, such as Vrienden op de Fiets ('Friends on Bikes'), 'CouchSurfing', 'Warmshowers', house swapping and 'Campspace' (camping in someone's garden). This can add direct value to the relationships between residents and tourists and help the European values to flourish at the kitchen table or around the barbecue.

## Q38 Cultural, urban and tourism infrastructure (including renovation projects)

Existing infrastructure will be made accessible and more sustainable. We will also make use of public and semi-public spaces and commit to temporary use and shared use (see Q37a). Below is a non-exhaustive list of projects that can help to shape Ghent2030.

### Cultural infrastructure (heritage, museums, arts, libraries)

| PROJECTS UNDERWAY                              | SHORT DESCRIPTION                                                                                                                                                                                                | TOTAL ESTIMATED BUDGET (2024) |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>St. Joseph's Church</b>                     | Church in the Rabot district to be refurbished as a neighbourhood centre.                                                                                                                                        | 6,000,000                     |
| <b>Great Butchers' Hall</b>                    | This protected heritage building in the city centre is being temporarily repurposed as a bicycle shed.                                                                                                           | 6,500,000                     |
| <b>Design Museum</b>                           | Renovation and extension as an open space for Ghent residents to join the conversation on the future of the museum and themes such as democracy and sustainability.                                              | 14,000,000                    |
| <b>Time Castle (Castle of the Counts)</b>      | Making the Castle of the Counts accessible.                                                                                                                                                                      | 6,500,000                     |
| <b>Floralien Hall / ICC</b>                    | Renovation of the Floralien Hall with space for events and culture. Optimisation of the ICC convention centre, turning it into a fossil-free venue.                                                              | 15,000,000                    |
| <b>Former Maternity Hospital - Bijlokekaai</b> | Renovation of protected heritage to accommodate various cultural organisations and promote collaboration.                                                                                                        | 7,800,000                     |
| <b>Ghent Opera House</b>                       | The opera house is being renovated, restored and extended to create high-tech infrastructure and a navigable space.                                                                                              | 155,000,000                   |
| <b>House of Alijn</b>                          | Making the museum accessible.                                                                                                                                                                                    | 2,000,000                     |
| <b>Ghent heritage</b>                          | Various optimisations planned                                                                                                                                                                                    | 1,500,000                     |
| <b>Cinema Rex</b>                              | Conversion of the derelict arthouse cinema at Ghent-St-Pieters railway station into a 'house of cinema' for education, production and presentation of audiovisual arts that do not feature on the regular scene. | 15,000,000                    |
| <b>District libraries</b>                      | Making district libraries more sustainable and more accessible to a range of target groups.                                                                                                                      | 900,000                       |
| <b>The Vooruit</b>                             | Making the arts centre ecologically and socially sustainable and accessible. The building is a UNESCO world heritage candidate.                                                                                  | 16,000,000                    |
| <b>Kopergieterij</b>                           | Making the theatre for children and young people accessible and ecologically sustainable.                                                                                                                        | 4,800,000                     |
| <b>KONEKT/Platform</b>                         | Construction of an inclusion hub with a dancefloor focused on exchanges between people with and without disabilities.                                                                                            | 5,000,000                     |

Some examples of planned extra space for artists and culture in districts, and space for diverse art forms:

| PROJECTS IN PREPARATION                              | SHORT DESCRIPTION                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>NTGent</b>                                        | Renovation of the city theatre, moving the studio to the outskirts of the city and extending the second auditorium to include extra presentation space.                                              |
| <b>S.M.A.K.</b>                                      | Extension of the museum.                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>ARCA</b>                                          | Making the small theatre sustainable as an arts venue. It is currently also a shared space for various music and theatre groups from Ghent and elsewhere.                                            |
| <b>NUCLEO Sint-Amansberg</b>                         | 40 new studios for artists in the district of Sint-Amansberg.                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Huis van Oombergen</b>                            | Transforming a building into a 'House of Literature' for the Poetry Centre in Ghent, KANTL and Ons Erfdeel.                                                                                          |
| <b>Beguinage in Sint-Amansberg</b>                   | Renovation of empty convents in the beguinage for creative and cultural initiatives.                                                                                                                 |
| <b>De Expeditie</b>                                  | Sustainability work on this old factory on the outskirts of the city that has been transformed into office, rehearsal and presentation spaces for various cultural and socio-cultural organisations. |
| <b>Church of the Holy Cross in Sint-Kruis-Winkel</b> | Socio-cultural repurposing of a church in the Canal Zone.                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>St Martin's Church in Baarle</b>                  | Repurposing of a church as a residential care centre and house of the arts for retired artists. Local socio-cultural associations can also use the building.                                         |
| <b>De Centrale/AMAL</b>                              | The Centrale is planning a cultural inclusion hub together with the municipal integration service. The plans for this are currently being drafted.                                                   |

### Tourist infrastructure

By 2030, there will be extra accommodation both in and outside the city centre, providing 994 rental units/rooms (or 1,988 beds).

### Urban infrastructure

The vision for urban development until 2030 is summarised in 'Space for Ghent'. One of its main principles is better use of space through 'smart densification and creation of more open spaces'. Urban renewal projects underway in districts and areas of the city such as the Oude Dokken, Nieuw Gent and Dampoort are creating open spaces and new meeting places. In the next legislative term, Ghent will commit further to urban development.

There are plans to tackle areas including the Watersportbaan, Afrikalaan, the zone around the railway in Moscou-Vogelhoek and the villages in and around the port. These are all districts and neighbourhoods that we would like to involve in the concept of 2030. Local authorities in Zeeland are also looking into ways of giving empty buildings a new cultural purpose, such as the old library in Terneuzen. This is being done in consultation with Cultuur Gent and the Ghent2030 team.

A new vision paper for the City of Ghent's urban heritage was validated in May 2024. This paper is also in line with the goals for 2030. Over the coming months, various themes such as proximity, accessibility, shared use and affordability will be further elaborated with the different policy departments.



## **Frequently used abbreviations**

EYC: European Youth Capital  
NSPD: North Sea Port District  
GRR: Ghent Reference Region  
ECoC: European Capital of Culture  
S.M.A.K.: City Museum for Contemporary Art  
MSK: Museum of Fine Arts Ghent  
STAM: Ghent City Museum  
CoGhent: Collections of Ghent  
GKO: Ghent Arts Platform  
vzw: non-profit organisation  
KASK en Conservatorium: School of Arts & Conservatory  
MENA region: Middle East and North Africa region

This bidbook came about ‘tuupetegoare’, with contributions from more than 1,000 enthusiastic people. It is impossible to name everyone here. Our thanks to all of them!

### **Ghent2030 vzw/asbl executive board and general assembly:**

Evelien Bracke (GKO), Aristide Bandora (GKO), Dobrinka Barzacka (Community Gent), Khalid Benhaddou (Community Gent), Ann Buysse (Ghent University), Astrid De Bruycker (City of Ghent), Mathias De Clercq (City of Ghent), Johan De Smet (GKO & Kopergietarij), Franky Devos (GKO & VierNulVier), Stefaan De Winter (GKO & Die Verdampte Spielerei), Badra Djait (Ghent University), Hafsa El-Bazioui (City of Ghent), Tru Lefevere (Community Gent), Bruno Lowagie (Community Gent), Freddy Mortier (Ghent University), Zeneb Bensafia (City of Ghent), Hilde Schuddinck (Community Gent & Voka), Daan Schalck (North Sea Port), Veerle Simoens (GKO & Flanders Festival Gent), Sami Souguir (City of Ghent), Christel Stalpaert (Ghent University), Andy T’Jampens (Community Gent), Anneleen Van Bossuyt (City of Ghent), Bram Van Braeckvelt (City of Ghent), Pascale Van Damme (Community Gent), Tom Van Damme (Ghent University), Jeroen Vanden Berghe (Ghent University), Rik Van de Walle (Ghent University) Mieke Van Herreweghe (Ghent University & Community Gent), Isabelle Van Vooren (North Sea Port), Jos Vermeiren (Community Gent & UNIZO)

**Bidbook editorial team:** Tonté Chow, Patty Delanghe, Jeroen De Schuyteneer, Freija De Smet, Amani El Haddad, Wouter Hillaert, Joris Janssens, Nele Keukelier, Lotte Loncin, Maarten Soete, Els Uytterhoeven, Lien Van de Velde, Tijs Vastesaegeer

**Photography:** In line with the idea of ‘tuupetegoare’ photos taken by residents and visitors of Ghent were used: cover Wouter Vanhoutte (@W.VANHOUTTE), page 6 Max Van Hemel, page 7 Ehsan Eqlimi, page 10 Armina Ghazaryan (@ARM\_79), page 32 Travelformotion (@travelformotion), page 39 Jonas Herman, page 42 Luc Pauwels and page 49 Jeffrey De Keyser. In addition, pictures (supplied) by Ghent University / Hilde Christiaen, Visit Gent, City of Ghent, Yves De Bruyckere, Michiel De Vijver, NTGent, De Koer / Faber Mahieu, Gouvernement and all the people that are quoted, are also included.

**Graphic design:** Edouard Schneider (Letterlik)

**Translation:** Helen White (Snapdragon Translations)

**Printed by:** Graphius Ghent

**Responsible publisher:** Mieke Hullebroeck, Managing Director, City of Ghent

**[www.gent2030.eu](http://www.gent2030.eu)**

# Our 12 values

**DIVERSITY & INCLUSIVENESS** – Diversity means the extent to which different identities are represented in a project. Inclusiveness means the extent to which everyone has and gains access to opportunities, resources and participation. Diversity is our starting point; inclusiveness is our goal. Diversity is merely quantitative, inclusiveness is qualitative. We emphasise the importance of both values in all layers of the organisation and the projects. We recognise that everyone's position is unique and complementary. We come to understand each other's position with respect, an open mind and plenty of curiosity. We embrace differences without emphasising them.

**ACCESSIBILITY** means shaping activities, communication, procedures and spaces to be as usable, meaningful, enriching and comprehensible as possible to as many people as possible. We remove both physical and mental obstacles. In doing so, we believe very strongly in 'universal design', a vision that encourages radical accessibility.

**SAFETY** means the extent to which a person or a group of people can trust that they will not be exposed to violence, discrimination, personal attacks or other forms of physical or emotional pain. We do not tolerate any form of discrimination whatsoever based on socio-economic background, skin colour, ethno-cultural background, language, religion, beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability or neurodivergence, etc.

**OPENNESS** means removing as many mental and physical obstacles as possible. Openness also stands for transparency about every phase of the project and for clear communication on organisational, financial, managerial, artistic and programming decisions, etc. At the same time, there is always space to question people and institutions in positions of power.

**FREEDOM** means the extent to which someone can be autonomous, think and act independently, and do so without pressure or limitation. This individual, artistic, physical and mental freedom for everyone must be safeguarded as far as possible, unless it limits someone else's freedom.

**INNOVATION** means the openness to introducing other ideas, concepts, techniques or inventions and implementing them in both artistic programmes and other processes. Innovation can be an aim in itself, but it must always be a means to promote values such as inclusiveness and accessibility as well.

**SUSTAINABILITY** means ensuring that raw materials, human energy, social networks and money are generated more quickly than they are used up. These four dimensions (ecological, human, social and economic) are so intrinsically linked that they cannot be guaranteed independently of each other. Sustainability must never lead to poverty, marginalisation, wasting resources, monopolies, favouritism or exclusion.

**SOLIDARITY** is the awareness of togetherness (being part of a group that supports each other) and the willingness to bear the consequences of that. Solidarity implies a sympathy with social struggles that, strictly speaking, do not involve you. We walk towards people who need help and solidarity instead of expecting them to call for help or that problems need to become visible first.

**JUSTICE** is both a proportional distribution of facilities and resources and the opposite of exploitation and repression. A just policy leaves no one behind and doesn't omit anyone. If someone experiences injustice, there must be space to rectify this injustice.

**DEMOCRACY** means the fundamental belief that everyone has an equal say and matters just as much as anyone else. When making decisions, we use consent (there are no fundamental objections) rather than consensus (everyone gives the plans their 100% support).

**COLLABORATION** implies new connections, both between individuals and between organisations, communities or population groups. These connections must be aimed at achieving collective goals and collective progress. We experience them as successful if they plant the seeds of new, sustainable community connections. We do not organise things 'for' anyone, but always 'with' them.

**CONNECTION** means actively strengthening and renewing existing connections. These connections go beyond those that merely exist between individuals. People also share all kinds of connections with each other in the form of organisations, official or unofficial associations, informal and formal contexts that bring them together.

## Our 3 learning principles

**RADICAL LEARNING** – Inventing new practices requires courage to let go of established systems, try something new, just do it and evaluate honestly: this means learning by doing & failing forward. We are embarking upon wild learning processes in various forms, including non-linguistic methods, humour, fast prototypes, etc. We press the pause button to reflect together and ask each other questions, to celebrate successes (and failures), to document our learning and to share it freely with others in Ghent and Europe.

**SURPRISING CONNECTIONS** – So much more becomes possible if we consistently create links between sectors, silos, generations, communities, institutions and people... We are working extra hard on unusual or even un-comfortable partnerships. Connecting is a question of 're-pairing': mending the fabric of society. For this reason, each toop will only start once it includes parties that do not usually work together. We will stimulate local, regional and international connections, both on and offline.

**SHARING OWNERSHIP** – We will trade in the old paradigm of 'outreach to target groups' for 'collective ownership'. This is why each toop will also include voices that are not usually involved, right from the outset. We will work on our openness and trust, breaking down traditional power relationships and sharing responsibility. This is an exercise in letting go and passing on, listening and supporting.

