



Open call Sint-Jozef church: A long term process

In order to find a manager for Sint-Jozef church – a person or consortium who will provide activities in the building, will manage the building, and will experiment with sustainable models for the building – the city of Ghent wants to launch an open call. A lot of meetings and conversations near the coffee machine had to take place. But finally, I can proudly say that we are nearly there. The open call is as good as ready!

Internal process

A city-wide workgroup, in which over 20 of Ghent city services are represented, follows the process of the creations of the open call from a distance. They gather once a year, and are asked for their input via e-mail on several, strategic moments.

Besides that group, a second smaller group gathers more or less once a month to discuss in detail the content of the open call. 6 colleagues of 4 different city services are involved, and even though we try to animate the meetings with fruit and cookies, discussions their can sometimes be quite intense. It is interesting to see how visions can differ between different colleagues, depending on their professional background. But I'm also very happy and thankful to establish that visions can also evolve. The people that we gather around the table each month to discuss hot issues such as warranty, rental responsibilities or insurances with, are all very open minded and willing to think out of the box in order to find solutions that will work for as well the city services as for the future manager and users of the building. If anything, a big merit from the process until now, is that these city services cooperate as they have never done before, with a big amount of respect for each other's interests and boundaries.

External process

The internal process isn't easy and sometimes provokes long discussions, but this also applies for the external process. We used the format of the ULG to gather inhabitants and organizations of the neighborhood Rabot-Blaisantvest, and discuss with them the basic principles of the open call. In the first meeting, people were rather reluctant. The group expressed a certain 'mistrust' towards the City, and referred to several projects in the past



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to motivate why they feared not being able to weigh on the final result. During a long discussion we succeeded in taking away these concerns, and were able to motivate the group to gather again.

In the meetings that followed, we were surprised by the good discussions that took place. It was very rewarding to notice that civilians follow the basic principles that we, as civil servants, find important as well. The members of the ULG all agreed that whatever happens in the church in the future, should be in an equal partnership between neighbors, manager, and the city. We were very happy to see that civilians are prepared to take on a role as well.

And now?

We continue finalizing the open call, but the biggest discussion points are behind us. And then, we wait for the city council to approve the process that we worked so hard on. And finally... after more than a year of meetings and discussions... we should be able to start using the building for what it is meant for: bringing together the neighborhood.

Josefien Maes, City of Ghent – neighborhood manager