European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards (2024)
617-Citizens' Engagement & Awareness-raising 4. Citizens' Engagement & Awareness-raising

The Square Kilometre

gPyqGaok

Entry details

General information

Main country of application	Belgium
Registration number	HA2024-BE-03

In case there are other official partners involved in the project, please list the country(ies) they come from

> Belgium

Brief description of the project

> For the past five years, a 'historian in residence' has been travelling the most superdiverse parts of Ghent. Per **'square kilometre'** she invited locals to bring forth *'hidden histories'*. Starting by simply walking around in the lived environment and translating questions of residents to a variety of public history-projects, this project has not only been able to make 'unheard voices' heard, but also started up negotiations with cultural heritage-peers about democratising their practices. As the project revolves around ownership and recognition, The Square Kilometre has proved to be a vivid accelerator of civic participation, emancipation and neighbourhood engagement.

Start date of the project	2017-01-01
Website(s) of the project/nominee	www.erfgoedcel.gent
Any other relevant social media	https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpZb7GJQUIgSbzoIuF_YKbrYISRZ4cI5V (video interviews)
Does the site or heritage in question have national/regional/local cultural heritage designation or protection status in its country?	No

Is the site or heritage in question included on the UNESCO World Heritage List, either as a single World Heritage Site or as part of one larger site?	No
If relevant, is the site/heritage accessible to the public?	Yes

If relevant, is the site/heritage accessible to people with disabilities?

> Yes, throughout the activities and exhibitions, people with disabilities can participate, or we engage with them to provide a tailored experience.

Contact details

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Entrant's position	Heritage coordinator
Organisation of the entrant	STAM City Museum Ghent / Ghent Heritage Cell
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Organisation of the owner	STAM City Museum Ghent / Ghent Heritage Cell
Name of the project leader	Marieke Vangheluwe
Project leader's position	project coordinator
Organisation of the project leader	STAM City Museum Ghent / Ghent Heritage Cell
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Other relevant participants

> Historian in Residence, Tina De Ghent, freelancer
> STAM City Museum, Christine De Weerdt, museum director

Concise summary

Concise summary

> In a superdiverse urban environment, rife with challenges and rapid transformations, the question arises: What is the point of heritage? If you ask us, it has never been more important. Heritage possesses the unique ability to foster understanding in diversity, recognize the voices often unheard, initiate profound dialogues, and nurture resilience. Indeed, heritage can make a profound difference in a world of differences. But how?
>
> This theoretical question emerged as a sincere and personal inquiry from Ridvan, a local entrepreneur of a 'fritkot' with Turkish heritage. Over five decades, he witnessed substantial changes in his neighborhood. However, he still felt that his claims to the neighbourhood's past remained unrecognised, not only by heritage experts but more importantly, by his neighbours. Upon reaching out to migration historian Tina De Gendt, a small experiment was conducted in collaboration with the museum.
>
> This experiment evolved into the **'historian in residence'** taking up residence in five specifically designated square kilometres, corresponding to the squares depicted in a massive aerial image showcased within the museum. This initiative involves continuous street walks, participatory action research, interviews, projects, where the historian actively collaborates with local residents to negotiate local heritage and history.
>
> These residents, affectionately referred to as **'rememberers'**, represent diverse backgrounds in terms of gender, age, education, and their connection to the neighbourhood. However, they all share a profound bond with both the past and the future of their continually evolving working-class neighbourhoods, which are grappling with gentrification and urban transformations.
>
> Through shared authority over their contemporary surroundings, these dedicated rememberers collaboratively decide, research, present, and engage in **'hidden histories'** on topics such as religious diversity, resistance, and entrepreneurship. This approach facilitates the emergence of new, personal insights into our urban fabric. Furthermore, it empowers citizens to act as agents of change, fosters a sense of belonging, promotes mutual understanding, transcends the confines of urban contexts, and integrates a global perspective.
>
> Each residency culminates in an **exhibition** within the museum and numerous heritage-guidance projects where the narration is shaped by the rememberers themselves. This results in an **extensive calendar of activities**. To facilitate this project, we collaborate with the 'historian in residence,' employ museum staff (equivalent to 1.5 full-time positions), and allocate an annual budget of €60,000.
>
> In conclusion, *The Square Kilometre* represents a visionary undertaking that not only empowers communities to reclaim their heritage but also enriches our understanding of urban history and diversity.

Objectives and work undertaken

Aims and objectives of the project/initiative

> As a medium-sized European city, the historic city of Ghent is superdiverse, international and rapidly changing in every aspect. Often referred to as a 'pocket-sized metropolis', with its 260.000 inhabitants, it boasts over 160 nationalities. Ever since the historic city life bursted from the gridlock of its city gates and walls in 1860, the rapidly developing neighbourhoods that grew in what once were 'the outskirts', are hotspots of historic and ongoing social, economical and urban development, migration and change.
>
> These areas are prime spots of urban renewal today, yet their history remains largely unexplored and overlooked in the dominant narratives, museums, and archives. This project seeks to uncover "hidden histories"° that challenge dominant

narratives, to catalogue relevant heritage collections, to offer a continuous service, and to bridge the gap between history, the present, and the future.

At the same time, many of the inhabitants feel marginalized and under-recognized as historical actors. Whether it's the former sailors in the neighbourhood, the war refugees who have arrived in the 1990s, the Turkish and Flemish working-class families, or the West Flemish students - all of them somehow feel deprived of history. Hence, the project develops practices to empower local habitants to claim their own narratives and be recognised as agents of heritage work and future building.

°'Hidden histories' refers to historical questions and issues that have not been publicly disclosed or explored. These are not necessarily forgotten or unknown histories, but rather ones that have not been made accessible to the public.

Any historical and technical research undertaken for the project/initiative

Participatory action research is at the core of this project. It begins with uncovering Hidden histories, posing previously unasked questions. For instance, we explore the existence of over fourteen religious spaces in the small Rabot neighbourhood, examine Ghent's historical connection to its hinterland, gauge the local orientation of ethnic communities in Ledeberg, and delve into the significance of local war monuments for those emerging from warzones today. These questions transcend the local level but are approached from a local perspective, using various methods, from oral history to mapping and archival research. We have collaborated with local schools, youth organisations as well as historians and heritage experts from Ghent University. Many questions from rememberers have become research projects and master's theses for students and researchers from various departments.

Our work has also expanded historical research opportunities. Notably, we have secured previously inaccessible archival collections in collaboration with Amsab-ISG. For instance, we have made significant progress in researching civil society organizations of ethnic minorities, for which limited written sources were previously available. Today, the archives of these pioneering self-organizations are accessible, opening new avenues for historical investigation.

Activities carried out and stages of implementation of the project/initiative

A. Research or residence phase

The historian in residence starts by walking around with residents and then putting together a group of 15 to 20 'rememberers'. They jointly decide on ten lines of further collaborative research. During the four to five months research phase, the historian also invites other inhabitants and interested people on sunday-walks through the area, delving deeper into hidden histories and ongoing research.
After the residency, the historian reports to the collaborating partners about the results: the encountered archives, collections of photos, videos and other heritage objects and possibilities for further research.

B. Presentation and C. Continued service provided by the heritage cell

- **'neighbourhood walking plans'** are developed, allowing residents to explore histories by walking through the neighbourhood.
- following each residence, a **free exhibition** in the Ghent city museum is available to the wide public, presenting the hidden stories and the rememberers quest, rather than a factual and concise, let alone a diachronic history. Deriving videos are shared online as well.

Beyond these two standard outcomes, the rememberers developed

- smaller exhibits in the neighbourhood itself, artistic interventions, exhibits within the main exhibition, podcasts, various cultural project-proposals, books, etc.
- open days and walking activities (such as an 'open prayer house day' in the Rabot-area).

- heritage guidance projects with inventories of archives and collections, digitisation and cooperation with local archives in the city. The heritage cell serves as a matchmaker with other organisations in the network, and it permanently engages rememberers in its long term networks.

D. sharing experiences and making connections

Inspired by the project and other experiences, we started a network of colleagues within Gent and beyond who share their experiences in communities of practice specifically devoted to diversity, participation and migration history. for more information, we refer to the questions on dissemination.

Challenges or problems encountered and solutions found to overcome them

- The number of questions and identified heritage-collections was rapidly increasing. Therefore, 2024 marks a point of pause and continued service to projects and questions touched upon so far.
- Many rememberers were in search for a reliable public archive. Therefore, archives were invited to actively participate in the project steering group and to join forces.
- Forms of token-participation have punctured the experiences citizens have with government organisations. To clearly outline the project's approach, and to step away from confusion and earlier breaches of trust, a book was recently published.
- A personal connection appeared crucial. Staff from the heritage cell started actively accompanying the historian in her interactions with the rememberers.
- All envolved have their blind spots. This also goes for the historian. The project is therefore very explicit in the topics that will not be touched upon.

Results and impact

Summary of the main results achieved and knowledge that has been gained. List the ways that the project/initiative contributes to the preservation and/or enhancement of the historical, cultural, environmental, educational and/or social values of the heritage in question. Mention the project's impact on conservation policy and practice, if any.

Concrete outcomes

- **Exploration of hidden histories:** The project uncovered and explored previously hidden histories and numerous collections within specific square kilometres.
- **Free exhibitions**: Each residency resulted in free exhibitions and walking plans at the Ghent City Museum, making the hidden stories as well as the more classical heritage of the neighbourhood accessible to the wider public.
- **New projects and cooperations**: the project served as an inspiration and wake-up-call at this time. It laid the base for new projects of broad cooperation, such as Collections of Ghent (EU UiA) or the Ghent-Turkish Heritage project (in which young Ghentians of Turkish descent detect and preserve heritage objects, and initiate talks with heritage organisations).

Less tangible, but based on feedback we got from participants, residents, audiences, but also social workers:

- **Empowerment of local inhabitants**: It empowered local residents as authorities on both current society and historical narratives. It furthermore strengthened heritage awareness.
- **Global perspective**: The project adopted a global viewpoint, moving beyond the traditional confines of historical research.
- **Diverse participation**: By engaging people from diverse backgrounds, it diversified the voices contributing to heritage in Ghent.
- **Increased inclusivity**: The project broadened the inclusion of different communities and backgrounds in the conversation about local history
- **Process-oriented approach**: It emphasised a process-driven approach, prioritising active participation and involvement of community members. The project saw a step by step increase of agency by rememberers the creation of

the exhibitions and other activities.
- **Mutual curiosity**: It fostered a sense of mutual curiosity, promoting dialogue and learning among residents.
- **Knowledge sharing & skills development**: Colleagues within and outside Ghent shared their experiences through communities of practice, promoting knowledge exchange on diversity, participation, and migration history. The project allowed for a book on principal participation in the cultural heritage sector, and a conference on the topic (cf. infra for participation).

Aspects of the project that can be considered innovative within its area or field.

First and foremost, the project is ground breaking in its wholehearted recognition of the **authority of local inhabitants**, as experts of the current society that therefore have a valuable perspective on its history. It adopts a global perspective, transcending the conventional framework of history as primarily the domain of institutions, academia, and predominantly white experts. By actively involving residents from diverse backgrounds and nurturing curiosity, it broadens the spectrum of voices at the table, empowering individuals in their contemporary endeavours, recognizing them as civilians in society and indeed co-creators of heritage and history.

As the project encourages local residents to democratically partake in negotiations about the narratives of our society, the process is in essence democratising. Participation is central to the project, and yet approached critically. The published methodology serves as an inspiration for heritage workers, but has also been adopted by educational and social workers.

Measures to ensure the sustainability/future viability of the project (in terms of future plans and funding).

As a service provider to heritage actors and agents, and a separate unit within the city museum, the heritage cell of the STAM, incorporates the project as a main focal point, inscribed in its policy plan for the period 2021-2026. It has all intentions to continue project and its methodologies beyond this point.

Moreover, the heritage cell carries on the reconnaissance work of the historian in residence and the rememberers, hinting at possible corporations, matchmaking between organizations, supporting heritage care projects and digitisation, initiating digital projects, and supporting new initiatives in the areas. It invites neighbourhoods to its network.

Through exchanges, publications and a 2023 conference, the project also offers lessons learned to colleagues, other organisations and neighbourhoods in the city, or beyond. Partners also take on similar projects, always subscribing to the concept of sharing authority, negotiation and providing service.

Dissemination of the project's results and knowledge gained and any outreach or educational activities.

see question on transferability and viabiity.

Participation in the initiative (number of participants/audience/users per year and/or, in the case of websites and digital platforms, information regarding visitor numbers and online interaction).

- The project involves ten to twenty rememberers at each stage and engages numerous social actors and organisations during each residence. Organised walks receive approximately 400 **participants** per year, while the exhibition attracts an annual visitor count of 40,000. The local maps, with 7,500 copies printed, originating from the Square Kilometre, are in high demand. Subsequent smaller events that are hosted in the museum, or that are organised by local participants, also draw numerous visitors.
- Each residence is covered in the city magazine, of which 150.000 volumes are distributed door-to-door throughout the city, and projects are widely covered by local and national **press**.
- On a **professional level**, the project also saw numerous exchanges of experiences with academia (BE, LUX, NL) and numerous cultural-heritage-peers (local and CAMOC network). With the project as a base, a dedicated community-of-practises grew in Ghent on the subject of participation.

Involvement of youth, community and/or non-traditional audiences.

> Collaboration with people whose perspective and voice have not been recognised yet, is central to this project. The involvement of different communities, specifically marginalized groups, is essential.
> Depending on the area, the partners and the questions may differ, but minority stakeholders are always actively involved. Furthermore, in each area we have collaborated with schools and local youth organisations. Many of these turned out very fruitfull. For example: One of the outcomes of a residency was a 'histori-graffiti'-project, where local youth translated the neighborhood's history into a graffiti-painting. Even though the groups of rememberers are very mixed, most of them have never been involved in a heritage project before and many have never been to a museum.
> During the process, the rememberers often become heritage ambassadors for other communities, and have themselves organised walking tours and museum visits for groups that feel uncertain about museums and heritage.

Contribution to intercultural dialogue and to the protection of cultural diversity.

> To the project, the multi-perspectivity encompassed by superdiversity presents an opportunity: only by looking at the past from different angles, are we able to detect 'hidden histories'. In a deliberate step back from open calls to participation, participants are personally invited on the basis of their perspective and expertise. Throughout, intercultural dialogue and collaboration remain constant and indispensable. For most participants, this is not exceptional as they are constantly engaged in intercultural dialogue in their lived environment, just not about heritage or history. By exploring and discussing histories in depth, we are able to enhance more profound conversation about society in general. Furthermore, participants are taking up roles as curators, creators and narrators. They are the ones in the driver-seats and as such become heritage-ambassadors. In our experience, having these ambassadors in negotiating positions is crucial to spark the interest of other unheard voices (specifically younger diverse audiences).

Transferability of the initiative to other contexts and its scalability potential.

> The basic idea of The Square Kilometre is to approach urban heritage 'from below', employing a random grid of square kilometres rather than (imagined) neighbourhoods. This concept is easily transferable to any urban context and has already been copied by educators and organisations.
>
> The methodology of having a historian in residence working with rememberers to find hidden histories has also inspired many cultural institutions that are looking for ways to 'break down their walls' in superdiverse settings, but has proved more difficult to transfer. Many of the ethics and ideas behind the project tend to get lost in translation, leading to disappointment. This realisation motivated us to publish a book (Ons Gedeeld Verleden), in which Tina De Gendt explains and contextualises the methodology. Since the publication, organisations, scholars and educators have used it to craft their own own democratising projects, based on the principles of The Square Kilometre.

Any related work that still needs to be completed, if applicable.

> In the preceding years, the historian resided in five square kilometres, all within the immediate vicinity of the former city gates and wall, in what is commonly denominated as the 19th century belt. There are many more parts to discover and many residents of other superdiverse neigborhoods have already invited us for a residency in their neigborhood. However, in 2024 the project deliberately takes time to evaluate the work and methodology thus far, and to decide on which squares of the grid are next. We are now working on a wrap-up exhibition (De Poorten/The Gates) and we will use this as a platform to openly invite participants and visitors to a wider exhibition to discuss the possibilities to extend the approach to more industrial, suburban or other zones within the city. Furthermore, the projects together with its partners evaluates how methodologies can be shared and put to use.

European and international dimension

European significance of the project/initiative/nominee.

> The Square Kilometre is all about the micro-macro: zooming in and zooming out. We explicitly take up a world history perspective to look at the smallest neighbourhoods. We start from a lifeworld perspective, but follow the roads to wherever

they may lead. Migration and urbanisation are central themes to this project. The Square Kilometre embraces curiosity and mutual learning. In that sense it is quintessentially European.
It does not merely observe or portray the city, but acknowledges the unheards, initiates deep conversation, fosters open dialogue on the complex and intertwined nature of urban history, its diversity, the everlasting role of migration, and the global character of cities today. Hence, we feel it has a clear democratising effect for all involved and all those who follow the project closely. Furthermore, we see engaged citizens and visitors inspired to come to terms with change, thus fostering resilience.

Costs of the project/initiative

Costs of the project (in euro), financial and management arrangements, funding partners and/or the type of funding.

Als one of the main projects to broaden heritage awareness and city wide representation of Cultural Heritage in Ghent, the project is coordinated by the Ghent heritage cell. The cell is embedded in the STAM museum staff. Structural Funding to the cell and 26 others cells in Flanders is provided by the Flemish Government.

For the project the Gent heritage cell engages:

- a full-time freelance historian in residence
- several heritage cell and museum staff colleagues for the production of the exhibits, the projcet coordiation and providing service and advise to local groups (1.5 FTE and standard service provided by heritage cell)
- a production communcations and research budget of circa €60.000 yearly

Funding provided by the European Union or the EEA/Norway Grants (including programme, year and amount of the Grant), if any.

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Additional information

How would winning the European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award benefit you, your project and/or your organisation?

Every time we begin a residency, people hesitate to join in, feeling they have 'nothing to say,' even about their immediate environment. As we explore history together, we witness their sense of citizenship grow. When we present the results in the museum, participants often question whether 'outsiders' will be interested. Upon realising people are interested, they realise they're not mere residents but city-makers. Imagine the boost in confidence and ownership an award could provide.

In case this submission is the winner of the Grand Prix, what will the monetary award be used for?

It is the keen wish of the people involved to further share experiences, instigate mutual inspiration and share methodologies in a European and multilingual Belgian context. This would include the translation of 'Ons gedeeld verleden' (our shared history, Tina De Gendt, 2023, originally in Dutch).

In case this submission is the winner of the Grand Prix, who will be the recipient of the monetary award?

"Erfgoedcel Gent", the heritage cell for the city of Ghent

How did you find out about the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards?	Word of mouth

Is this the first time that this entry has been submitted to the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards?	Yes
On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with this online submission form?	✓ 8
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02_aerial photo ... 6.8 MiB



03_group photo... 3.7 MiB



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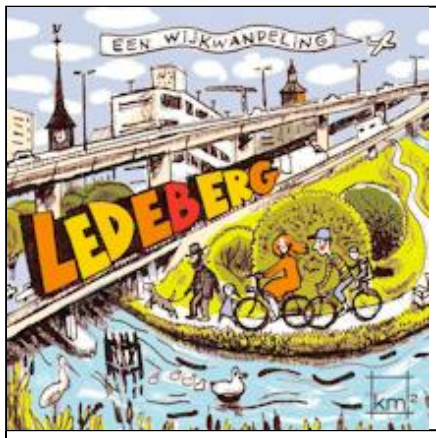
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