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Heritage Education
in the Brussels Capital Region

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Belgium

Belgium is a federal state with three autonomous regions and three communities

Flanders in the north has a Flemish speaking community. Wallonia in the south has a French speaking community. In the east on the border with Germany there is a small German speaking community around the city of Eupen. The Brussels Capital Region has both French and Flemish speaking citizens.

Belgium has a federal government, three regional governments and the German speaking community although it is part of the Walloon region also has its own government.



The Brussels Capital Region

The Brussels Capital Region which geographically is situated in the region of Flanders became autonomous in 1989. From the start the Brussels government was responsible for all matters related to its territory. Therefore a department for the preservation of monuments and landscapes was set up within the administration of urban planning, housing and city renovation.



The Brussels Capital Region is a conglomerate of 19 municipalities each with their own local authorities. It's a densely populated urban region. In 2017 it held a population of 1.2 million inhabitants living together on 161km². A total of 123 nationalities were counted, 400.000 foreign residents and large communities of second or third generation Belgians (Italy, Spain, Morocco, Turkey, Congo,...)

It has a rich and varied cultural and natural heritage: several of them are on the Unesco World Heritage List:

-The Grand Place of Brussels



	
<p>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</p>	<p>La Grand-Place, Brussels inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1998</p>

-The Stoclet Palace by Joseph Hoffmann and the Wiener Werkstätte



	
<p>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</p>	<p>Stoclet House inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2009</p>

-4 Emblematic Townhouses by the Art Nouveau architect, Victor Horta



Solvay



Van Eetvelde



Tassel



Victor Horta's own home and studio



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



- Major Town Houses of the Architect Victor Horta (Brussels) inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2000

-The Sonian Forest



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



- Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2017

But there are of course many others: monuments, parks and gardens archaeological sites, rural heritage



The Royal Galleries



The Egmont Palace



The Josaphat Park



The Luizenmolen



The Chinese pavillon

Creating public awareness and heritage education

Although it was not until 2014 that creating public awareness was officially recognised as one of the pillars of its policy, the heritage department of the Brussels Capital Region has a long history of promoting, supporting or initiating different types of actions targeting different audiences.

The heritage department has built up a large portfolio of publications and organises exhibitions on a regular basis.

Heritage education

Over the years our department has financially supported and sometimes initiated several educational activities and the development of learning tools. The activities were/are small scale and for the most part short term operations. They were/are organised by heritage organisations and local authorities. They target primary school children up to the age of 12. Some are working with schools others offer activities outside school hours and during holidays.

Towards a programme of heritage classes

In 2005 the idea of *heritage classes* was launched, an educational programme open to all Brussels schools (for 10 to 18 years old youngsters)

The ambitions of the programme were:

-To design a week-long programme which would touch every subject matter on the school curriculum but applied to heritage (sciences, languages, history, civil society, skills and crafts,...)

-To give pupils some hands on experience on a restauration and/or excavation site

In order to do this we consulted specialists on the school curriculum and on heritage education. We also started looking at possible restauration or excavation sites which could serve our purpose: able to accommodate school classes for the duration of the program.

Quite soon however we encountered several kinds of difficulties:

School education being linked to language it is organised by the French and Flemish speaking communities separately, each having their own methods, curriculum and certificate it would be very complicated to design a programme which works for both communities. Furthermore and more importantly even as a regional administration we did not have the authority to organise such a programme.

Finding the right restauration and/or excavation site which could on a long term basis accommodate schoolchildren from as wide an age range as 10 to 18 years old proved impossible to find. Combining an education programme with the evolution and accessibility of a restoration/excavation and the school terms was immensely complicated. So was finding the right accommodation to house school classes in the vicinity of the site.

So we had to reset our goals completely.

We decided to start with the creation of a 'flying heritage team' that would go to the schools and work with the heritage present in the immediate environment of the schools. Instead of a week-long programme, they would develop a day-programme of a mix of working outside the school walls and in the classroom.

But first we had to find a partner who could organise it for us. On advice of the heritage education specialist we contacted the King Baudouin foundationⁱ. They agreed to help us develop and launch the programme, hiring a team and offering accommodation for them to develop the programme. As the policy of the King Baudouin foundation is to limit their involvement to the start up of projects like this it was decided that this partnership was to be for a maximum of two years. After which we had to find a more permanent solution.

We started off with a team of two French and one Flemish speaking collaboratorⁱⁱ. As they requested the King Baudouin Foundation was given a free hand in the selection. The people they picked were young, dynamic and showed lots of potential which they have more than realised. Today two of the initial team are still working on the programme. Back then however they had very little experience and almost no knowledge of the Brussels

architectural heritage. Two out of three lived outside the Brussels region and were not familiar with it at all. Coaching them we soon became aware that they needed intensive training in how to analyse architectural heritage. A lot of time and effort went into this and this consequently slowed down start of the actual programme. The positive side of this however was that we were closely involved in the development of it much more than if we had left it to established heritage education workers.

In fact it was an interesting learning curve for us as well.

First of all through our direct involvement we were being confronted with the problems the team encountered in the schools.

- language issues: Pupils having a serious language backlog as they do not speak French nor Flemish at home, or because the parents send them to be taught in Flemish when at home only French is spoken or vice versa. In both cases parents are unable to help with homework. In some schools the mother tongue of the majority of the pupils is Turkish or Arabic. As they tend to fall back on their mother tongue whenever they can their progress in Flemish or French is hindered. The team observed that pupils sometimes would have a general backlog of several years because of their language deficiency.
- cultural differences: our team was confronted first of all with the gap between their own cultural references and those of the pupils. Certainly when working with the students of the secondary schools particularly the older ones this often led to heated discussions. But they would also frequently arrive in classes where the cultural mix led to tensions amongst the pupils, tensions that would obviously come to the foreground when talking about cultural heritage.

To overcome these difficulties the programme had to be adapted. Some activities focussed more specifically on language.

On the one hand enriching their vocabulary with word games on heritage. For instance pupils working in twos or threes are given what is called 'a key' This consists of a list of simple questions based on what can be observed of a particular heritage object, only to be answered with yes or no and thus leading them to the final solution.

On the other hand developing reading and writing skills and speaking in public. For instance the older students are sending out onto the streets in small groups with a camera to make mini documentaries. In preparation they have to read up on the history, or building styles. Then they shoot the images write up the comments, interview passers-by and report like journalists.



The activities were adapted to incorporate exercises on cultural diversity. For instance teachers are asked to invite pupils to bring an object to the classroom which is precious to them, and tells us something about their family or their country. This enables the heritage worker not only to talk about the abstract notion of heritage but is also an opportunity to show that we are all similar in our differences. We all cherish things which define us. Another example is making crosswords with the names of the pupils, or in the case of a class made up of pupils speaking various different languages to make a list of very simple words that are then translated by the pupils into their own language. Examining the similarities or the differences.

The programme also started focussing on citizenship. Rules of behaviour and respect towards one another. How to address someone you don't know. The idea that the heritage around us belongs to all of us and that we therefore are all responsible for the preservation of it. This aspect of the programme proofed also an important selling point towards the schools. It would help teachers motivate those schoolboards or school heads which were not convinced of the necessity of heritage education, to invite our team.

Secondly it soon became clear that in order to be viable the programme needed to find the right balance between the made to measure aspect and a more global approach. The concept of the flying team working with the elements available in the neighbourhood of the school and on top of that trying to accommodate the specific needs of every class demanded for very intense preparations. A year after the start of the programme the team had already been reinforced with an additional Flemish speaking member. Although there were less Flemish schools, it just proofed too much work for one heritage worker on his own. A visit to the school, meeting the teacher and an exploration of the neighbourhood prior to the activity was always going to be necessary but the team needed to develop formats which could be reproduced with slight variations. One very successful example is the use of a road book. This book which pupils use while they are exploring the neighbourhood contains a number of basic exercises which can be applied to every district of the Brussels region. The heritage worker can select those which correspond with what's available on the ground or adapt it.

Following the progress of the team from up close also helped us shape the future of the programme. We got a much better idea of what was needed to develop it further. The next step was to find that location we were looking for to house the team and accommodate schools. An opportunity arose when space became available in an historical building belonging to the administration of the Brussels Capital Region which is situated on top of one of our major archaeological sites: remnants of the *Palace of the Coudenberg*ⁱⁱⁱ. The building was being completely renovated which meant that the spaces allocated to us could

be adapted to our specific needs. But what was more in taking possession of this accommodation the solution for the other part of our problem presented itself. The archaeological site is managed by an NGO called 'The palace of Charles V' which is subsidized by the City of Brussels and by our department. It was agreed that as soon as the spaces were ready for occupation the team would be incorporated in the NGO.



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Heritage and Citizenship classes

The programme was entering a new phase. The accommodation opened up new avenues. As it was located in the historical centre of the city, literally sitting on 1000 years of history a whole new series of activities centered on the rich and varied cultural heritage of Brussels could be developed. The new premises had three spaces to accommodate classes, two offices, a meeting room and a storage room. The team took possession of them in the spring of 2008.

It was decided not to abandon the flying team concept. As this part of the programme deals with 'every day heritage' it would always be complementary to the activities focussing on emblematic monuments of national and international renown. Schools might want to participate in both, others might not have the means to organise a school trip. But of course their number had to be reduced to make way for the new ones.

In order to develop these new activities the team would need to be reinforced but most of all it needed a full-time coordinator. We would still be involved but the team needed someone who could coach them on a daily basis and concentrate on the logistics of the accommodation. Also with the expansion of the programme, the complexity of the planning increased and so did the managing of the bookings. It was clear that this could no longer be taken on by the heritage workers themselves. The NGO also needed an administrative assistant to cope with the extra work as their number of personnel had tripled in one go.

Being able to accommodate classes in their own space also meant that the team could develop a new type of tools. Before all tools had to be lightweight and compact as they had to travel with them on public transport. When creating audio-visual material they had to consider whether the schools had the equipment to show them. These restrictions were going to disappear. Not overnight of course. But as far as the budget allowed it they could develop a whole series of tools.

One of the first and most successful of these is a three dimensional puzzle which forms a model of the Royal district. Partly build on a hill and with a history going back as far as the 12th century its aspect has changed continuously over the centuries. Not an easy subject to tackle but a very interesting one. In order to help pupils understand the complexity of the urban development of this area the puzzle is used to show the different stages of its evolution.



The creation of a new activity is very time consuming. The process involves brainstorming, developing a scenario, creating tools, trial runs of the activity and making adaptations. So although the possibilities which the area offers are almost endless, the programme developed at the rate of one new activity a year. Where at the beginning the whole team was involved they now worked in pairs as they simultaneously had to continue with the existing ones.

As the objective was to gradually cater for all pupils and students between the age of 10 and 18 of all types of schools, careful thought was put into the target group for each of the activities. Knowledge of the curriculum for each of these was therefore essential. From the start the team had built a network of contacts within the education world. Enthusiastic teachers who would advise them and school heads happy to have them try out the activities. This has proven invaluable over the years.

Initially promotion of our programme was done through mailings but it was soon clear that more was needed. A campaign was set up to go into the schools and present the programme. Another means was to organise a teacher's day, where teachers could themselves participate in the activities and give feedback.

Each year the completion rate rose, but there was a marked difference between French speaking and Flemish ones, the latter one lagging behind. The difference between the two was that Flemish schools had more money and organised more activities. Where the French schools were on the lookout for free activities in the proximity, the Flemish were looking for quality and frequently organised school trips taking the pupils outside the region. Five years on the rate of completion was next to a 100% for both language groups. In fact once the bookings were made online the calendar would fill up in a matter of days.

<https://www.classesdupatrimoine.brussels/>

The problem being that the team can only take on so many day activities as it got time to prepare for, also taking into account the time spend on developing new activities. The team expanded as the programme developed but after a few years it was clear that it would never be able to accommodate nor visit all the schools in Brussels. Therefore it was decided that the heritage classes would adapt the learning tools which they developed for their activities into manuals for teachers who wanted to work on heritage with their pupils/students. These manuals would then be put online. Today the catalogue online consists of thematical manuals and of manuals per municipality so teachers can find out about the heritage present in the vicinity of their school. And the team is continually developing new material. One very popular theme in recent years is the manual on the First World War, which focusses on historical events, on everyday life in Brussels at wartime on the commemoration monuments and the soldier's graves.

<https://www.classesdupatrimoine.brussels/dossiers-pedagogiques/>



The combination of popularity of the programme and the booking online system had another effect. The same schools would come back every year and in some cases booking more and more activities. New schools would find it difficult to get in. Therefore it was decided to block a few dates in the calendar reserving these for newcomers on the waiting list.

Specials

Over the years there have been a number of special activities which have been developed outside the calendar. Sometimes at the request of a school

For instance a school situated in the city centre wanted to set up a one month project around the history of Brussels implicating several classes and resulting in the making by the pupils of a documentary on the city. They requested the help of our team in the development. Today this concept called 'The spirit of Brussels' is offered to other schools.

Another school celebrating its 100th birthday requested the help of our team to set up a series of activities around this anniversary. The whole school was involved older pupils working with younger ones a whole school year to organise a day of festivities

As the Coudenberg palace is a member of the Network Royal Residencies of Europe, the heritage classes set up a collaboration with a teacher of a secondary school to work with her students a whole week around the history of the palace. As a return the students would be able to participate in an exchange between groups of students from other members of the network

Restoring heritage as a career choice

In 2012 a demand came from the minister to look into the possibilities of setting up a new programme focussing on motivating young people to choose for a career in restoration.

On the one hand it had been noted that certain crafts were in danger of disappearing as restorers found it difficult to find young people interested in learning these skills. On the other hand a certain fragment of the young population had difficulty finding employment.

The initial ambition was to set up a collaboration with the unemployment office and with restorers and the building industry in order to develop this new programme. The idea of a restoration site which could serve for the training of these young people was put forward, but we ran into more or less the same difficulties as we encountered 6 years earlier.

So again we had to reset our goals.

Instead of targeting unemployed young adults it was decided to focus on the schools who train people for the building trade. (Age 16 to 18 years)

Instead of a more long term training it was decided to organise a week programme giving these young people a taste of the restoration world, making them aware of the differences between restoration and renovation.

A collaboration was set up with several craftsmen who accepted to give workshops, with contractors to visit restoration sites, with architects leading restoration projects. The heritage worker who leads the programme accompanies the students the whole week. In the workshops they can experience how they can apply their own trade for instance woodwork to restore buildings

They spend the first day of the week on team-building, working with a specialised organisation. They give them exercises to do which are quite spectacular, physically demanding and require working together.



A very similar week-long programme was set up for primary schoolchildren. They are introduced to different crafts (wood and metalwork, mosaics, stonecutting) and learn the why and how of restoration. The idea is that it might make some of them want to learn a craft later on.



10 years Heritage and Citizenship classes

In 2018 the Heritage and Citizenship classes celebrated its 10th anniversary with an interactive exhibition “Heritage? Child’s play? It was not set up as an overview but rather as a walk through different types of build heritage. The visitor was invited to play the games to test his knowledge.



In 10 years' the heritage and citizenship classes have become an institution. Nowadays they use their expertise to give support to other initiatives and to train teachers. The programme is forever evolving, the team keeps growing and new means are tested.

Today the team counts 8 full-time and several freelance heritage workers + the coordinator. As mentioned before the NGO also employs an administrative assistant dealing with the accountancy and salaries. Since a couple of years there is also a social media manager. For the year 2019 the cost for the heritage classes was estimated at €910.000. (Salaries, equipment and fees for craftsmen and other collaborators). This is an impressive sum but we must not be blinded by it. On the contrary what we should take away from this is that developing activities on heritage education can be done with very modest means. The way to start is to determine goals that are achievable in the short term.

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ⁱ The King Baudouin Foundation was founded in 1976 and is currently under the patronage of Queen Mathilda. Its supports civilian efforts to increase justice democracy and respect for diversity. It also has a long track record on supporting the arts, cultural heritage and heritage education.

ⁱⁱ The Brussels Capital Region is bilingual but only ten percent of the population is Flemish speaking.

ⁱⁱⁱ The site consists of the subterranean remnants of the Coudenberg Palace which dates back to the 12th century and was destroyed by fire in 1731. On its ruins a whole new district in neoclassical style was constructed at the end of the 18th century. In the 1980's and 1990's several restoration campaigns were conducted with the objective to make what remained accessible to the public. The museum site was officially opened in July 2000. The remnants consist of parts of the palace kitchen, the chapel and the Aula Magna. The museum itself is located in a 16th century townhouse (hof van Hoogstraten), originally adjacent to the palace.