

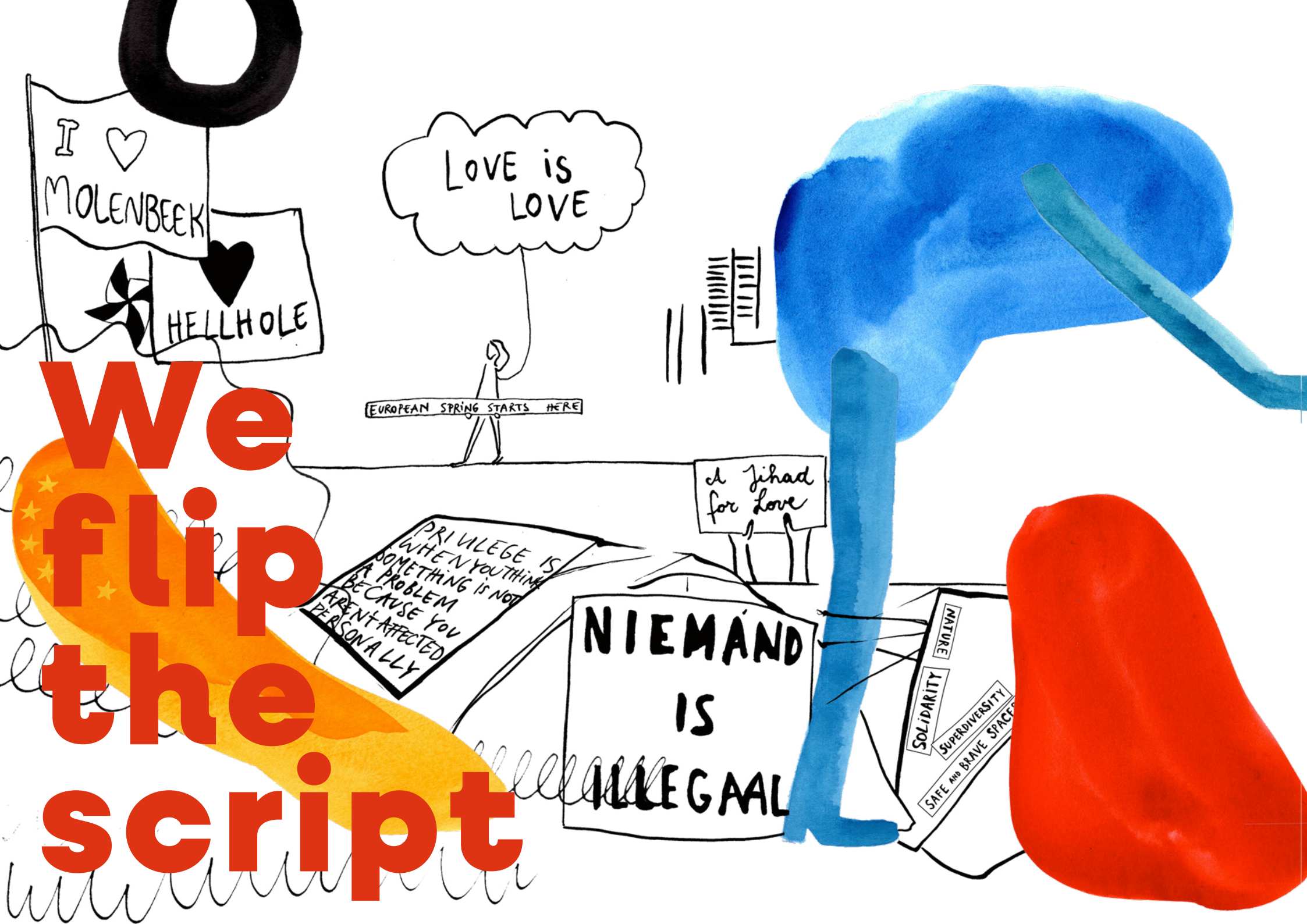


SaDaKa

be generous

Molenbeek
European capital
of culture
candidate city





**We
flip
the
script**

I ♥
MOLENBEEK

HELLHOLE

LOVE IS
LOVE

EUROPEAN SPRING STARTS HERE

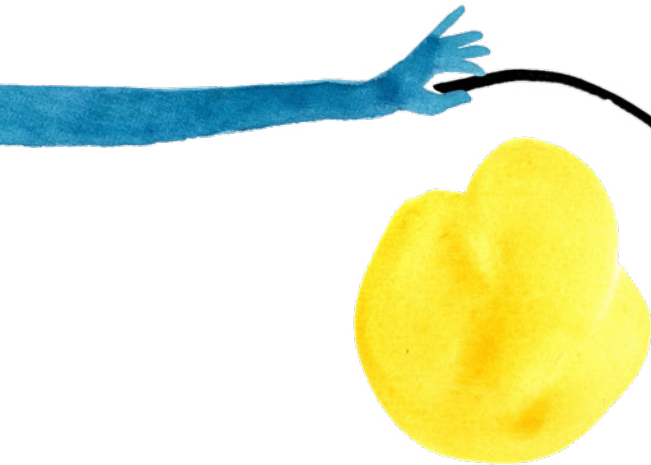
A Jihad
for Love

PRIVILEGE IS
SOMETHING IS NOT
A PROBLEM
BECAUSE YOU
AREN'T AFFECTED
PERSONALLY

NIEMAND
IS
ILLEGAAL

NATURE
SOLIDARITY
SUPERDIVERSITY
SAFE AND BRAVE SPACE

0_	Introduction	2
1_	Contribution to the long-term strategy	7
2_	Cultural and artistic content	13
3_	European dimension	20
4_	Outreach	24
5_	Management	28
6_	Capacity to deliver	31



0_Introduction

Why does your city wish to take part in the competition for the title of European Capital of Culture?

If you have heard of Molenbeek before, it could be in relation to terrorism in Europe. Molenbeek in the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR) was home to the young men who planned and executed the terrorist attacks in Paris (2015) and Brussels (2016). Donald Trump called it a 'hellhole', Filip Dewinter and Geert Wilders, right-wing politicians, organised an 'Islam safari' here. When passing through Molenbeek, even some progressive Belgian politicians don't feel like they are 'at home' or in Europe anymore. For us, Molenbeek, with its 140 nationalities and even more languages spoken, is the lens through which we look at Europe. We search for European connections in other contexts like Molenbeek that share with us this

sense of fragmentation, but also the embodied survival and know-how that adds courage and depth to the future of Europe.

Reimagine European solidarity!

The basic question is: how can we build a common future when we don't share a common past? After three years of intensive micro-conversations we realised that, with the transformational power of a European Capital of Culture (ECOC), Molenbeek can project itself in, and help inspire, a common European future, beyond the fragmentation. With the lived experience of many Europeans, our aim is to create a 'New Us'. The young, superdiverse and the extremely creative populations and communities of the Molenbeeks of Europe must play a key role in that much-needed transformation.



Molenbeek could be literally translated as “Millbrook” in English. Centuries ago, it was a valley landscape, part of the countryside and provided Brussels with food and all it needed to survive. In the nineteenth century, it became the industrial engine, right next to the Canal through which coal arrived from Charleroi, 60 km away. After World War II, industrial decline set in and diverse waves of migration brought workers from Southern Europe and Northern Africa.

More recently, newcomers have arrived from Eastern Europe for economic reasons, but also refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Asia. All this has led to the reality of Molenbeek today: an over-urbanized transit city, struggling with painful post-industrial transitions, facing high unemployment, exclusionary poverty and violence, and with far too little space for nature and people to breathe. Fighting climate change within this precarious context is virtually impossible. 2030 is a milestone in our global endeavours to preserve biodiversity and reduce our CO2 emissions. The question how to tackle climate mitigation in Molenbeek, in the form of Settlements of the Future, public places where human and non-human forces connect and reinforce each other, is pivotal. Europe counts many territories like Molenbeek, facing similar crises and challenges. How can we learn from one another?

Although Molenbeek today seems to be part of the enlarged centre of the BCR, the Canal remains an insurmountable mental border which socially, economically and culturally

violently splits the region in two. Molenbeek is very much ‘on the other side’ of the Canal. Molenbeek for Brussels 2030 (MB2030) is about repositioning Molenbeek and the Canal, not outside of Europe, but at its heart. Our drive is to reduce forms of inequality and injustice that the Canal embodies and to build with all Molenbeek has to offer: a huge, eager workforce, generous and creative collaboration, multilingual practices, a spirit of bravery and risk-taking, cultural hybridisation, entrepreneurial ambitions.

Sadaka: solidarity, generosity, empathy, selflessness

The key concept of MB2030 is imagining forms of solidarity that advance equality and justice for all - not only for those who look like us and not only for humans!

Our method is Sadaka. It is a word present in Hebrew (tsedaka), Arabic (sadaqah), Swahili (sadaka), in Hindi/Urdu (Sadqa) and other languages. It means solidarity, generosity, empathy, selflessness. It contrasts starkly with the ancient Roman credo: *do ut des*, reflected in the morals of commercial contracts, ‘I give so that you may give’.

Our European Sadaka is unconditional: a gift without return. Sadaka will be creolised into creative Sadaka by all the concrete practices that MB2030 will embrace:

cultural co-creation, circular economy, rewilding, safe and brave spaces. Sadaka became a reality when tents were pitched on the bridge near the Belgian arrival centre for asylum seekers, in February 2023: ‘Molenbeek residents organised themselves to help their “neighbours on the bridge” by bringing food, warmth, clothes, medicine or legal assistance’, as the Brussels Times reported. Social and public solidarity must inspire, multiply, stimulate, but never replace civic solidarity, the legally formalized responsibility for redistribution of wealth and wellbeing by welfare state institutions.

How can we, out of current and future centres like Molenbeek, through long-term, large-scale, cultural and civic gestures and processes, contribute to systemic solidarity, climate justice and generous rituals, with maximum impact for our entire continent? How can more Sadaka, as is the case in the Global South, be shared by Molenbeek’s creative and superdiverse population? How can we all provoke more European solidarity that offers hope, togetherness and positive change for the future of all young Europeans? How can we be good ancestors for those who come after us and will embody tomorrow’s Europe?

Finally, how can we reinforce a ‘New Us’ that Molenbeek and Europe desperately need and how can we embrace creative experiences from communities that don’t feel part of today’s Europe? Which mental and material change will creolised Sadaka out of Molenbeek produce? These are our crucial questions and challenges.

Does your city plan to involve its surrounding area? Explain this choice.

Of course. Molenbeek is a part of and at the heart of the new, enlarged centre of the BCR. The regional government is a key partner. This is embodied in the solid, in-depth and long-term collaboration with the two institutions that will be housed right next to Molenbeek, just across the Canal, from 2025 onward: the arts centre KANAL-Centre Pompidou (KANAL) and CIVA -Architecture, Landscape, Urbanism Brussels (CIVA).

In April 2024, the 18 other municipalities in the region officially confirmed and signed up for a structural and long-term partnership with MB2030. Every municipality will have the chance to include its own two-week programme within our overall MB2030 programme, echoing our concept and themes and adding accents of their own called Capital Quinzaine.

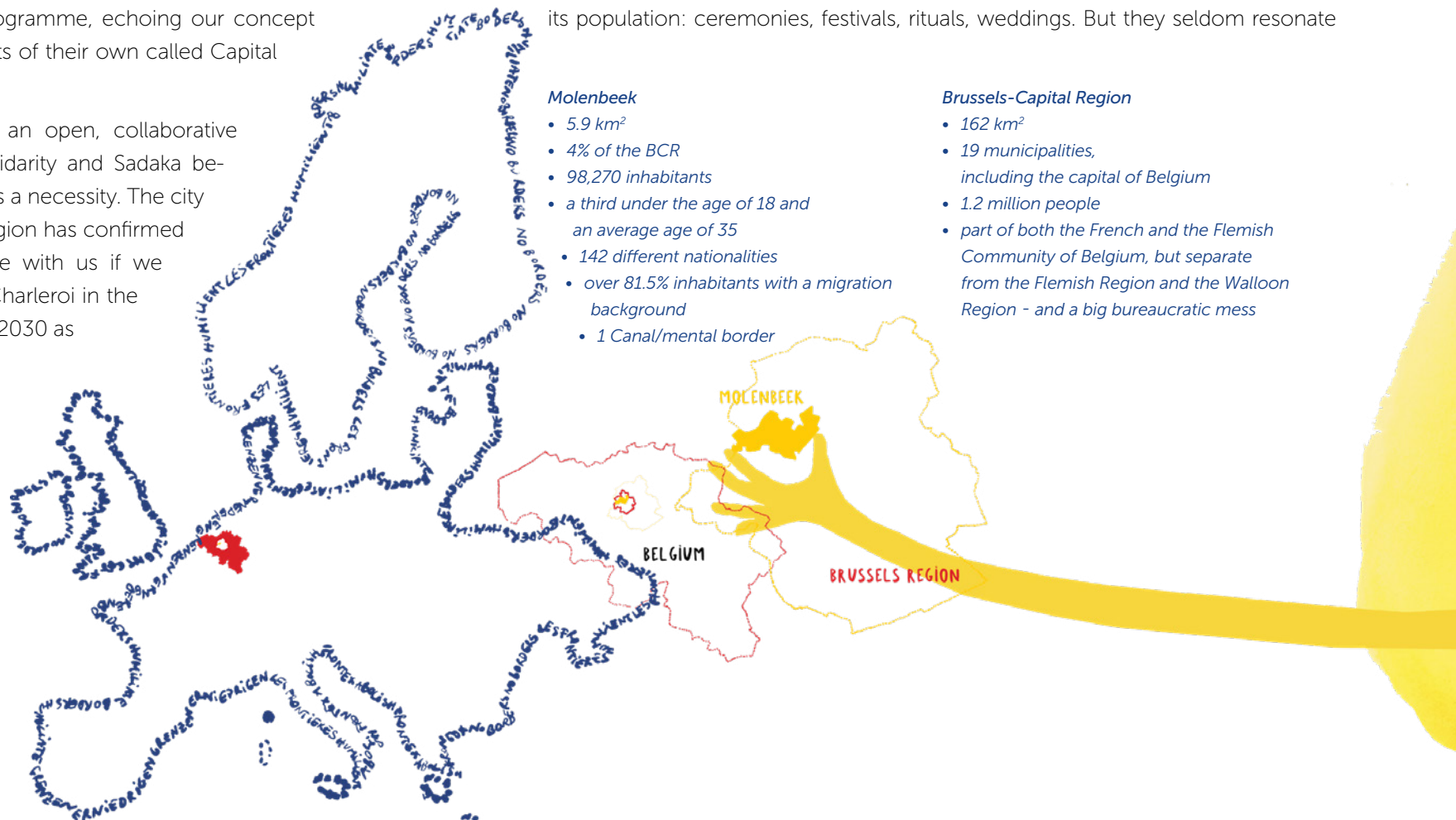
MB2030 defends a vision of an open, collaborative Belgium, in which cultural solidarity and Sadaka between strong, thriving regions is a necessity. The city of Mechelen in the Flemish Region has confirmed its commitment to collaborate with us if we continue in this competition. Charleroi in the Walloon Region has picked MB2030 as its exclusive partner.

Our motivation is to make sure that long-term artistic, cultural and civic gestures allow for the transmission of more Sadaka between Molenbeek and all its regional neighbours.

Explain briefly the overall cultural profile of your city.

Molenbeek has a remarkably dense cultural and social life, reflected in a wide variety of cultural and social structures and associations, all connected to a complex accumulation of levels of public funding and political responsibility. The cultural agenda of Molenbeek includes an average of 500 acts a year, most of them small-scale concerts and music performances, comedy and clubbing. Most events are organised by venues or companies such as the House of Cultures and Social Cohesion (with a capacity of max 180), Vaartkapoen (300), Recyclart (600), Charleroi Danse (400), UP – Circus & Performing Arts (300) or Ras El Hanout (150).

A large number of cultural practices in Molenbeek are linked to the diversity of its population: ceremonies, festivals, rituals, weddings. But they seldom resonate



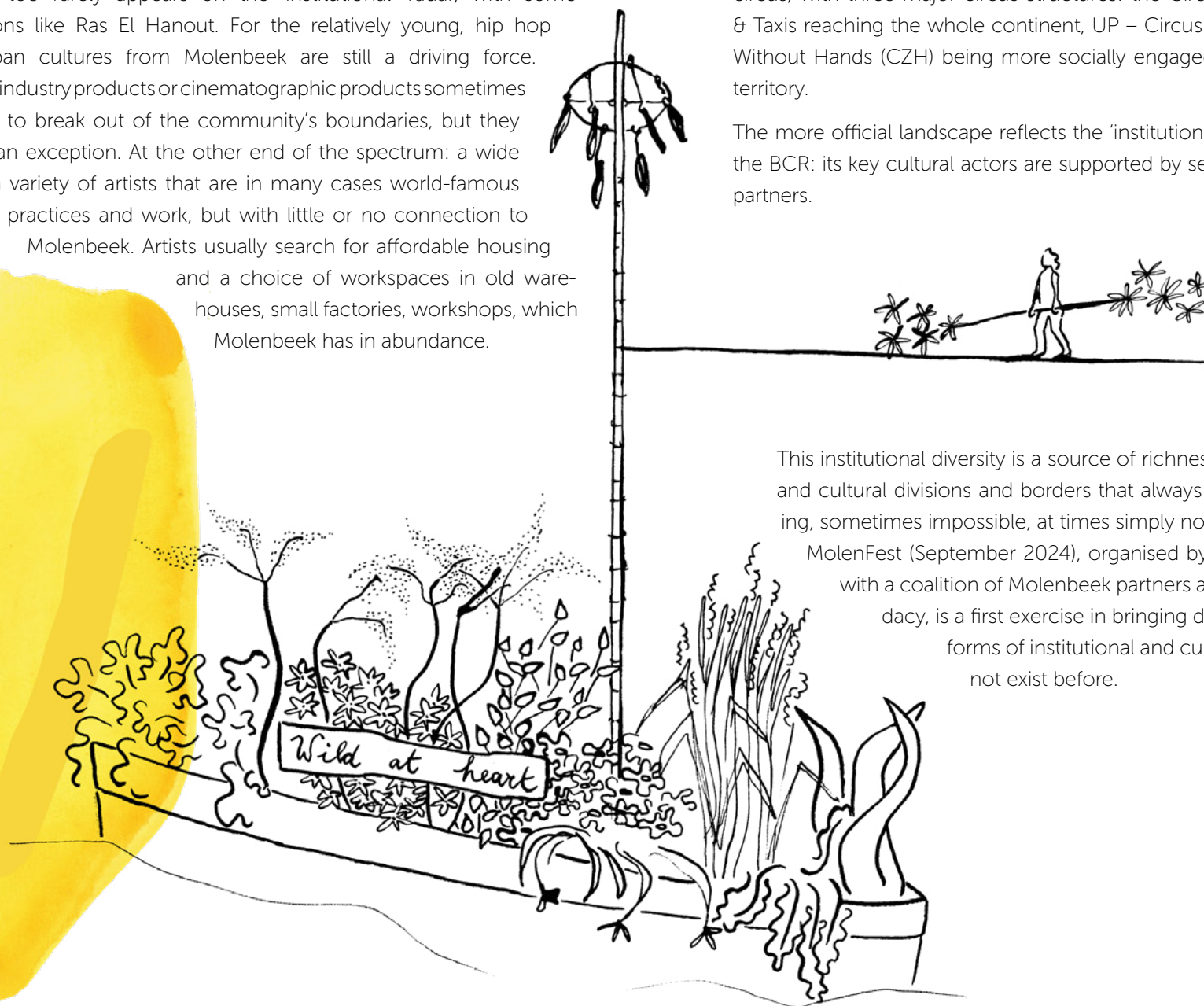
outside the communities involved. The huge amount of informal cultural production too rarely appears on the 'institutional' radar, with some exceptions like Ras El Hanout. For the relatively young, hip hop and urban cultures from Molenbeek are still a driving force. Cultural industry products or cinematographic products sometimes manage to break out of the community's boundaries, but they remain an exception. At the other end of the spectrum: a wide and rich variety of artists that are in many cases world-famous for their practices and work, but with little or no connection to Molenbeek. Artists usually search for affordable housing and a choice of workspaces in old warehouses, small factories, workshops, which Molenbeek has in abundance.

It may come as a surprise, but Molenbeek could well be the global capital of circus, with three major circus structures: the Circus School of Brussels at Tour & Taxis reaching the whole continent, UP – Circus & Performing Arts and Circus Without Hands (CZH) being more socially engaged and connected to the local territory.

The more official landscape reflects the 'institutional lasagne' that is so typical of the BCR: its key cultural actors are supported by several political and institutional partners.

This institutional diversity is a source of richness, but also of mental, material and cultural divisions and borders that always make collaboration challenging, sometimes impossible, at times simply not a part of the mental horizon.

MolenFest (September 2024), organised by MB2030, KANAL and MCCS, with a coalition of Molenbeek partners and as part of the ECOC candidacy, is a first exercise in bringing dozens of partners together for forms of institutional and cultural exchange that simply did not exist before.



Explain the concept of the programme which would be launched if the city is designated as European Capital of Culture.

A two-year process of consulting and co-creating with thousands of youths from Molenbeek and the BCR – organised in the framework of *Speak Up* and the *Youth Coalition* and resulting in a rich and dense *Youth Manifesto* – defined the **four central themes of our project: equality and social justice; superdiversity, multilingualism; the return of water and nature to our city; and safe, brave and free spaces that allow everyone to flourish in the future.** The programme is structured along these four themes under the poetic names: Equality Machine; Creole Europe; Wild at Heart; and European Space to Embrace. Given that the transition to a more sustainable society starts with a *change of culture*, MB2030 is committed to finding clues for this change in the everyday reality of the least privileged and their cultural roots, magical modes of survival and secret codes of resilience.

For all these projects we start from a 2 + 1 basis: two Molenbeek partners + at least one BCR partner. For all these projects we also include a partner from other transit cities in Europe or connect to international cultural hubs that Molenbeek is intimately linked to.



All major projects are imagined with a legacy that is not necessarily a new building. For the *Home of European Sadaka*, we want to reclaim an existing building; the *Euro-Season of the New Us* needs to become a new European and live rendez-vous at the end of summer, when a new cultural year begins, combining the scale, quality and outreach of the Dream City Festival in Tunis with that of documenta fifteen; *WildWaterWadi* involves more unpacking and revealing than new construction; and *Safe and Brave Parades and Ceremonies* are about creating shared public spaces. All will have an immaterial legacy and a life beyond 2030.

Besides being as much of a zero-emission event in itself, MB2030 ECOC aspires to become exemplary in tackling the challenges of a socially just and integrated transition towards a new zero-net normal. Yet rather than enforce incompatible solutions on people who do not have the luxury of dedicating time and thought to a distant future, we want to research the strengths and hidden treasures of their everyday reality in relation to the questions of sustainable living.

With the desire to add and produce more long-term Sadaka, out of Molenbeek, and with solid and long-term European and international partners, leading to a creative European renaissance, we have built a rich and transformative cultural programme that aims to involve a maximum of Molenbeek residents, cultural structures and artists.

It is important to emphasise that all of this has already been piloted and experimented with on several occasions and in various contexts. All these preparations are the backbone of this application. *Speak Up* and the *Youth Coalition* have been ongoing, three Summer and Spring Assemblies in 2022, 2023 and 2024 have boosted Molenbeek's appetite, as will the first edition of the *MolenFest* in September 2024. All of these activities will gain in strength and European connections from 2025 through 2029 and come to full blossom in 2030.



1. Contribution to the long-term strategy

Describe the cultural strategy that is in place in your city at the time of the application, including the plans for sustaining the cultural activities beyond the year of the title.

We could say, bluntly, that there is no overarching cultural strategy in Molenbeek. A much more nuanced approach, however, would be to say that there are four different 'agents' at work on the territory of Molenbeek with concurring cultural strategies.

First, Molenbeek, which, unlike the 18 other municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR), did not outsource culture. The city has two 'associates' to the mayor, responsible for culture, one Francophone and one Flemish. It runs a hands-on policy via the House of Cultures and Social Cohesion (MCCS), prioritising creative participation and intercultural dialogue.

Then, there is the Flemish Community Commission (VGC) and the French Community Commission (COCOF), with exclusive jurisdiction over cultural and linguistic matters; each has its own strategy: the VGC has the Integrated Cultural Policy Plan (2020–25), the COCOF the Cultural Plan for Brussels (2013).

Lastly, the BCR, through its competences related to the international role of Brussels, the overall image of the region, its urban planning and, therefore, its public space. The result of all this: fragmented cultural policies and funding mechanisms.

The Molenbeek council approved the VGC Integrated Cultural Policy Plan (2020–25) for Molenbeek, which is based on a large number of interviews with citizens, workers, associations and civil society. Further, Molenbeek developed the official policy

document *Future Vision: Molenbeek 2050*, which aims to transform Molenbeek into a regional artistic and cultural base and which provides long-term guarantees that this policy objective will extend beyond 2030, for the decades to come. MB2030 mitigates this cultural policy fragmentation, and we integrate the policy priorities of these plans into a converging formula:

Priority 1: Strengthening encounters in local cultural spaces

The aim is for every individual, regardless of origin, gender, social condition, sexual orientation, abled or disabled to feel welcome in local cultural spaces. By relying on cultural centres, libraries and other existing structures, we want to create 'safe spaces' where everyone can express themselves and actively participate in the cultural and artistic life. These spaces are designed to be inclusive environments where diversity is celebrated and where cultural and artistic activities can bring people together, fostering greater social cohesion in Molenbeek. The purpose is to ensure that these spaces are accessible and welcoming to all community members, providing opportunities for interaction, learning and collaboration. The belief is that by nurturing an atmosphere of

respect and openness, barriers can be broken down and stronger, more connected communities can be built. Also, by programming events that reflect the diverse cultures and interests of Molenbeek's residents, this will ensure that everyone feels represented and valued in the municipality's cultural landscape.

Priority 2: A creative Molenbeek, home to a wide diversity of artists and cultural actors

The aim is to actively support artists from various cultural backgrounds, disciplines and artistic traditions. By supporting a wide range of voices and perspectives, the cultural tapestry of Molenbeek is enriched and mutual understanding among different communities is fostered. Through collaborative projects, exhibitions, performances and workshops, opportunities are created for artists and the public to engage in meaningful conversations and cultural exchanges. Resources are provided mainly through reliable cultural centre partners, offering vacant industrial spaces through Urban Renovation Contracts (BCR) and support for artists to explore new ideas and creative processes. This includes offering financial support through subsidies (VGC, COCOF, FW-B and VG), residencies, and access to spaces where artists can experiment and develop their work. Support for cultural projects is integrated with broader efforts to promote sustainability, including using environmentally friendly materials, supporting projects that address social and

environmental issues, and encouraging practices that contribute to the long-term well-being of communities. *Future Vision: Molenbeek 2050* outlines plans to enhance the infrastructure and resources available to artists. This includes developing dedicated art spaces, improving access to cultural venues, and creating a vibrant network of artists and cultural institutions.

Priority 3: Sustainably strengthening the network of local and regional cultural actors

Efforts are made to encourage overcoming cultural and linguistic divides and to strengthen collaborations between French and Flemish community institutions and the diverse communities settled in Molenbeek and the BCR areas. For instance, the *Molenlight Festival* exemplifies this effort by creating a participative and dynamic festival with Flemish and Francophone official partners and inhabitants. Additionally, a project manager position was created at the MCCA in 2022, specifically tasked with rebuilding and reinforcing ties with local associations and cultural actors in Molenbeek, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

How is the European Capital of Culture action included in this strategy?

MB2030 offers Molenbeek and the 18 other municipalities in the BCR a shared vehicle to deliver their separate cultural-policy priorities. Four different

If we can work it out in Molenbeek, we can make it work anywhere.

policy levels cannot achieve their goals separately. All current policies are incomplete, all policy levels and their institutions lack the delivery capacity to properly and fully implement them. Integrating them would imply making these four 'agents' and their strategies on the territory resonate and work together. They would need to speak together, to define goals and make their strategies converge. This is politically challenging if not impossible. So, we are doing the work for them: they gave a mandate to MB2030 to be a space for experimentation of new inclusive work methods, bringing diverse institutional actors and grassroots associations together. **If we can work it out in Molenbeek, we can make it work anywhere.**

As a first step, we inject the priorities with visionary artistic innovation and connect them to the urgencies of other Molenbeeks in Europe and beyond. For **Priority 1** we shift from cultural infrastructure to safe and brave public spaces, where artistic and cultural gestures are introduced to citizens. Encounters are staged between people and cultures whose paths sometimes cross but hardly ever really meet. For **Priority 2** we connect international to local talent and offer temporary and permanent artistic workspaces, without further alienating vulnerable populations at risk of gentrification. For **priority 3**, we enhance collaboration across communities, municipalities and policymaking levels to overcome fragmentation, while connecting the local reality to the wider European and global realities it is a part of. As a next step, we provide the three priorities with six actionable goals:

Goal 1:

Beyond Communities: Redeveloping the Molenbeek-BCR cultural ecosystem from fragmentation to integration, producing a superdiverse, hybrid culture across policy, institutions, languages, communities

MB2030's objective will be to accompany and strengthen cultural practices that promote

encounter, exchange and co-production that fundamentally transcend community boundaries:

we will make sure that urban life, characterised by inherent superdiversity, is better reflected in cultural production and the policies and funding supporting it. We adhere to the legacy of the Brussels Arts Network (RAB/BKO) of producing and promoting a BCR cultural policy. Our objective is to be a co-author of a next cultural plan for the BCR. This new plan should embody the transformation of the BCR as a bi-communitarian city in 2000, to the new reality of a superdiverse city without a dominant majority. We will create facts on the ground and work closely with all levels of policy, constantly challenging them to think and act out of the silo.

Goal 2:

Crossing Bridges: Moving society from tribal dynamics to cross-cultural and intergenerational sense of community

Giving value to communities and their cultural expressions should not shut them up in their identitarian target groups, whether these groups are of Flemish or African origin, French-speaking or Polish-speaking, young or retired. It should always foster a more cohesive and harmonious Molenbeek and Europe, building a local and transnational 'New Us'. The paradigm shift we want to bring about is a generous gift of transcending community divisions through culture, something that the whole of Europe can benefit from.



Goal 3:

Reinventing Third Spaces: Turning public spaces into community-focused markers of visible, celebratory and accessible solidarity

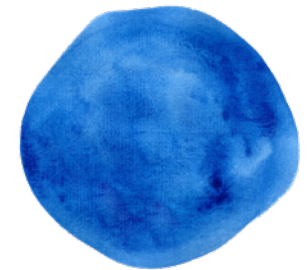
Taking into account the enormous social and cultural fragility of the Molenbeek population, the transformation of public space into a space of cultural activity is a major goal. By inhabiting places which are symbols of diversity and solidarity (markets, schools, elderly care homes), MB2030's cultural programme will become an omnipresent element of everyday life for Molenbeek's inhabitants, without the constraints of opening hours or entrance fees. Of course, the first step is to foster spaces of encounter in which all individuals, regardless of cultural background, religious belief or sexual orientation, can express themselves. Enforcing cultural democracy and accessibility is essential.



Goal 4:

Connecting to New Centres: Towards a European alliance of selfless solidarity

Our goal is to forge new connections with European urban realities that mirror Molenbeek's challenges and strengths – superdiversity, multilingualism, a young population, deindustrialisation and social fragility, territorial exclusion and a shared experience of stigmatisation – in areas of Rotterdam, Timisoara, Berlin, Jenin, London, Malmö, Marseille, Tangiers, Skopje, Kinshasa. Together, while co-producing MB2030, we aim to stimulate new policies and structures to encourage solidarity at local, interregional and transnational levels.



Goal 5:

Grassroots Innovation: Cultivating locally sourced social economies and job creation

Working with the Molenbeek-based entrepreneurial, social and civic communities to organically make MB2030 a driver of jobs and resources for local communities instead of an agent for gentrification and cultural displacement (typical of major cities). We build capacity with grassroots social-innovation projects to grow, create new jobs and social connections, and have an impact across the Molenbeeks of Europe.

Goal 6:

Practical Resilience: Tackling the socio-economic challenges of a socially just transition towards a new zero-net normal

Engaging with site-specific and economically accessible notions of care, solidarity, access to green space, food and local production, skills and job creation, mobility and shared infrastructure, recycling and circularity. If transition to a more sustainable society starts with a change of culture, MB2030 will commit to finding clues for this change in the everyday reality of the least privileged and their cultural roots, magical modes of survival and secret codes of resilience, before eco-labelling or top-down technological solutions.

Describe the city's plans to strengthen the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors including through the development of long-term links between these sectors and the economic and social sectors in your city.

MB2030's goals are supported by a capacity-building programme to strengthen the cultural ecosystem of Molenbeek, so as to be active and impactful at regional and European level. MB2030 pilots a pedagogy in which acts of unlearning and learning-by-doing across cultural tribes are the starting point to cultivate a radical

knowledge democracy. Supported by inclusive, green and digital skills, this programme empowers the cultural agents of Europe's new centres to produce superdiverse culture.

Formal educational institutions in the BCR exclude many of the diverse knowledge systems, including those of indigenous people and excluded racialised groups, and those excluded on the basis of gender, class, disabilities or sexuality. These realities are mirrored in many new centres like Molenbeek, across Europe and the world. MB2030 promotes a knowledge democracy for cultural practitioners. As part of this, institutions, policymakers, independent actors and audiences will acknowledge the equal importance of multiple knowledge systems: organic, spiritual and land-based, frameworks arising from social movements; and the knowledge of the excluded. This knowledge democracy is started by SKILL GIVING, a Molenbeek-started, European-connected platform for informal and formal learning designed by, with and for cultural agents of the European new centres, and contributing to goals, 1, 4, 5 and 6.

The platform will prioritise the development of three groups of skills:

- * **CROSS-CULTURAL LEARNING:** Skills to produce superdiverse culture which is more than the sum of linguistic and sociocultural parts: new hybrid forms that connect French-speaking, Dutch-speaking, English-speaking, Arabic-speaking and other sociocultural communities into a common collective;
- * **UNLEARNING:** Skills to produce culture in collaboration with social partners (schools, hospitals, non-profits), so as to open cultural and social work to other knowledge systems which improve well-being;
- * **LEARNING BY DOING:** Skills to produce culture in collaboration with entrepreneurial and innovation partners (incubators, businesses, R&D), so as to open cultural and innovation work to informal and DIY business models which improve economic dynamics and the local economy.

The learning mechanism involves people selflessly giving their time, presence and knowledge to work and learn together. SKILL GIVING is divided into three sub-programmes: SPACE GIVING, PRESENCE GIVING, KNOWLEDGE GIVING. Each of these, developed in collaboration with local cultural agents with the involvement of youths and with educational/business/social partners, will design three hybrid training modules that are self-contained, but can be shared further via peer-learning and study-circle activities. Each of the sub-programmes includes the sharing of good practices on inclusion (including language), green and digital practices.

SKILL GIVING will transition into a legacy capacity-building programme for super-diverse cultural production. It will be managed at European level by MB2030's legacy foundation in collaboration with ICHEC and the New Centres Observatory (NCO), which will implement the monitoring and evaluation plan.

Outline briefly the plans you will put in place for monitoring your progress in preparing and implementing your title-year and for evaluating the impact of the latter.

MB2030 will rely on a new constellation of strategic partners to deliver the monitoring and evaluation plan: ULB – Free University of Brussels (ULB), VUB – Free University of Brussels (VUB), Brussels Studies Institute, Brussels Academy, and Molenbeek-based experts on impact assessment for non-profits *Maakt Beter!* These partners have collaborated on the citizen participation process at the root of the application (Summer Assemblies of 2022, 2023 and Spring Assembly of 2024) and will continue their work on scientific knowledge-sharing to have an impact in Molenbeek and Europe.

Creation of the New Centres Observatory (NCO)

This constellation, in collaboration with MB2030, will create an independent observatory, named NCO, to analyse and evaluate the urban transformation, social dynamics, economic and cultural impacts generated by the ECOC process from 2025 to 2035. It will be transdisciplinary and multilingual, integrating academic and field expertise to understand the ECOC's impacts in Molenbeek and at various scales ranging from the local to the European level, and establishing interfaces with the transnational research and impact communities. In practice, when a project is co-produced by MB2030 and its European partners, monitoring and measurement

are replicated across locations. The NCO will follow the Guidelines established by the European Commission for the evaluation of ECOC cities, work in close co-operation and will be coordinated with a designated individual from the ECOC team. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) are integrated into the NCO.

The NCO's research will integrate quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure an integrated understanding of the transformation processes while making the research inclusive, participatory and capable of capturing the complex dynamics of transformation. Quantitative research will involve the systematic collection and analysis of data, while key methods will include surveys and questionnaires, statistical analysis and digital data collection. Qualitative research will provide in-depth insights into the experiences, attitudes and perceptions of individuals and communities, including focus groups, interviews and different studies. An innovative approach of the NCO will be the application of citizen science and participatory/volunteer monitoring mechanisms in its methodology. Public volunteers will help to collect and classify data through community workshops, storytelling, digital platforms and different feedback mechanisms. Local citizens will also be able to initiate projects researching areas of interest in their own communities, following the NCO's ethical and scientific protocols. By working closely with researchers, experts and local actors, the NCO will serve as a platform for exchange and reflection and can serve as a model on a European scale.

Additionally, the NCO will provide base case and interim analyses throughout its period of operation, allowing for adjustments to be made to the project to ensure the achievement of the set objectives. This continuous monitoring will take into account machine learning, natural language processing and computer vision as tools for social impact measurement. In collaboration with local IT partners, we will specify mechanisms for data processing; insight generation and visualisation will be augmented by technology, always considering ethical and environmental challenges.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the New Centres Observatory (NCO)
What Will We Monitor?

The NCO aims to measure the impact of the ECOC initiative through a variety of KPIs focused on social inclusion, cultural engagement, economic benefits and sustainable urban transformation.

2_Cultural and artistic content



What is the artistic vision and strategy for the cultural programme of the year?

In 2030, four thematic or topical Sadaka Seasons will allow Molenbeek's residents, artists, visitors and economic and political partners to co-create, offer to and share with Europeans from similar and other backgrounds, its generous gifts.

Preparations are under way and will continue through 2025 to 2029. Artistic and cultural projects and ideas are being produced that are directly related to our four topics: equality and social justice, superdiversity and multilingualism, the return of nature and water in our city, and safe, brave and free spaces. How can our continent, out of its Molenbeeks, become a shared space and territory of greater generosity and solidarity? How can all of us Europeans be better equipped to face the challenges and transitions of the future, thanks to the creative and young energies and dynamics that Molenbeek, and its partner cities across Europe and beyond, will prepare for us in 2030? How can the following actions contribute to this: inclusive circus performances that turn Molenbeek's parks and squares into accessible cultural spaces for all; or a *Home of European Sadaka* that offers concrete propositions for living together with our differences, in European cities where people do not share a common past; or cultural and civic initiatives that make our rivers, valleys and natural infrastructure visible again and transform them into shared cultural infrastructure; or *Safe and Brave Parades and Ceremonies* that make our public spaces inclusive and safe? In short, how can all these projects and processes contribute to a generous and selfless Europe, and to a more equal future for all, humans and non-humans?

This is our challenge: to generously embrace Europe with propositions for a better European future in which Molenbeek and its young creatives take the lead.

In terms of values and principles, the cultural strategy of MB2030 centres on the following pillars: a new synthesis of, rather than an opposition between, artistic excellence and broad citizen involvement and empowerment; topical and thematic work at the service of the mental and material transformation of Molenbeek and Europe; going from an in-depth local anchoring towards concentric circles that include the BCR, Flemish and Walloon partnerships, a rich European dimension and, last but not least, connections with international cities that are intimately linked to Molenbeek through its superdiverse population. Finally, a bottom-up approach very much anchored in Molenbeek and complemented by a clear artistic direction (that is not collective) and collaborations with loyal institutions from the BCR, Europe and beyond.

Once again, solidarity, generosity, empathy, selflessness – and, through them, the reinforcement of a 'New Molenbeek and European Us' – are at the heart of our vision and strategy: bringing together artistic, cultural and civic energies that remain extremely fragmented in Molenbeek and Europe; linking new dynamic centres like Molenbeek and its partners with the old and tired capitals of Europe, through shared spaces and times of Sadaka; combining a bottom-up approach with a clear organigram and decision-making processes; and building coalitions between the key operators of Molenbeek and European reference institutions. These coalitions will reinforce our capacity to deliver while also allowing all partners to be revitalised and re-energised by the young, superdiverse and creative forces of Molenbeek and its European partner cities.

Long-term processes with regional and European impact are our basis. Therefore, we have made sure that the foundations of the cultural programme of MB2030 are being laid right away. In fact, the first steps were taken in the summer of 2022 thanks to our first Summer Assembly, with MB2030 providing support for several artists and cultural players that now figure in our culture programme.

Four categories of projects have emerged:

- * Through what we call our **MILL** projects, we aim for large-scale, co-created and sustainable additions to the cultural, institutional and infrastructural landscape of Molenbeek and its surrounding region.
- * The **BRIDGE** projects will be artist-driven and will produce empowering, inclusive and high-quality cultural processes. On an equal basis, they will bring together very different partners from Molenbeek, the BCR and Europe, which so far have remained separated by all sorts of mental and physical 'frontiers' which remain all too real. They will now commit to working together for the long term in the framework of MB2030: two partners from Molenbeek, at least one from Belgium, and several European partners.
- * **BROOK** projects will produce multi-annual cultural dynamics related to our four themes, in which groups of citizens initiate, define and produce themselves the contours, objectives and methodology of projects.
- * Finally, through our **VALLEYS** and their open calls (both local and European) and protocols, we will open up our cultural programme to a wide diversity of partners and initiatives, in tune with our four themes, and to our overall concept of superdiverse and systemic solidarity, from the Molenbeeks of Europe, to the entire continent and its capitals, in need of fresh ideas and practices.

All MILLS and several BRIDGES and BROOKS are in preparation and will be developed from 2025 onward. We have first and partial commitments from political and cultural partners that could allow us to develop them over the next five years and bring them to full blossom in 2030.

Methodologically, the key choices, pathways and partners are in place. Our entire cultural programme, processes and partnerships will start from and firmly propose protocols that will have a substantial long-term and in-depth impact on 'how'



MOLEN = MILL
BEEK = BROOK



projects are constructed, developed and produced and also on 'what' their outcomes will be. These protocols will be detailed or formalised for the second bidbook, but they have started to be developed for every preparation or past activity of MB2030. For MB2030 it is crucial that all of our projects are sustainable, apply circular economy and zero-waste policies, are inclusive and accessible.

Sustainability is crucial to our methodology, but will also determine our content. Reducing the carbon footprint of our projects as much as possible, going for a zero-waste production policy, and achieving all this without putting extra pressures and demands on local Molenbeek populations, but rather mobilising them on the basis of their own cultural knowledge and traditions: these are non-negotiable goals for which we will work together with Molenbeek and

BCR structures and especially those concerned with culture and sustainability.

Closely connected to sustainability is the practice of circular economy. No credible zero-waste policy without concrete partners and collaborations for practices inscribed in models of circular economy.

Give a general overview of the structure of your cultural programme including the range and diversity of the activities/main events that will mark the year.

A. THE EQUALITY MACHINE

Home of European Sadaka

Europe's new centre for a culture of solidarity, offering exhibition spaces, stages and artist workshops alongside micro-housing for the unhoused and the undocumented, or a social restaurant which also trains persons Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEETs) on circular economy models. The Home's weekly programme of cultural activities turns empty buildings such as the Church of Saint-Rémi and the Institut Imelda into a home where we can share our narratives of creative Sadaka and self-organise collective imaginaries up for redefinition by anyone who is at home. Inspired by such short-term occupations as Grands Voisins in Paris and Coco Velten in Marseille, the Home organises long-term and large-scale civic and cultural cohabitation and co-creation between precarious, cultural, environmental and entrepreneurial communities. It invites creators from across Europe to use and recreate the

space for exhibitions, performances and workshops, and it encourages all Europeans who visit or stay to share their acts of creative Sadaka with the co-residents. After 2030, the *Home of European Sadaka* will become a prototype for large-scale and semi-permanent co-occupations by artistic and social movements, inspiring new locations across European cities, and connecting European cultural solidarity movements.

B. CREOLE EUROPE

Euro-Season of the New Us

Molenbeek's new festival for large-scale, contextual, multidisciplinary, co-created artistic creations. The whole city is a stage, every citizen a co-creator. Over six weeks between August and September, Europe's coolest creators will celebrate the past, present and future of Europe as a superdiverse megalopolis and creatively miscegenate our European cultural traditions into a new collective synthesis greater than the sum of its parts.

This festival of European cross-border co-production engages producers, participants and active audiences from across Europe in every single project for hyper-specific premiere performances in Molenbeek co-devised and recreated in new European and global locations in dialogue with their inhabitants according to common protocols: approach a common European challenge related to equality, diversity, nature or freedom; be co-created by European artists of reference, high-quality performers and non-professional participants; invest in public and semi-public spaces and avoid conventional cultural venues; be intergenerational, intercultural and



include abled and disabled participants; offer long-term creation periods and combine minimal technical efforts with a minimal carbon footprint.

After 2030, *Euro-Season of the New Us* will become one of Europe's crucial gatherings marrying artistic excellence and social inclusion and, combining the best of Dream City Festival in Tunis (large-scale, co-created), documenta fifteen in Kassel, and Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin (critical global voices), as a multidisciplinary, cross-cultural artistic space for shared discussions on the future of Europe.

C. WILD AT HEART

WildWaterWadi:

How to Make the Valley Public Again

'Wadi' is the Arabic word for a river valley in arid areas that is dry for most of the year. Cities across Europe have covered, buried, forgotten and sacrificed the rivers and waterways on which they were built. Urbanisation and industrialisation processes continue to disrupt nature's metabolism in cities, and urban river water is mostly no longer drinkable or swimmable. *WildWaterWadi* brings an artistic and civic torrent to European cities, in order to rewild and recreate the river valleys of Europe. Environmental art interventions and installations, water-based exhibitions and creative workshops will animate the Molenbeek-Charleroi Canal and other European rivers, valleys and watercourses as hubs of urbanistic, activist, artistic and sociocultural initiatives which give water a voice in public discussions about the notions of urban settlement and colonisation. Artists, citizens and scientific experts from across Europe will connect the natural infrastructures of rivers and valleys

to people's urban imaginations and install a series of Settlements of the Future in Molenbeek and European cities in which human and non-human forces connect and reinforce each other. After 2030, this immaterial network of European water-tangible Settlements of the Future will drive forward the cultural, scientific, urbanism and advocacy work for safeguarding healthy waters for people and nature in Europe.

D. EUROPEAN SPACE TO EMBRACE

Safe and Brave Parades and Ceremonies

An entire year of public ceremonies, rituals and parades that strengthen what we share, what can connect us better and more deeply, and what can be the fabric for a common European future. Starting from Molenbeek, we will celebrate local and European initiatives from historical and folkloric parades (Ommegang) to inclusive activist parades (Pride) and cultural block parties (Park Poetik, Dia de Muertos), not forgetting the Zinneke Parade. From this dynamic of Molenbeek-initiated ceremonies and rituals, a European dimension will grow: in 2030, hosting a transnational European carnival in Molenbeek and the BCR, with marching partners from all European territories. This carnival parade will showcase the mixed and shared heritages of Europe, not romantic ideas of national culture, and its participants will then travel across thematic parades and local carnivals in different European cities. Associated with the European carnival, European partners will meet for an international conference on the topic of 'Neo-Parades and Ceremonies for cultural identity formation in European cities which

need common futures' and lead to the formation of a European network of intercultural parades. On the way to and beyond 2030, the initiative will evolve into a Molenbeek-based production and formation centre of urban culture, focused on sharing knowledge, tools, materials and methods for inclusive participation and the circular management of cultural events.

Explain succinctly how the cultural programme will combine local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative and experimental cultural expressions.

What intangible cultural heritage around sustainable livelihoods is hidden in the roots of this multicultural beehive? What embodied knowledge do the people from the diaspora generously share while cooking, chatting, caring? Can the notion of Sadaka help us to get a deeper understanding of this hidden power and energy?

While it is not up to the ECOC to solve the unsolvable, we can shed light on practices, gestures and ethics hidden behind rituals in languages that not everybody speaks, in stories that linger in kitchens, gardens and salons we do not have access to, in recipes that are only passed on orally.

The goal would be to discover sweet spots and system cracks that can serve as exemplary practices because of their innovative and transversal concepts, based on solidarity and roots in diasporic traditions. Shared households, communal gardens, an intergenerational care system, urban farming as a learning environment, sheep flocks to mow and

fertilise our parks, recycling and repairing as a system of care for common goods, grey water from laundries and car washes, energy communities.

How has the city involved, or how does it plan to involve, local artists and cultural organisations in the conception and implementation of the cultural programme?

Molenbeek artists and cultural structures, professional and non-professional, big and small, emergent and established, and also a wide variety of creative Molenbeek citizens have been and will be deeply involved, over the long term, in the cultural programme of MB2030, not just as observers or passive participants, but as active co-creators.

Learning by doing together, in a city where everything is structured so that fragmentation wins and a New Us cannot emerge: this is what we have practiced for the past three years.

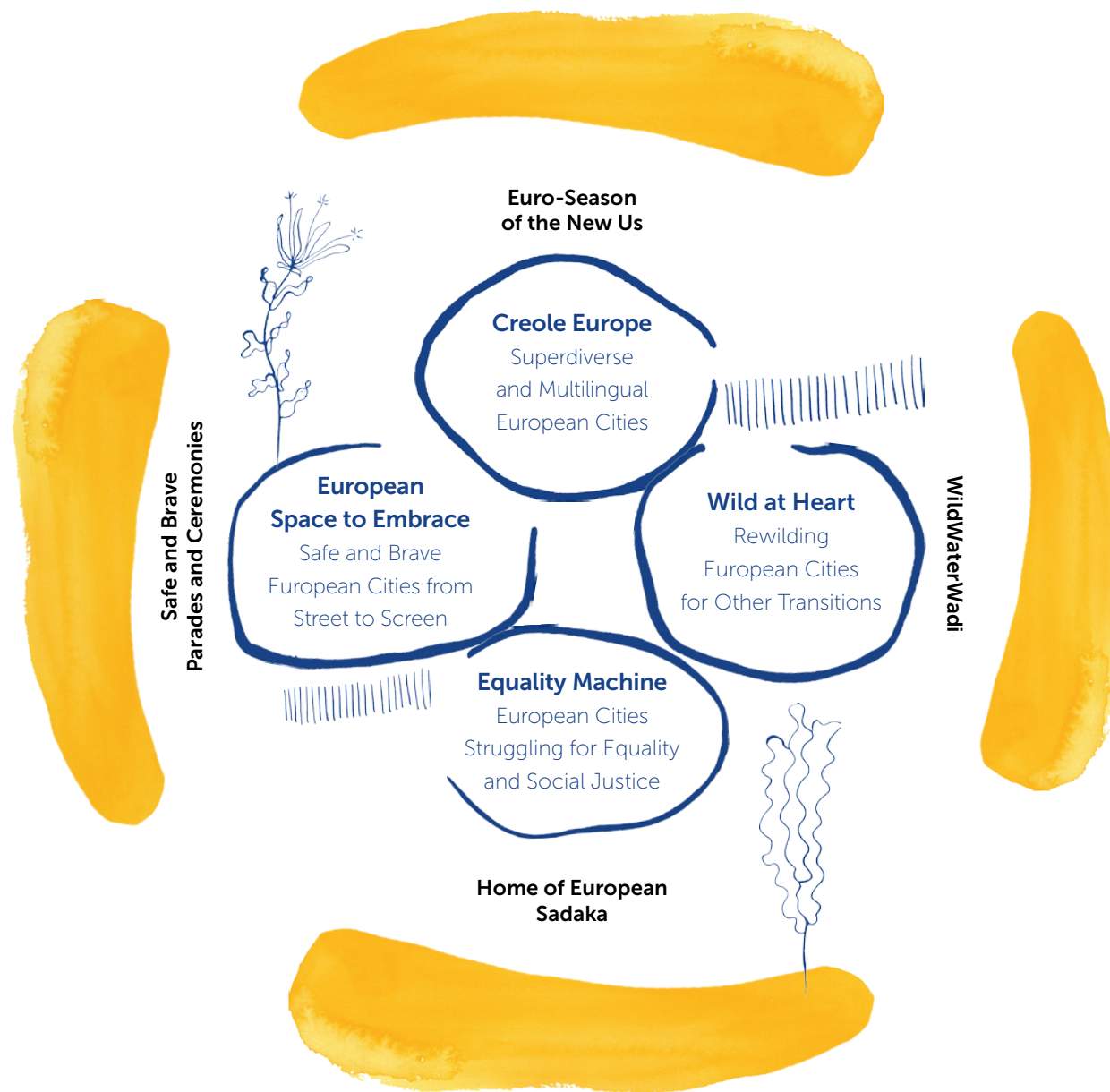
We have practised seeing potential and working on it together for the past three years. Through *Speak Up*, the *Youth Coalition*, the Summer and Spring Assemblies, the *MolenFest*, and initiatives such as *MolenYouth* or *Girls Make the City*, especially young Molenbeek and citizens from all over the BCR have already played a key role in defining the key themes and some of the central projects of MB2030.

Over the next few years, a wide diversity of Molenbeek cultural operators will play a key role in developing our cultural programme.

Obviously, the main objective of the MB2030 cultural programme remains on another level: to spread

Sadaka projects and practices of systemic solidarity from Molenbeek across Europe. Starting from the conviction and the reality that Molenbeek's artists and cultural organisations can

and will be the motors of that change, through their creative energies and by working together, we all grow and challenge, share, strengthen Sadaka in Europe.



3_European dimension

Give a general outline of the activities foreseen in view of:

- * Promoting the cultural diversity of Europe, intercultural dialogue and greater mutual understanding between European citizens;
- * Highlighting the common aspects of European cultures, heritage and history, as well as European integration and current European themes;
- * Featuring European artists, cooperation with operators and cities in different countries, and transnational partnerships.

The European mission of MB2030 is to turn creative Sadaka – giving without expecting anything in return – into a core value of European culture.

Europe's culture of giving and solidarity is going through an existential crisis. Can we still credibly pretend to be a generous and welcoming continent? The World Giving Index 2023* asked 150,000 people from 142 countries: in the past 30 days, did you help a stranger, volunteer your time, or donate money to a charity? Europe's answers were miserable. There is no EU member state among the ten most giving

communities aggregated by nationality; only three in the top 20, and six in the top 30. Ukraine comes second, Belgium only 55th. Eastern and Southern Europe are among the places in the world where people are the least giving.

As Europeans struggle with multiple crises, exploding costs of living, major financial crashes, the arrival of millions of refugees crossing its eastern and southern borders, terror attacks in major capitals, and drastic energy spikes amid stagnating wars, we have become self-centred and selfish. And lonely. Several European (geo-)political evolutions, decisions and election results bear witness to this evolution: in some countries, the profoundly European model of the welfare state is being eroded by exclusionary policies on the basis of social, ethnic and potentially illegal criteria; in neighbouring countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco, the European Union (EU) runs the risk of being perceived as an inhospitable 'fortress' that finances undemocratic regimes on the condition that they keep away fellow human beings in dire need of our solidarity and of safety.

The results of the recent European elections might have weakened European achievements for the future, like the Green Deal, that are foundational for our solidarity with the future generations of our continent.

MB2030 aims to respond to these crises, fears and weaknesses among Europeans, which are real and legitimate, with proposals and concrete practices for more solidarity and generosity.

We will set up the cultural building blocks that enable cross-cultural and cross-border actions, rooted in a Molenbeek-inspired, European dimension of selfless exchange.



Creative Sadaka is about inspiring new forms of systemic solidarity, crisis-resilient imaginaries and practices, which advance social justice for all (and not only those who look like us), human and non-human. It goes beyond notions of benevolent charity, mutual aid and exclusionary tribal collaboration, which can all be patronising acts of *othering*. All these inspirations should be pluralistic and, most importantly, benefit from heterogeneous perspectives and diverse cultural backgrounds, practices and codes. So many invisibilised communities and territories on our continent are treasure boxes of solidarity and creativity: we want to connect them, creolise them and share them in a better European future.



This mission is spearheaded by MB2030, but collectively led by a transnational movement of places and communities like Molenbeek.

These are precarious, post-industrial cities fighting themselves out of socio-economic inequalities, sometimes furiously as a reaction to systemic and post-traumatic societal pain. But also very young, superdiverse cities with vibrant social and cultural community-sourced movements driven by passionate citizens. The European dimension of MB2030 will concretely take shape and make a difference by engaging these young, vibrant, creative and post-industrial new centres in collaboration.

Together we will share time, resources and capacity for concept co-development, programme co-production, partnership brokering, as well as cross-border advocacy and communication. MB2030 and its ECOC programme are the main delivery channels.

From digital screens to street corners, we will bridge distances and connect people. These connections between European places and people in the artistic programme of MB2030 are visualized in the next map.



To what extent do you plan to develop links between your cultural programme and the cultural programme of other cities holding the European Capital of Culture title?

Interaction, collaboration and co-creation with other cities holding the ECOC title are integral to MB2030. During the bidding process, we developed collaborations with past, present and candidate ECOCs.

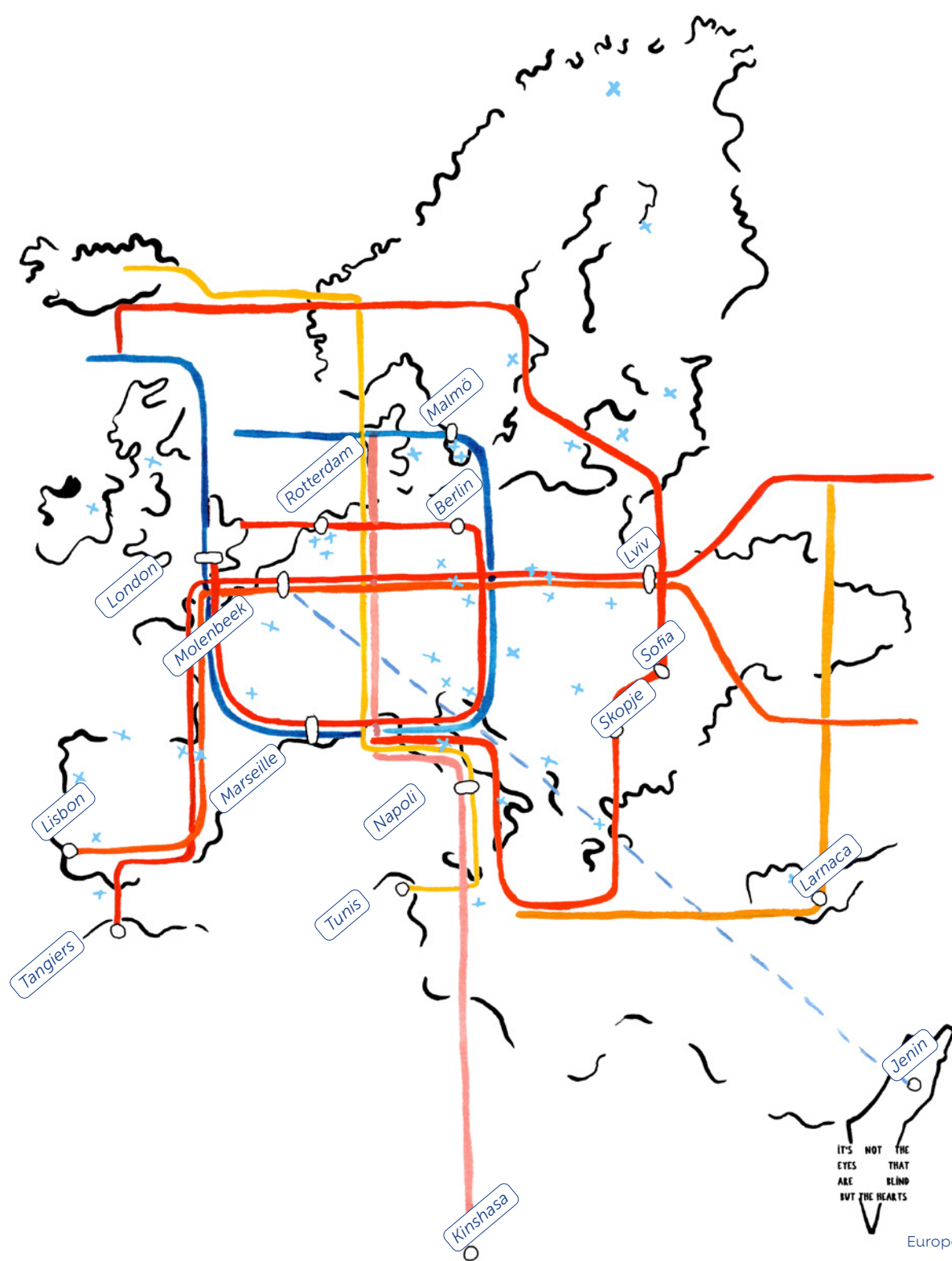
Our transnational movement of places that look like Molenbeek will relate to and challenge the cultural legacy of historical ECOCs like Berlin 1988, Lisbon 1994, Rotterdam 2001, Lille 2004 and Marseille-Provence 2013. In 2023-24, we attended the ECOC 2023 Forum in Kaunas as well as the 11th and 12th Culture Next Conferences respectively hosted by Leeuwarden2018 and Oulu2026. In Oulu, we presented the MB2030 vision in preparation for our development of European partnerships to 25 other European cities (former ECOCs, candidates or former candidates).

We attended the opening of Bodø 2024 to network with the ECOC family and learn about the practical details of organising an ECOC opening. We co-organised, with Cypriot candidate Larnaca 2030, a special meet-and-greet session for Belgian, Cypriot and third-country candidates, (12–14 May 2024) to facilitate networking and programme co-development, attended by MB 2030 and Larnaca 2030, as well as candidates Leuven, Kortrijk, Ghent, Bruges, Namur, Lemesos, Kourion, Nikosia and Nikšić.

- * Leeuwarden (NL)
- * Niksic (ME)
- * Bielsko-Biala (PL)
- * Helsingör (DK)
- * Fabriano (IT)
- * Uppsala (SE)
- * Tartu (EE)
- * Kiruna (SE)
- * Rijeka (HR)
- * Oulu (FI)
- * Esposende (PT)
- * Zabrze (PL)
- * Katowice (PL)
- * Matera (IT)
- * Évora (PT)

- * Chemnitz (DE)
- * Prague (CZ)
- * Kosice (CZ)
- * Eindhoven (NL)
- * Timisoara (RO)
- * Riga (LV)
- * Amsterdam (NL)
- * Copenhagen (DK)
- * Bilbao (ES)
- * Donostia / San Sebastian (ES)
- * Paris (FR)
- * Belgrade (RS)
- * Veszprém (HU)
- * Nova Gorica (SI)

- * Bad Ischl (AT)
- * Budweis (CZ)
- * Nicosia (CY)
- * Gijón (ES)
- * Dublin (IE)
- * Valetta (MT)
- * Edinburgh (UK)
- * Elefsina (EL)
- * Arhus (DK)
- * Cluj (RO)
- * Bourges (FR)
- * Jerez de la Frontera (ES)
- * Liepaja (LV)



The background of the page is a light blue watercolor wash. Overlaid on this are several darker blue watercolor shapes: a large, irregular blob at the top left, a horizontal, pill-shaped blob at the top right, and a large, teardrop-shaped blob on the left side. A hand-drawn blue arm with a five-fingered hand extends from the bottom of the teardrop shape across the bottom of the page. A black wavy line, resembling a squiggle, starts from the hand and extends towards the right edge of the page.

4_Outreach

Explain how the local population and your civil society have been involved in the preparation of the application and will participate in the implementation of the year.

Molenbeek is one of the cities in Europe that is marked by a growing young population. By 2030 these are the people who will be in charge. They should have the greatest say. We combined their aspirations with expert tables, EU-workshops, social design projects and broad calls. The strength of our proposal is in the mix of these different strategies. Note: we consider as locals all those who are in the same situation as us, all over Europe.

Visibilising potential

In our *Speak Up* initiative, 1,000 young people from the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR) shared their most urgent questions about the future. We collected their contributions through workshops in and with 24 schools and 88 youth organisations, a question-

naire, and street interviews on the *Speak Up* digital platform. Out of this material, a group of 100 superdiverse young changemakers – a mix of gender, cultural and social background – that we called the *Youth Coalition* distilled the Manifesto that is the basis for our candidacy: mb2030.eu/youthcoalition.

Next to this, we reached out to 77 civil-society organisations in Molenbeek, active in the arts and culture as well as in sports, nature, urbanism, youth and solidarity at the *Great Rendez-Vous*. We met with more than 2,500 citizens in three major assemblies: Summer 22, Summer 23 and Spring 24. With W100, we mobilised 100 diverse women in Molenbeek to reflect on the gender balance of the MB2030 programme and outreach. And we held a series of conversations with around 1500 residents of our city in the 12 neighbourhoods of Molenbeek called *Molenbeek Speaks to Europe*. With *This is Us. This is Brussels*, we collected 250 interviews led by 90

local citizens, we organised ten talks and defined the common heritage in Molenbeek. Our BROOKS projects like *Girls Make the City* are the result of these encounters. In general, our three years of encounters also mobilised stakeholders such as the two principal Brussels Universities, the broad cultural and economic sector, civil society and citizens at large.

Expert tables

We were accompanied by a Chamber of Reflection of 20 members, experts in cultural matters. During the EU-workshops in the Summer Assemblies experts exchanged with youngsters, stakeholders and academics on equal foot. An open call for Future Places was launched in January 23 after a broad field investigation, 81 individuals as well as organisations responded. A jury then proposed 7 partnerships as prototypes. The Molenbeek Future Places are further developed as Settlements of the Future under our MILLS project *WildWaterWadi*.

These expert tables and our civil society backed the proposals coming out of the *Youth Coalition* and defined together the four themes that outline the MB2030 programme: equality and social justice, super-diversity, nature in the city, safe and brave spaces.

Becoming actors

Realising the potential of the imagined Molenbeek puts co-creation at the heart of MB2030. Residents and citizens become the dancers or gardeners, all of them agents in major projects: coupling artistic excellence with civic engagement, based on time and proximity. We will move away from the language of bridging and bonding and

actually start to work together. Take *WildWaterWadi*, a collaboration involving artists, engineers, civil society, urbanists, planners and more, starting from imaging transitions to more nature and softer mobility, into working it out together with a mix of people willing to leave their silos.

All these projects are being prepared in a long-term perspective, with *MolenFest* in September 2024 as the starting point to engage the population in the implementation of the programme.

Becoming captains

The *Youth Coalition* will transform into *MolenYouth*, the ambassadors for the programme in 2030. They will become interns or employees and collaborators. We are committed to fostering young and diverse talent, facilitating work experience in the wider cultural sector.

Excellent participation

Our volunteer programme *Art of Giving* is deeply committed to inclusivity, viewing volunteering not as a privilege but as a fundamental opportunity accessible to all. Therefore, all citizens, local or EU, engaged in our volunteering programme will receive a fee (max. €41.48 a day according to the Belgium system). It will broaden our reach to include those who typically do not participate in volunteering activities. We offer a diverse range of opportunities which individuals can join based on their skills and interests. They will be trained by professionals and/or organisations.

A team of volunteers will support cultural events and our communications staff. But we will also establish a dedicated group for specific missions: a translation team, hands on the ground, caretakers of safe spaces, guides for people with reduced mobility or the elderly, fighting loneliness and social isolation.



Explain how you intend to create opportunities for participation of marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

It is hard to single out minority groups in a fragmented Molenbeek: most citizens can be considered socially marginalised in some way or other, and among them there is reciprocal exclusion. It is always a combination of disadvantages and context.

You can be a young black woman from a working-class background who cannot find a job because of discrimination.

You can be upper-class and feel marginalised because you cannot find a Dutch-speaking doctor (Dutch being one of the three official languages in Belgium).

You can be an older white man and feel marginalised because you are queer, or an unemployed woman with a PhD from the land you fled and with no place to live.

During the three years of preparation, we spent a lot of time on co-creation and co-development with the local population at large. In the coming years we will focus more on invisibilised groups: firstly, young people identified as NEETs, that is, one out of three young adults in Molenbeek, in some areas up to 40%. Also, single-parent families, the poverty-stricken, the homeless and undocumented people. Our approach will be intersectional, always keeping an eye on our main goal: to create this 'New Us'.

Labelling a 'target group' is a tool; you want to identify them, reach them and connect them. We have already introduced the *Youth Coalition*. Next year we will have *The Senior Squad*, and the year after *The Disability Pride*, until the *Year of Homelessness* in 2030. Each year, we will focus on a different target group so that the network continues to grow and, through a number of pilot projects, participation of target groups increases.

Particularly disabled people (both physically and mentally) are unfairly considered a 'niche', while about 15% of the population has care needs. As our disability expert says: we are all only temporarily abled bodies. Citizens on wheels, people with Down's syndrome and psychic vulnerability will share their dances in *MolenFest* with a special edition of the inclusive *Ballroom* project by L'Autre Maison (Marseille) and laGeste (Ghent).

Accessibility of cultural information, physical accessibility of public spaces and transport as well as finan-



cial accessibility are priorities for MB2030. To this end, we are partnering with the informal network of people with disabilities and organisers of five festivals, led by and a part of Lasso, the Brussels platform for cultural participation. We started collaborating in the context of *MolenFest* to improve the experience and prototype. For example, how do we apply their accessibility protocol, developed for indoor venues, in the public space? How do we make the programme more accessible, not just in terms of infrastructure, but also for the hearing- and sight-impaired, for those who cannot leave their house?

Our goal for cultural participation is to provide a **twin-track: general accessibility (offering cultural activities that are adaptable, available, affordable, accessible and acceptable for minority and disadvantaged groups), paired with special needs by demand, working intersectionally.** Stages of the work will be intersectional diagnosis (2024–25), repairing (2026–28), developing best practices (2028–30) and sharing via digitisation (after 2030).

Inclusion is at the core of our mission. We want to break boundaries.

The question is always: Who is not there yet? Who is missing? Whether in the team, in the volunteer group, in the programme; from societal strata, from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Whose stories are we not hearing, whose presence are we not honouring, whose potential is not being valued?

Explain your overall strategy for audience development, and in particular the link with education and the participation of schools.

Many people don't see themselves as cultural beings. This reality is shaping the programme of MB2030. That is why our audience development strategy has set five goals:

- * For more Molenbeek residents to encounter cultural activities by chance in their daily lives;
- * For participants in cultural activities to connect and mix with creators and participants from communities other than their own;
- * To engage the precarious target groups suggested in Q18 as co-programmers of cultural activities;
- * To make every encounter with cultural programmes an opportunity for people to start considering themselves as cultural beings;
- * To communicate about cultural activities in the programme using the informal, hidden, alternative, digital channels already shaping the social fabric of Molenbeek.

Our projects will focus on dance and music to overcome linguistic obstacles, we celebrate popular art forms like hip hop and circus, markets and public spaces become platforms for presentation we aim for artistic métissage; and we invest in translation where needed.

We will even develop extended audiences, with a focus on digital audience development via social media and streaming. Participants from Molenbeek will want their families in their countries of origin to share in what they are proudly producing. Instead of individuals providing snapshots on WhatsApp and other live messaging apps, we will provide proper multi-camera live streaming, in collaboration with Molenbeek-based digital and social entrepreneurs like Yume House, BubbleTech and Molenzine. This will create a feeling of familiarity with the programme, even if not physically present.

Let's return to those physically present. Schools, obligatory and free for all, are the best place to start audience development. Schools in Molenbeek should be places with the least fragmentation, impacting not just pupils but also parents, siblings and teachers. But, as in the rest of the BCR, there are big differences between education on the Flemish and the Franco-phone sides, between government-run, denominational and private schools. Schools are not the Equality Machines they should be. We will challenge the 47 schools and directors we have met in Molenbeek, their more than 10,000 pupils and families to work together in VALLEY projects that mix schools.

This is revolutionary, because today there is no collaboration between schools from different educational networks in Molenbeek. We aim to collaborate with European partners.

5_Management

What are the main strengths and weaknesses of your project? How are you planning to overcome the weaknesses identified?

Our SWOT analysis for MB2030 was developed through several rounds of workshopping with public, private and civil society partners:

Strengths

- S1 Deep involvement of citizens, artists and civil society, particularly young people, resulting in genuine public support.
- S2 Solid unanimous political support at both the municipal and regional level; all parties in the municipal council, the 18 other municipalities and the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR) officially back Molenbeek as candidate.
- S3 Molenbeek-based cultural production has access to unique assets and talents, so it will challenge world-famous artistic talent to develop and implement high-quality artistic work with a global resonance.
- S4 Whereas Brussel2000, Bruges2002, Mons2015 were dominated by a very tense and politicized Belgian context, MB2030 collaborates at arm's length with a city and region that co-operate well politically, culturally and linguistically.

Weaknesses

- W1 Gaps in cultural infrastructure, with a relative lack of use of locally based venues prepared for world-class cultural productions.
- W2 Complexity of bureaucratic relations between the BCR, the Flemish Community (VG) and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (F-WB), complicating delivery and financial allocations.
- W3 Molenbeek is a city of great social fragility, where social cohesion needs to be strengthened in the long term due to low-income levels, unemployment and similar challenges.
- W4 Molenbeek, specifically, the Canal zone, is undergoing a process of urban redevelopment which poses a risk of gentrification and later exclusion of local inhabitants from the development benefits of the ECOC.

Opportunities

- O1 As a direct answer to W1, the local and regional government as well as their partners are already leveraging public funding and efforts to develop and equip cultural infrastructure for the delivery of the ECOC year at world-class level, which will remain as a legacy after 2030 and transform Molenbeek into a global powerhouse of artistic production.

O2As a direct answer to W2, broad public support for a common regional project beyond political divisions, with goals for integrated cultural policy and cross-silo cultural production (multilingual, accessible, inclusive) with the potential to democratise the regional cultural ecosystem.

O3As a direct answer to W3 and W4, ECOC provides social, creative and human elements to a wider process of urban development, also in upper Molenbeek and other areas in need of development. Not exclusively in terms of infrastructure, but mostly investment in people so that the project, instead of gentrification, can generate economic and social value for Molenbeek locals.

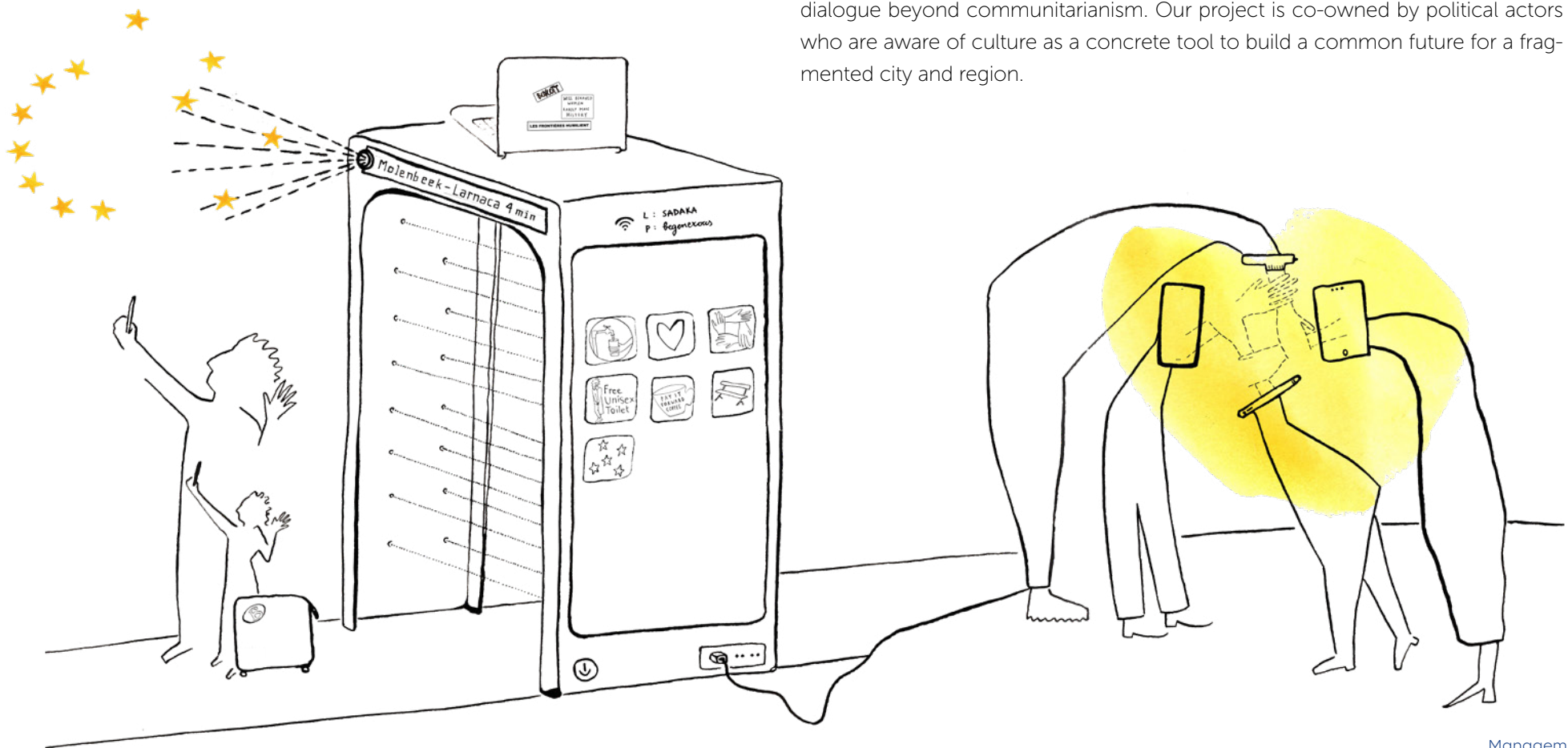
Threats

T1 The ECOC project and Molenbeek being targeted by populists and xenophobes, with the slightest incident getting media attention.

T2 An escalation of conflicts across the globe can ignite proxy social conflicts at local level, creating instability which complicates the production of public events inclusive for all.

T3 A victim of its own success, if selected, power players and major institutions of the BCR cultural ecosystem overtaking the process at the detriment of local actors who have driven our bottom-up development.

The approach of dealing with the threats is not completely under the control of MB2030, but the general intention is to work with methods that offer space for dialogue beyond communitarianism. Our project is co-owned by political actors who are aware of culture as a concrete tool to build a common future for a fragmented city and region.



How does the city plan to highlight that the European Capital of Culture is an action of the European Union?

MB2030 aims to celebrate solidarity, a goal underlying European Union Treaties. We do it not on paper, but with daily acts of giving without expecting anything in return. The plan to highlight the ECOC as an initiative of the European Union follows this approach, with the following components: see table.

In short, we aim to discover new local heroes by leveraging youth networks within diverse communities, both locally and abroad. More than highlighting symbols like flags, anthems and logos, our focus goes beyond mere representation. We prioritise being actively engaged in areas within our city and beyond, where generosity and collective selflessness are needed, particularly through artistic initiatives, and tell a story of a European Union actively engaged in creative Sadaka and its solidarity actions.

Traditional visibility of the EU	Unconventional visibility of the EU
Visual identity – the EU logo will be placed on all communication material, websites, social media and graphic materials – per official guidelines	MB2030-promoted unofficial competition for a new logo for the EU, based on the theme of 'European solidarity'
Decoration of the buses and trams on Molenbeek routes with the European colours and MB2030 + EU logo	The 'European ride' programme, in which random public transportation users are given a free ticket/ride 'paid-forward' by EU funding
Decoration of official buildings with official insignia and flags, as well as paving and other signage	Production and gifting tents, blankets and sleeping bags to vulnerable groups such as the homeless across European capitals
Inviting representatives of other ECOC (2030, 2029, 2031 and partners from other years) as well as representatives of EU institutions to the opening ceremony, with associated media activities	Associated programme of proximity events between EU institutional representatives and common citizens, like the Long Table of Europe dinners
EU logo featuring on ECOC-related media outputs (TV, radio, periodicals)	MB2030-promoted unofficial EU media released, such as the Brussel-lobbyist simulator mobile game or the EU's street newspaper
Oral mention of the ECOC as an EU action in official speeches	Pairing official speeches to an act of solidarity 'in the name of the EU'
Celebrations of Europe Day on 9 May	Alternative celebrations with indigenous groups and activists to discuss alternative and outsider perspectives on Europe



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6. Capacity to deliver

Confirm and supply evidence that you have broad and strong political support and a sustainable commitment from the relevant local, regional and national public authorities.

Six months after the 2016 Brussels Airport and metro terror attacks which shook Europe and the world, then Minister-President of the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR) Rudi Vervoort launched this urgent message: the BCR needs a cultural project that is *representative of the diversity of offerings, institutions and audiences, emancipatory and accessible*.

This started off a regional engagement process to apply to become ECOC 2030, in partnership with the municipalities. This ambition was confirmed in the Regional Policy Declaration of 18 July 2019 (after the elections) and was backed by policy and budget decisions.

As the process gained focus in 2022 and became meaningful for more people, voices from civil society, the artistic ecosystem and the political sphere brought Molenbeek – stigmatised as the ‘European capital of jihadism’ after the 2016 attacks – as the most meaningful choice to spearhead the candidacy. From the spring of 2023 onward, Molenbeek acted as candidate for ECOC 2030, an act that was confirmed on 20 April 2024 by unanimous support of the 18 other municipalities that make up the BCR, under the collective name MB2030.

On 30 May 2024, the municipal council of Molenbeek unanimously approved the candidacy, with support from centre-left, left, green, centre-right, local and independent political forces. Further confirmation of budget decisions is planned for the spring of 2025.



During 2021, a non-profit organisation at arm's length from the political process was set up with an operational team financially supported by the BCR, and with civil society, regional and municipal stakeholders represented in boards and committees.

This team has had trimestrial meetings with the Minister-President of the BCR, the mayor of Molenbeek, as well as 85 meetings with political decision-makers at federal, regional and municipal levels to inform, discuss and anchor the project in the local, regional and national policy landscape.

This includes a high-level political meeting between MB2030, the BCR, Mechelen and Charleroi which



led to an official decision by Charleroi to cooperate exclusively with MB2030 and by Mechelen to co-operate if we continue in the competition.

In a complex political system with unavoidable changes of persons due to mandate limitation, MB2030 has been developed from a political dimension that is not bound to individuals (so changes of staff in political positions do not jeopardize support to the project) and in which political actors give civil society the space to lead.

Civil servants from Molenbeek – including the head of culture and the head of urban planning/infrastructure – are actively engaged in the development of

the candidacy, providing technical and operational support and working as extended members of the MB2030 movement.

What are the city's assets in terms of accessibility (regional, national and international transport)?

People can move within Molenbeek by bus, train, metro and even boat, offering one of the most extensive public transportation coverage among municipalities in the BCR.

Molenbeek is easily accessible by public transport. We have the largest number of public transport stops/metro stations in the BCR, a huge part of the public transport workforce lives in Molenbeek.

Local and Regional

76% of Molenbeek residents live near a bus stop, 60.5% near a metro station and 68% near a tram line. All four BCR metro lines run through the territory of Molenbeek, with seven stops in total (Ribaucourt, Comte de Flandre, Étangs Noirs, Beekkant, Simonis, West Station, Osseghem).

There are 11 bus lines, two tram lines and one in the making, two S-trains (trains that operate within the territory of the BCR) and all three train stations of the BCR are very close to Molenbeek, with connections to the rest of Belgium. It is even possible to

reach Molenbeek by water: Brussels-Brabant Water-bus from Vilvoorde has a stop at Saintelette, just in front of our key venue, KANAL - Centre Pompidou (KANAL).

“Molenbeek is accessible to about 60 million Europeans in under 2 hours by train or plane”

You can rent a Villo bike for the day, and of course, services like Uber, Bolt and Heetch are active in Molenbeek, as well as e-mobility services like Dott and Bird. The public transport (metro, tram, bus) system offers 1-way single tickets with contactless payment at ca €2.60 or a 24-hr ticket with contactless payment at ca €8.

National

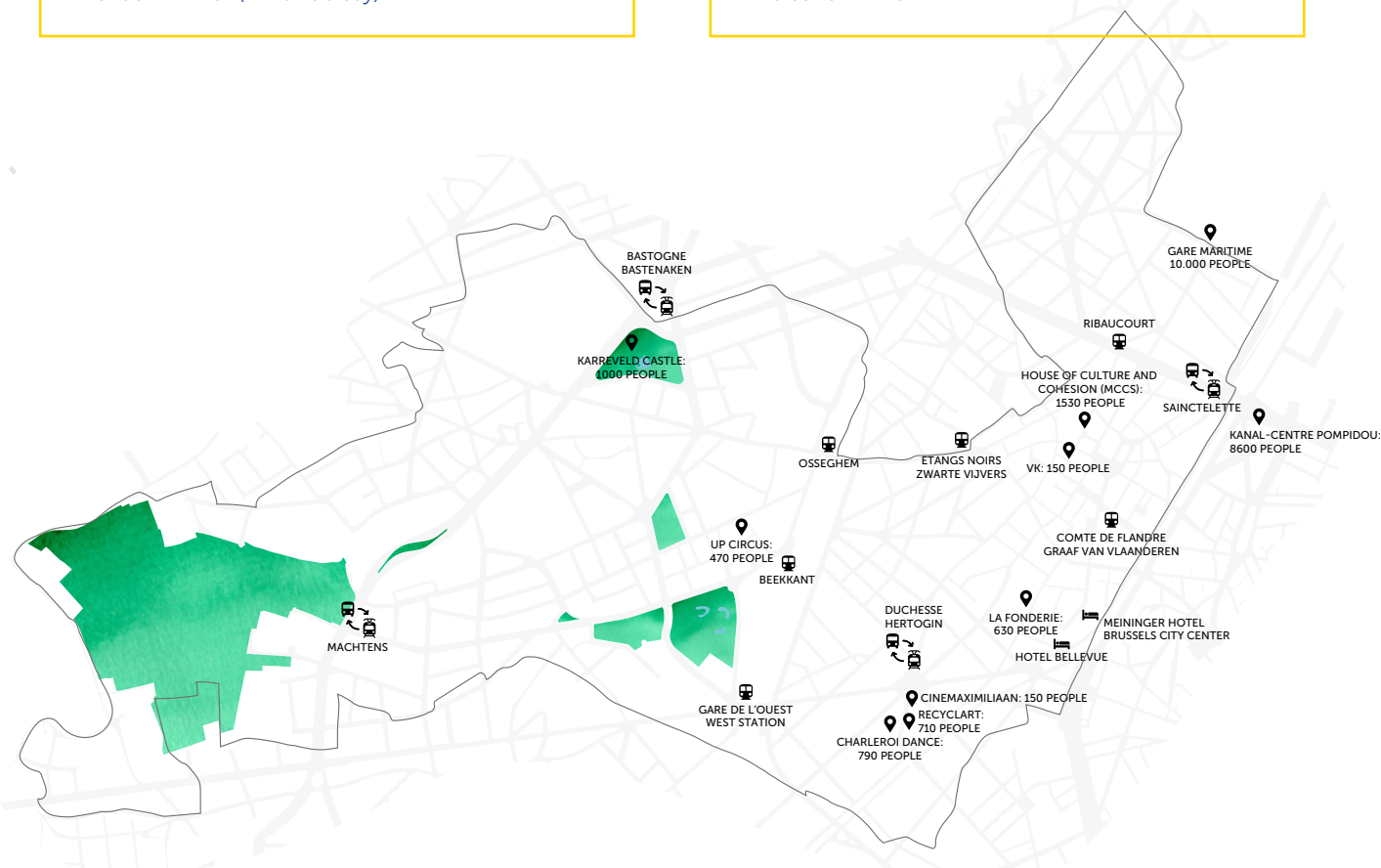
Neighbouring Belgian cities Antwerp, Ghent, Liège, Namur and Charleroi are just one hour away by public transport. Within a 1.5-hr travel radius from Molenbeek, the population is connected with an audience of 5 million people because it is so well connected

High-speed rail network:

- * Lille > 00hr34 (6 trains a day)
- * Rotterdam > 2hr (28 trains a day)
- * Paris > 1hr22 (24 trains a day)
- * Berlin > 6hr40 (trains a day)
- * London > 2hr01 (11 trains a day)

Examples of flight times:

- * Malmö > 1hr35
- * Katowice > 4hr
- * Skopje > 2hr40
- * Timisoara > 3hr35
- * Marseille > 1hr45
- * Tanger > 3hr
- * Tunis > 2hr35
- * Jenin > Amman 8hr5
- * Kinshasa > 8hr15



with the centre and the train stations of the BCR. In short, the entire Belgian population could easily join us in Molenbeek.

International

Molenbeek is served by Brussels Airport (23 million passengers/year) with direct flights to 200 destinations in 66 countries, 20 minutes away from the centre by train with a station at the airport and with trains running four times an hour: one-way ticket at €10,80 and €21,60 for a round trip. By bus, the Brussels Inter-communal Transport Company (STIB-MIVB) operates links from the airport to the railway station Brussels-Luxembourg in the European district, €7.00 with contactless payment. With a taxi, it takes 25 minutes to the city centre, with taxis available outside the arrival hall for a fee of €30 and €40.

Molenbeek is also indirectly served by Brussels-South Charleroi Airport (6 million passengers/year) focused on low-cost companies and offering direct flights to 100 destinations in Europe. It is located 45 minutes from Brussels city centre, with shuttles every 30 minutes from/to Brussels-South railway station.

In addition to the strong international connections through Brussels Airport, the BCR and by extension Molenbeek is served by an extensive high-speed rail network (ICE & Eurostar): more than 60 million Europeans can reach Molenbeek in about two hours.

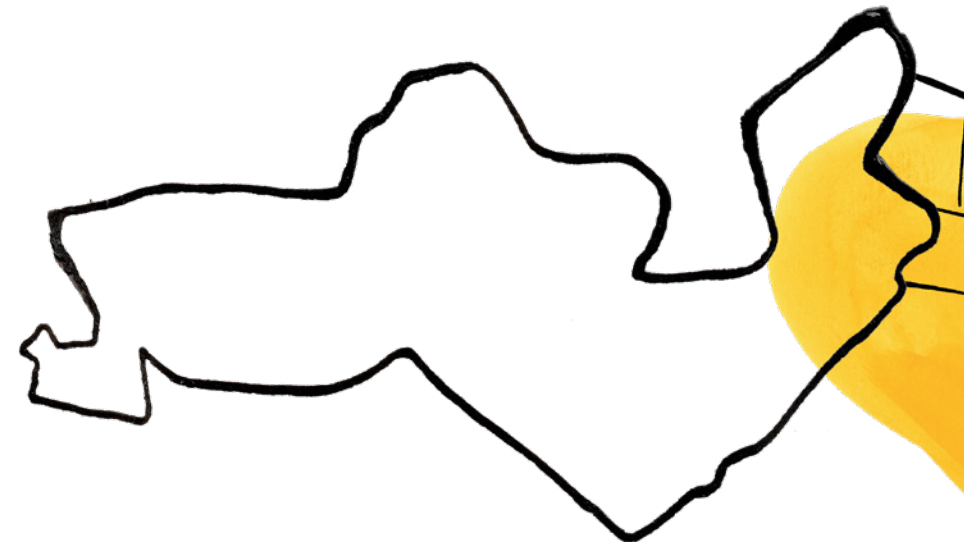
However, Molenbeek also faces a lot of challenges: Molenbeek is not easily accessible for people with physical disabilities and parents with baby strollers. This is partly due to problematic conditions of roads and busy traffic. Additionally, Molenbeek often suffers from a negative digital reputation and bad press.

Finally, Molenbeek is one of the places with the most polluted air quality in the BCR and Belgium. At night, not all areas are safe, sometimes some places experiencing drug-related violence and harassment of women and queer people. Molenbeek residents do not travel easily outside the area or over the Canal. But it does attract people with a migrant background from neighbouring countries, especially the famous shopping streets.

What is the city's absorption capacity in terms of tourists' accommodation?

Molenbeek alone offers tourist accommodation in the form of: 2 hotels, Meininger Hotel Brussels City Centre, with 150 rooms and 727 beds; and Hotel Belvue, with 29 rooms; 1 aparthotel, Sunrise Apart Hotel with 9 apartments and 7 studios; 1 certified Bed & Breakfast, B&B Leopold II; and 3 other accommodation sites offering a total of 261 beds together, JES Sleep Inn with 89 beds, Generation Europe with 170 beds, and Bridies Bed and Breakfast with 2 rooms.

There are about 155 options for private rental locations available, with a pre-Covid average of 23,000 nights booked a year, at an average nightly price of €60.60. But the excellent accessibility offered by Molenbeek's public transport means visitors do not



need to stay in Molenbeek, and our bid can benefit from the tourist accommodation in the BCR: 20,000 rooms, 11 five-star hotels, 50 four-star hotels, and 45 three-star hotels. There are at least 7 new hotel projects planned in the BCR by 2030, with a projected offer of new rooms at ca 1500.

In general, Molenbeek residents are positive towards tourism and putting their city in the limelight. A survey of 1,000 inhabitants in 2021 showed that 88% of the population feels that tourism has positive consequences. 84.5% found that visitors should be encouraged to explore the city outside the traditional tourist areas (meaning that they should discover Molenbeek), and 73% would be proud to have Molenbeek highlighted as a visitor destination.



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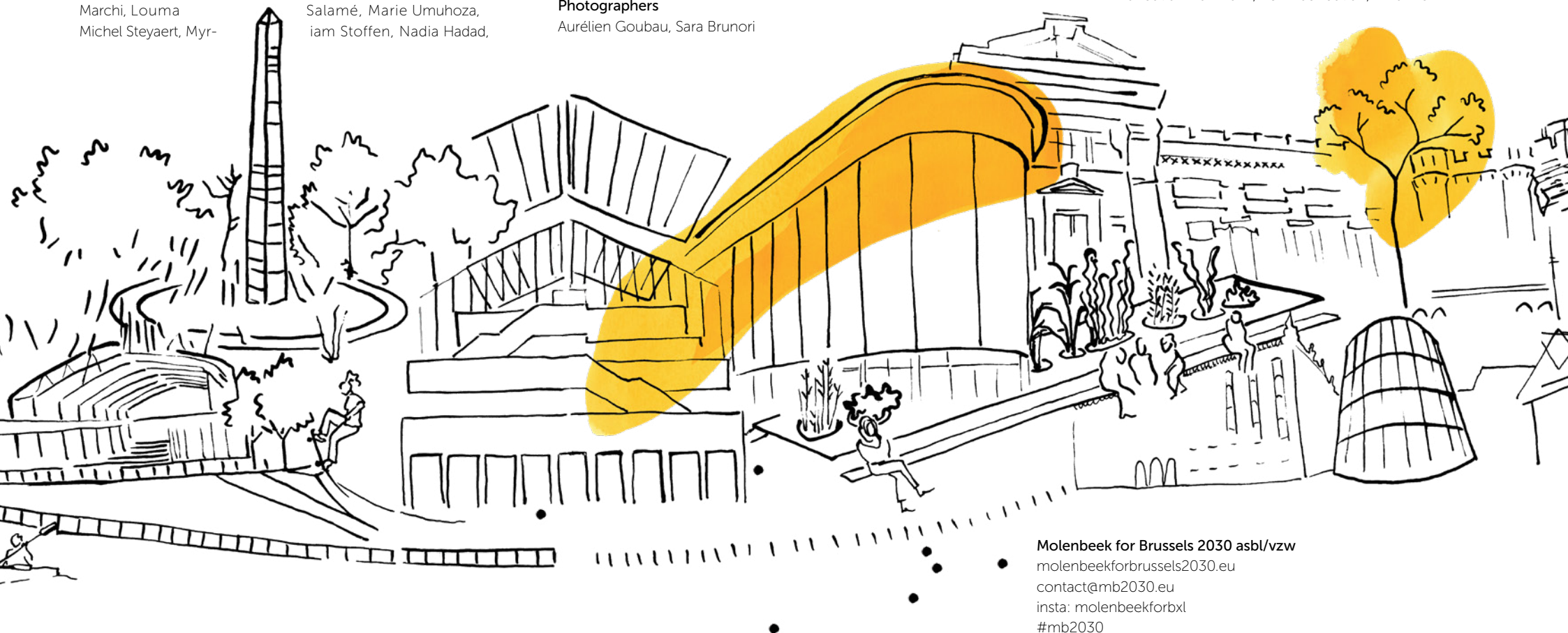
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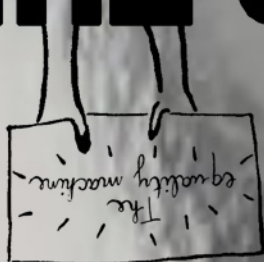
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