



FACTSHEET:

NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGERS

© STAD GENT

WHAT?

The City of Ghent has sought ways to empower citizen participation since the 1990s. In 2018, the Policy Participation Unit within the administration consists of five staff members and fifteen neighbourhood managers. This unit answers directly to the mayor's office and continuously works to communicate with citizens and encourage new, innovative methods of participation.

The neighbourhood managers actively encourage citizens in their neighbourhood to initiate new activities and make plans around themes that matter to them. They also function as brokers for temporary use: they are well connected to citizens who want to take action, signal opportunities such as empty plots or buildings, and link these to the needs of the neighbourhood whenever possible.

WHEN?

Since the 1990s

WHERE?

Ghent, Belgium

WHY?

- Bridging the gap between the administration and daily life in the city

- **Encourage and improve participation of citizens**

- **Empower citizens to take action**

- **Take on a brokering role in temporary use projects**

LESSONS LEARNT

True participation requires a closer relationship between civil servants and citizens than is traditionally the case. The civil servant working behind a desk, away from the public eye, cannot bridge the distance to citizens' everyday lives and needs. Neighbourhood managers can, and do. They act as intermediaries, inform the neighbourhood about projects and policies, and forward signals from their neighbourhoods back to the city to inform future policies or plans.

HOW TO TRANSFER

The approachability of neighbourhood managers is crucial to the success of their role. They must be able to listen and communicate, create a network, be sensitive to the political framework but also come up with creative solutions. Mediation and negotiation skills are essential qualities. The broker role should be officialised by giving neighbourhood managers real authority within the administration at a high level.