



Urban renewal programmes for neighbourhoods

Background

The City of Ghent launched its Urban Renewal Programmes for Neighbourhoods in 1999 as a city-wide strategy to promote sustainable transformation at the neighbourhood level. Rather than relying on short-term fixes, the city embraced long-term, context-sensitive planning that balances social inclusion, spatial improvements, environmental upgrades, and local economic revitalisation. Each district receives a tailor-made vision and phases actions designed by dedicated programme teams, informed by deep engagement with residents and stakeholders across policy, planning, and community sectors.

Central to the model is a participatory, people-centred approach: residents are invited from the outset to help define neighbourhood priorities via workshops, consultations, and participatory budgeting. Meanwhile, internal coordinators handle project delivery and communications teams ensure transparency and real-time updates to residents. Multidisciplinary teams work in tandem with local community groups, NGOs, universities, businesses, and municipal services to integrate diverse perspectives and maintain accountability.

By aligning with Ghent's Strategic Urban Renewal Policy 2020–2025, the programme steers transformation across ten neighbourhood areas - each advancing its own unique plan under shared principles of co-creation, resilience, and sustainability. Outcomes are monitored

through innovative evaluation methods such as outcome-harvesting and storytelling, ensuring both qualitative and quantitative learning informs continuous improvement.

Key Activities

- Development of long-term, neighbourhood-specific renewal plans tied to the 2020–2025 city strategy.
- Structured citizen engagement via workshops, neighbourhood forums, and local participatory budgeting processes.
- Formation of cross-disciplinary teams - including planners, environmental specialists, social workers, and community stakeholders - for programme coordination and execution.
- Dedicated communication and outreach to keep residents informed and involved.
- Use of evaluation frameworks such as theory of change, outcome harvesting, and narrative reporting to track impact and refine actions.

Impact

- Implementation in ten distinct Ghent neighbourhoods, with varying stages of progression, some active over two decades.
- Tangible improvements in public housing, green space provision, energy-efficient building upgrades, and accessible neighbourhood services.
- Enhanced local economic activity via support to small businesses, multifunctional community hubs, and skills-building initiatives.

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Impact

- Demonstrated rise in social cohesion, reduced crime rates, and elevated resident engagement - especially in revitalised areas like Rabot-Blaisantvest and Tondelier (“530 homes, amenities, offices”).
- Recognition by URBACT: awarded the “Good Practice” label in October 2024 for its high impact, transferability, and participatory governance model.

Tips for Similar Projects

- Develop neighbourhood-specific strategies within a broader urban renewal framework - this enhances relevance and local ownership.
- Embed participatory planning early, including mechanisms like workshops and micro-budgeting.
- Use multidisciplinary teams to address social, spatial, environmental, and economic dimensions holistically.
- Employ innovative, flexible impact assessment tools such as storytelling, theory of change, and outcome-harvesting for adaptive management.

Challenges & Solutions

- Coordinating multiple projects over many years required strong leadership. Ghent responded by embedding programme managers and fixed coordination roles to streamline operations.
- Perspectives varied across neighbourhoods; Ghent invested in continuous dialogue via neighbourhood councils and communication officers to bridge gaps and maintain cohesion.



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Identified Limitations/Weaknesses

Continuous staffing, evaluation, communications, community engagement demand, and ongoing financial investment.

Video

- Watch this [video](#) by URBACT about the programme!

Video Description

URBACT video pitch.



Resources

- [Urban renewal programmes for neighbourhoods \(article by URBACT\)](#).
- [Urban renewal programmes for neighbourhoods \(article from gent\)](#).
- [Interactive Map Resource \(gent\)](#).
- [Project Timeline \(gent\)](#).

Partners

