



EUROCITIES Social Innovation Lab

26-27 March 2019, Glasgow

Co-creation workshops - Wednesday, 27 March 9.30 - 12.00

Venue: Grand Central Hotel, 99 Gordon Street, Glasgow



Workshop B: Ghent city challenge - How can we ensure social cohesion and community participation in an area with high concentration of social housing and vulnerable people?

The co-creation workshops organised at the Social Innovation Lab in Glasgow give city representatives the opportunity to work together to co-design possible new and more effective responses to a common complex social challenge presented by one city.

Objectives

- Learn about co-creating innovations to city social challenges
- Formulate more effective and efficient responses to a critical challenge of a city, in a collaborative learning process with inputs from different cities

Format

Participants will work together in a workshop to co-design possible solutions to real cases of complex social challenges in cities. The case study of city challenge will be presented, discussed and explored through situation-based group work. The workshop will result in a set of ideas for actionable solutions that the representatives from the city concerned by the given challenge could take back home and consider acting upon. The logic is to generate out-of-the-box ideas and a fresh perspective to help a city that is looking for innovative ways to tackle a pressing challenge it faces at the moment.

Structure of the workshop

9.30 - 9.50	Introduction to the workshop
9.50 - 10.20	Presentation of the city challenge
10.20 - 10.35	Brainstorming in pairs for ideas of possible solutions to the challenge
10.35 - 11.10	Collaborative brainstorming and shortlist of possible solutions
11.10 - 11.30	Pitching - presenting solutions to the city concerned by the challenge
11.30 - 12.00	Group work to turn ideas into actionable solutions
12.00	Closing of workshop
12.00 - 12.30	Plenary presentation of actionable solutions co-created in workshops

Expected outcomes

- One **challenge brief** - real case scenario of complex social challenge in a city
- List of **possible ideas for solutions** brainstormed by fellow city experts in the workshop
- One or two **actionable solutions** that the city concerned by the challenge can take back

Questions for reflection

1. Have you had a similar challenge in your city? If yes, how have you tackled it?
2. Are there common elements /factors of the city challenge that you can recognise in your city? Do they manifest in a different way?
3. What ideas can you contribute to tackling the city challenge?
 - Adding a new element or taking something away
 - Integrating a new idea
 - Turning the practice upside down, assigning new roles to the actors involved
 - Segmenting the solution, exchanging one-size-fits-all for more personalised approaches
 - Bringing elements or practices associated with another field
 - Adapting responses from my city addressing this challenge
 - Learning from interventions from other cities, any other public body, social organisation, private sector or hybrid solution that could contribute to solve the challenge
 - Activating untapped (community or other) resources
 - Who can be part of this solution? (change-makers)

CHALLENGE BRIEF

City: Ghent

Challenge: How can we ensure social cohesion and neighbourhood participation in a concentration of social houses with vulnerable residents?

Topics: Social cohesion, neighbourhood participation, social housing and vulnerable people

The challenge

Since 2016 an increasing number of problems are being reported concerning the quality of the living environment in and around social housing concentrations in the city of Ghent. There are about 15,000 people who live in social housing - 12,5% of the city's households.

The vulnerability of the residents has increased sharply in recent years (language barriers, extreme poverty, psychiatric problems), which also influences the living conditions in and around social housing concentrations. This weakens the social networks and undermines the cohesion amongst residents. A phenomenon which is being fuelled by the quite substantial group of tenants with a short-term residence. The feeble living conditions are a quintessential factor in their decision to leave. When a better alternative arises or their personal socio-economic status augments, they leave the complex.

Thus, social cohesion is very vulnerable. Social housing concentrations are not just housing next to or above each other. It is a society in a nutshell characterized by a concentration of diverse and often very vulnerable residents.

The companies involved are working hard to improve the quality of social housing in Ghent. However, good living conditions in a home / neighbourhood require efforts in several areas. A good quality of life is not only about having a roof over your head but also about the other preconditions: a positive connection with your neighbours, finding your way to various services and organizations in the neighbourhood, feeling safe in the vicinity of your home, to have the possibility of leisure.

In the coming years, major renovation projects will take place within the city of Ghent in social housing concentrations. This offers opportunities but also raises many questions. Not in the least: Who is responsible for the coordination when it comes to attending the residents.

Needless to say these phenomena are not limited to Ghent. These signals also grow in other cities in Belgium with similar social housing concentrations.

Problem tree

Recent research in social housing concentrations in Ghent by the University of Ghent brought to light a number of issues about the well-being of these residents.

- There is a great lack of social cohesion (e.g. 25% of respondents do not recognize people in the street or residential block).
- Vulnerable residents feel insufficiently supported and heard (for example, 23% of respondents cannot appeal to support in the neighbourhood, 38% say that local residents are not willing to help each other, high threshold to professional services, communication about moving projects are very fragmented, ...).
- There is a very strong sense of insecurity among residents (e.g. 48% of respondents say that people in the neighbourhood are not to be trusted).
- There is a great dissatisfaction about the quality of housing and the public domain (e.g. 30% of the respondents indicate that they are (very) dissatisfied with the neighbourhood, quality of housing is low...).

In order to prevent the above mentioned among future residents in newly renovated social housing estates, we also want to anticipate their arrival and provide an appropriate 'welcome policy'. Goal is to make them feel at home in their new living environment. We are not only looking for preventive insights but also how we can anchor them.

To sum up, the core problems are:

- Lack of cohesion in existing social housing concentrations.
- In case of large relocations, ensuring a good reception policy to avoid the listed signals.

The context

Current residents of social housing concentrations experience their tenement and living environment uncomfortably. If the City services does not tackle this, the signals described above will only become bigger.

Testimonials

- The neighbour mediation service has many cases in social apartments. They indicate that many causes of neighbour disputes lie in the fact that neighbours do not know each other.
- Different organizations (aimed at children, young people, the elderly, families) that organize activities do not reach people from social housing. However, after conversations, we note that they are indeed interested but the thresholds are too high, or they think they are too high.

Previous experience

Several small-scale projects or pilot projects have already been started in the city. But none of these has been structurally embedded. This is due to reorganisations, lack of coordination, insufficient financial resources, personnel shifts and other priorities.

Key actors involved

- Within the City of Ghent, the following services are active on the theme of social housing concentrations: social management, nuisance control, neighbour's mediation, community work, outreach work, community watch, housing department, youth service, OCMW Ghent care for the elderly (social service organised by the city), police.
- The city has also entered into covenants with other civil society organizations such as Samenlevingsopbouw, KAA Gent Foundation, VZW Jong and Move 9000 (organizations targeting vulnerable people, children and young people). The city often works closely with them and also provides grants which also specifically focus on social housing concentrations.
- Currently we are still optimizing cooperation and coordination between the city and the social housing companies that own the social housing market.
- Both Ghent University and Artevelde Hogeschool and Hogent are looking for collaborations or are willing to do research on this theme.

Obstacles

At the moment, there is an instable relationship between the various social housing companies and the city government. It is a search for shared responsibility for the theme of social cohesion in social housing concentrations. The hot potato is now often moved to between parties or shifted to a third organisation.

Within the city many services work on the same theme but often each on its own turf. There is no overarching coordination. It will be a challenge to coordinate operations and financial operating resources and to focus more on cooperation.

Opportunities

For the city of Ghent, the theme of 'living' is a priority theme. For example, a 'Taskforce living' has been established in 2017. This Housing Taskforce unites city services, civil society, private partners and social housing actors to jointly work out solutions that provide an answer to the living needs of the lower segment of our housing / housing rental market, taking in account the different perspectives (tenants, services, legislation, housing market). Within this taskforce, 'social housing concentrations' is a separate theme. The purpose of this Taskforce is to give advice to the city council. The city council can establish a policy based on the advice.

In 2019, a new city council was elected that wants to continue working on the theme of housing and names it as a priority theme with financial resources linked to it.

In the Ghent media the theme was already given a lot of attention and in 2017 a documentary was made about the social housing blocks in Ghent. The documentary has exposed the challenges and made this hidden world tangible. This documentary received a lot of attention nationwide and ensured that the problem was taken more seriously.

Gradually we feel openness and willingness to cooperate, but a major stumbling block remains money and staffing.

Contact details

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