



Ghent welcomes European and Belgian cities during the EUROCITIES Annual Conference and the Cities Conference (27 November 2013)

Two major conferences will put Ghent firmly in the national and international spotlight from 27 to 30 November 2013. The annual meeting of the EUROCITIES network will take place in Ghent from Wednesday 27 November until Saturday 30 November 2013. This international conference will be preceded by a Belgian Cities Conference on Wednesday 27 November 2013. The theme for both conferences is 'smart citizens'. Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for Regional Policy, will give the closing address of the EUROCITIES conference on Friday 29 November 2013.

EUROCITIES: Ghent to host the leading network of European cities

Over 400 city leaders and delegates are attending the EUROCITIES 2013 conference in Ghent. They are meeting to explore how innovation and new technology can be used to empower citizens and build more inclusive and sustainable societies. Daniel Termont, the mayor of Ghent, and Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, EUROCITIES president and mayor of Warsaw, will give the opening speeches. Dan Hill will give the keynote speech. He is the CEO of Fabrica and Design & Architecture professor at the University of Technology in Sydney, and specialises in studying the interaction between design, strategy and the city.

The annual event comprises the 'EUROCITIES Awards', a 'Mayors' Debate', speed networking sessions, a gala dinner and a programme of tourist and cultural events. Ghent is also organising a meet-a-colleague event, a lighting display beneath the City Pavilion, an info market about smart solutions, a port seminar and a walking tour to show off the city's lighting plan. The city is also welcoming European Commissioner Johannes Hahn to the conference. He will address all the guests during the closing session of the conference.

As in every edition of the annual conference, the host city can also highlight good practices of the conference theme in action. The City of Ghent will highlight smart projects such as Klimaatverbond (Climate Alliance), the Ghent Living Lab, the Trojan Bike, Eetcafé Toreke and financial injections into two districts, the *Site* and the *Krook*.

Politicians from Amsterdam, Bologna, Stockholm, Tampere and Karlsruhe will take part in the 'Mayors' Debate'. Other conference participants will include the mayors of Antwerp, Nantes, Leipzig, Dortmund, Network City Twente, Hengelo, Turku, Bratislava and Rotterdam, aldermen, experts, officials from the European institutions and representatives from other public and private sector organisations.

100 years of Belgian cities

Before the EUROCITIES Annual Conference, a Belgian Cities Conference will also take place in Ghent, on Wednesday 27 November 2013.

2013 marks the 100th anniversary of the first international city conference (*Premier Congrès International et Exposition Comparée des Villes*), which was held in Ghent, and the birth of the Union of Belgian Cities and Municipalities, also in Ghent. For this reason, the city is organising a major Cities Conference. The target audience includes representatives of (regional or provincial) cities, knowledge institutions and umbrella organisations from Flanders and the Walloon Region. A total of around 200 visitors are expected.

Like the EUROCITIES Annual Conference, the theme of the Cities Conference is also 'smart citizens'. The changing role of the government will be discussed. How will the city deal with this new society of empowered citizens who no longer wait around for the formal political story, but who use coalitions to come up with innovative and creative solutions themselves? Which smart solutions can we detect and what is the impact of these new coalitions on the organization of a city?

The conference programme consists of two parts:

In the morning, all the participants will meet at De Bijloke. Amongst other things, the morning programme includes a keynote speech by Maarten Hajer. He is the director of the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL) and professor of Public Policy at the University of Amsterdam. As an urban planner and political scientist, he will be focusing on the theme of 'smart citizens and social innovation' during the Cities Conference. Hajer will then debate with 2 other speakers: Guy Gypens, director of *Kaaitheater* in Brussels, and Bram Verschuere, a lecturer in public management at the Economics and Business Administration faculty of the University of Ghent.

In the afternoon, the participants will then be introduced to several 'smart citizens' initiatives in the area. Workshops will be provided by and/or at De Meubelfabriek, Eetcafé Toreke, DOK, Ghent Living Lab, Klimaatverbond and Piramuide.

Inspiration for Europe

The theme of 'smart citizens' will not just be the subject of debate during the two conferences. The City of Ghent has also set up the 'Wijs van Gent' smart initiatives campaign. To this end, the city selected 10 striking ideas from the wide range of smart initiatives in Ghent. These 10 are not better or more innovative than the rest. However, they are excellent examples of what Ghent residents are capable of thinking up. 10 Ghent/European duos then visited these initiatives, which are competing for the title of 'smartest idea'. The competitors are Nite Owl, Cohousing, Wasbar, Fietskeuken, Wij delen, Mastouche, Uit in 9050, Wij veld, Buren van de abdij and Toreke.

Using all kinds of channels (social media, city magazine, press, the actual initiators etc.) the general public were then encouraged to vote for their favourite smart initiative. People could also launch smart ideas on social media themselves using the hash tag #wijsvangent. Votes could be placed until Friday 22 November 2013. The winning idea will be announced at the Cities Conference on Wednesday 27 November 2013. During the EUROCITIES conference on Thursday 28 November 2013, the City of Ghent will also inspire its European visitors with the 'Wijs van Gent' campaign.

Eurocities network

EUROCITIES is the leading network of European cities. In total, over 130 European cities from 34 countries belong to this network. Ghent is active in various forums and working groups and the city's mayor, Daniël Termont, became the secretary of the Executive Committee in 2010 and the treasurer in 2012.

Practical details

The full programme for both conferences is attached.

Background information about the conferences can be found at

<http://www.stedenconferentie2013.be> or <http://www.conferecedesvilles2013.be/>

<http://www.eurocities2013.eu>

Until Friday 22 November 2013, people could vote for their favourite participant in 'Wijs van Gent' on <http://www.wijsvangent.be>. On Wednesday 27 November 2013, the winning idea will be announced on this site.

The conferences are being organised with the support of Vlaams Stedenbeleid (Flemish Urban Policy), Deloitte, Ecobeton and Cisco, among others.

The plenary sessions of the EUROCITIES Annual Conference (28 November 2013 – 9.00- 12.30) and the closing session (29 November – 11.15-11.45) will be streamed online and can be viewed here: www.eurocities2013.eu

Information

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Person in charge

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