

Ghent
Belgium

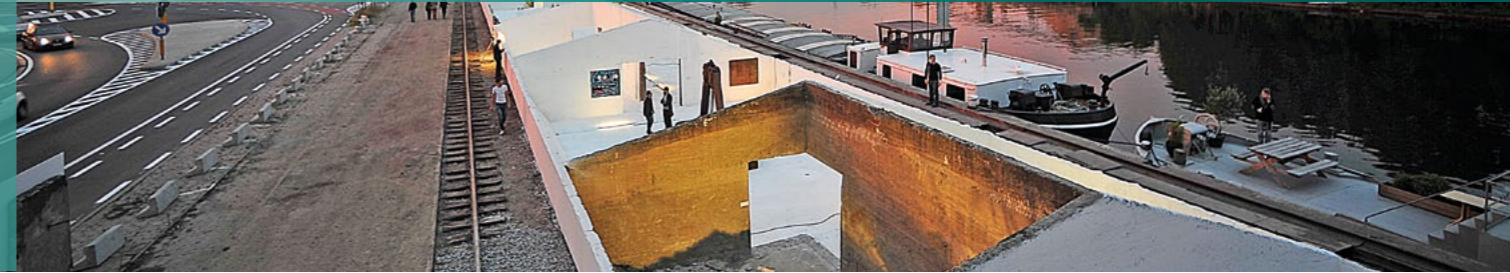
A new circular life in Ghent's Old Dockyards

In Ghent, Belgium, the circular economy brings together companies, institutions, governments and citizens on the way to sustainability. At the same time, its potential for innovation, job creation and economic development reinforces the attractiveness of the city.



"Our ambition is to further reduce the ecological footprint of Ghent and to evolve towards a climate neutral city. Making sustainable living possible in the city also means allowing a good quality of life in a healthy environment. The Old Dockyards is an excellent example. Sustainability is integrated into every stage of development. This circular economy model is the desired path for Ghent."

Daniel Termont, mayor



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Approach

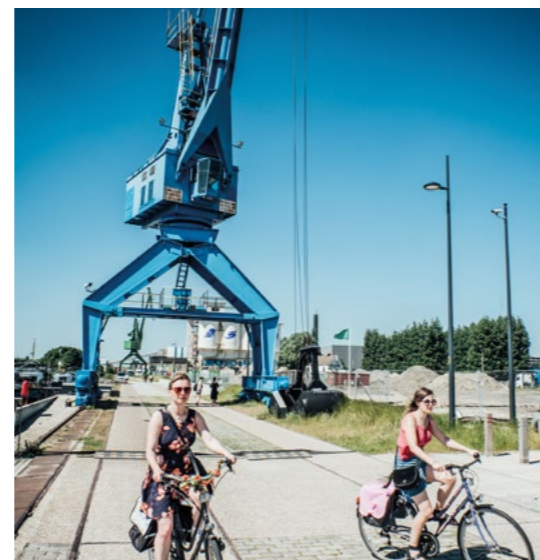
The Old Dockyards is a waterfront housing project where closing loops at the district level is key. Approximately 1,500 housing units will be constructed through public-private partnerships (PPPs). Ghent wants to develop a holistic approach for the area that encompasses the wider concept of circular economy. The project is supervised by the city of Ghent and the autonomous municipal Ghent development authority (sogent).

Thanks to innovative technologies, some residential buildings in the Old Dockyards will use heating systems based on biogas from black water. Such systems reuse the warm air produced by industrial factories, as well as captured heat and nutrients from used water from dishwashers and laundry machines.

But the Old Dockyards is more than a simple housing project focusing on constructing new low-energy and passive houses. Thanks to the regeneration of the area, new business models such as car and bike sharing have developed, and the city has launched activities that challenge residents' linear lifestyles. Indeed, throughout the Old Dockyards, people can already experience the circular economy

through the presence of temporary buildings constructed with recycled materials, guided walks, a 'circular dialogue café' as well as short-term exhibitions that demonstrate the different possible uses of city infrastructure.

That is why the Old Dockyards project was chosen as one of the good practices inventoried by the Cleantech Cluster Regio Gent, a regional partnership that stimulates the use of clean technologies and the circular economy, with the ambition of making the Ghent region a robust and resilient ecosystem by 2030.



Challenges

Many stakeholders are involved, including different public organisations, private developers and research institutes. In such a complex project that involves a wide spectrum of stakeholders, flexibility is a necessity. During the 10-year planning process of the Old Dockyards project, sogent has invested a lot of time and effort in coordinating the needs and expectations of all actors involved: project partners and surrounding companies, as well as current and future inhabitants.

The project needed strong political commitment to ensure that it had the required financial support. Due to the integrated approach of the Old Dockyards regeneration project, it was not possible to get funds from a single financing institution or programme. Instead, sogent had to apply for different European and regional subsidies and break the project into several sectorial actions, funded by different European and Flemish programmes (e.g. European Fund for Regional Development, the Flemish Fund for City Renewal and the Federal Urban Policy).

Impact

Between the planning phase and the effective realisation of the project, years have gone by. Those delays were transformed into opportunities, giving special attention to the possible temporary use of the grounds, allowing the city to renovate the quay walls and building a bridge for pedestrians and cyclists during that time.

Even though the Old Dockyards site is still under construction, it has already become an integral part of the city. During the long process of tendering, sogent has created temporary areas for city gardening and city farming. This has allowed Ghent's citizens to rethink land that was once perceived as waste or unusable as a profitable resource.

A very unusual project is the renovation of a series of disused gravel tanks. A team of young architects and an artist transformed this area into a unique multi-purpose public space that is currently used by Ghent's citizens for several types of events.

Lessons

Through public tenders, sogent has been able to steer the development of the Old Dockyards towards a circular district. Sogent has been able to publish tenders that imposed highly sustainable and circular standards to all the actors willing to take part in the Old Dockyards renovation. As a result, only business and stakeholders able to meet those criteria could join the project.

Furthermore, ownership of the project land is an essential prerequisite to make use of places and buildings on a temporary basis during the different phases of the Old Docks development. By giving the opportunity to citizens to experience circular economy during the execution of the project, Ghent has been able to raise awareness about the project's objectives and future plans.

The Old Dockyards project also shows the importance of using participative PPPs to scale-up your project. Indeed, PPPs not only allowed the city to work together with different actors and achieve a sustainable business model, but they also ensured that different services, such as water, energy and mobility, are characterised by a circular approach.