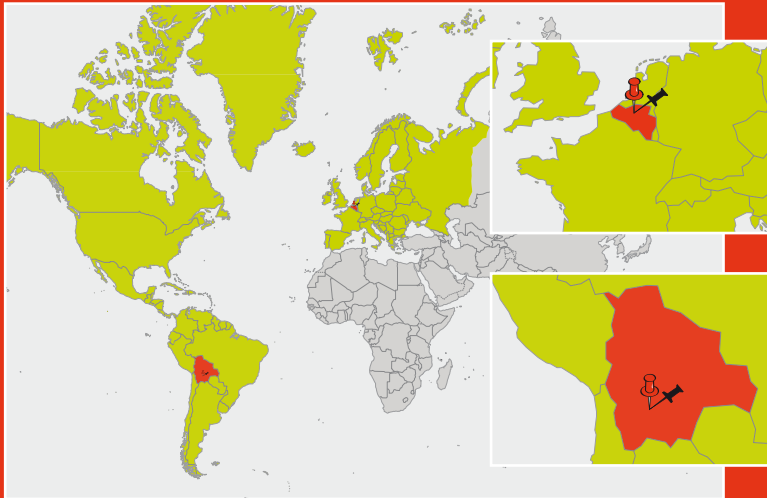


Mechelen • Sucre



Fair 'Sucre' in Mechelen

📍 **Sucre** is the legal capital of Bolivia. Although it is the capital according to the constitution, the government is established in La Paz. The only government body of importance in Sucre is the Supreme Court. The city has 280,000 inhabitants and is situated at 2800 m above sea level. The collaboration between **Mechelen** and Sucre dates back to 1996. During the first five years the foundations were laid for a further collaboration in the fields of tourism and culture. From the very start, Mechelen and Sucre took part in the pilot program concerning the covenants on municipal international cooperation organized by the Flemish government. After three years of the pilot phase of this program, in 2004, the Flemish Parliament decided to lay it down in a decree. Both cities decided to continue as partners in 2005 within the framework of that decree.





“I am opposed to fair trade because I have the choice between fair trade products and regular products”, says the North-South officer of Mechelen, Mieke van Cauwenberghe. “Do not misunderstand me”, she continues. “In fact, I do not want to make that choice. By definition, all products should comply with fair trade criteria.” Fair trade constitutes the core business of the cooperation between Mechelen in Belgium and.

Fair ‘Sucre’ in Mechelen

In 2005 the national campaign entitled ‘Ik ben verkocht’¹ (I am sold) was launched. For Mechelen it provides a perfect instrument to link sustainable development and fair trade to its city link with Sucre. This way, the objectives in the North can be tested against the reality in the South.

But was this really an issue in the South? It must be admitted that in Sucre fair trade was not really on the agenda of the city administration until its partner Mechelen put it forward. Although fair trade was no longer unknown at a national level (with Evo Morales as president), it was not an obvious topic for the city of Sucre. It is important to note that Sucre is not an

agricultural municipality. However, it does play an important role in the processing of products and how they are introduced on the market. So the city translated the concept of fair trade basically into striving for decent working conditions including attention for ecologically sound production processes. Thanks to the close cooperation with Mechelen, Sucre has presented itself, on a provincial level, as a fair trade city by now. It is the only local authority that participates in the Latin-American networking on fair trade (Comercio Justo). Thanks to the city link Sucre has developed some expertise in this respect that can be shared with other administrations, so in this way it presents an added value.

1 A national campaign organized by Oxfam-Wereldwinkels (Oxfam World Shops), Vredeseilanden (Islands of Peace) and Max Havelaar. The campaign promotes a fair income for all farmers in the South and the North.

Have Mechelen and Sucre been able to match their agendas in this respect? Both partners deal with the concept from a different perspective. In Sucre a lot of micro



“During our visit in Sucre (2004) we had a meeting with an association defending the interests of the small-scale milk producers within the region. They do not get access to the local market with their products,” explains North-South officer Mieke Van Cauwenberghe. “Thanks to our city link we have been able to discuss that problem with the local authority of Sucre, that listened to us. We decided not to handle this as a cooperation policy area, but rather as a specific theme which we would work on together intensively for three years, after which we would continue at our own pace. Whereas fair trade in Mechelen especially refers to sensitizing the population and reaching more and more actors, in Sucre the focus is on making the local market accessible for the small-scale producers.”

companies are operating in the processing of basic raw materials, a crucial link in the production chain.

The fair trade story in Sucre covers more than just fair trade and the labeling of products. The essence of the story is reinforcing local economy in consultation with the various actors. Focusing on fair trade starts with focusing on hygiene, quality, social legislation and employment. Based on advice and support from Mechelen, in the meantime a shop for fair trade products has been opened in Sucre. These products are produced locally, in a biological way, by employees for whom social security contributions have been paid correctly. Through the city link Mechelen is closely monitoring the developments. The products are always provided with the necessary information (on product origin, quality, processing procedure,...). Furthermore Mechelen facilitated contacts with the local college, so that a marketing student was able to support the city and the producers in developing a marketing strategy and media campaign. It is important to notice that this led to an enhanced cooperation between the various producers as such. For example, a producer of 'quinoa' works together with a producer processing the traditional 'amarant' so as to offer a package of cereals together. In the meantime, more ideas have been



generated with respect to 'combination products'. Through the shop fair trade has been visible and a second point of sale is in preparation!

At the same time a new social movement has been generated from the basis, 'Atreveté' (Take your chance), sending out a common message on fair trade in order to expand social support and exercise some political pressure. Together with the city council of Sucre, the local producers and NGOs laid down a step-by-step plan with a number of social criteria² towards fair trade. The key in this whole process is to obtain a label that is necessary to differentiate one's own products within the interior market in Bolivia.

Inspiring one another

The biggest challenge for both cities remains involving new partners, but also in this respect the partners inspire one another. The Catholic highschool of Mechelen worked together with chefs from local restaurants to produce tapas in Sucre on the basis of fair trade products. Mechelen will now organize something similar, so that they will not only provide a market outlet of fair trade products with the local hotels and catering facilities, but also sensitize another target group for fair trade and regional products. In Sucre people are extremely proud about the use of regional

products, such as cacao... was there a better place than Belgium to learn something from master chocolate confectioners? Sucre wanted to organize a chocolate festival and consulted the population of Mechelen in this respect. However, in Mechelen there is no chocolate festival of that order. That is why Mechelen, during a next visit, brought them into contact with chocolate confectioners from Bruges, what resulted in a close cooperation that has been sustained until the present day. In its turn, Mechelen encouraged its sister city to focus on local and sustainable raw materials, also with respect to chocolate and other derived products.

2 Four criteria of the label:

- A product must be made of at least 70% of regional materials.
- These are natural products without any chemical processes being involved.
- Apart from that, all the people contributing to the production, must receive a Bolivian minimum wage.
- Finally, a product quality guarantee must be ensured by means of external control.



Lessons learned

1 Reciprocal visits are important

At the first working visit that Sucre paid in 2005 to Mechelen, it was like starting from zero. The partner was convinced that Mechelen could constitute a market outlet for milk from Sucre, what was absolutely not the initial idea of Mechelen. So, both city administrations were talking at cross-purposes. Through dialogue and visits to Mechelen, where the delegations (in 2006) could get acquainted with various actors (bio farmers, producers, Max Havelaar) and their respective way of working, the Bolivians got a better idea of what Mechelen meant. A reverse working visit, from Mechelen to its partner city, was on the other hand necessary in order to know the Bolivian reality and to look what could be feasible for Sucre. It is important but to keep looking with a critical eye.

2 Taking into consideration the needs of the population

To literally copy a campaign has no sense. It must be translated into the local reality and adjusted to the needs of the population. Mechelen linked the 'Ik ben verkocht' (I am sold) campaign to people in Flanders and in the south, so that the story, the campaign, the vision could be easily identified by the population. Furthermore, the story was extended to themes such as local economy, dignified work,...

3 Sensitizing on a political level

Fair trade and dignified work must be an item on the political agenda. If politicians give the example, they hereby give a signal to the population to opt for fair trade as well, and so the support for fair trade is created and extended. Furthermore, a social movement has been created in Sucre, expressing a common message, in order to put some political pressure on the local and, if necessary, the national authorities.

4 Letting go the partner city in due time

A partner municipality must (be willing to) be aware of the importance of a theme, in this case fair trade, all by itself, in order to continue on its own. Mechelen has assisted Sucre in the first steps towards a policy on fair trade, but Sucre shall decide whether it will continue and how far it will continue in this respect. If the political support for fair trade is fading away, the social movement can again ask Mechelen for support, so as to put this issue back on the political agenda.



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