

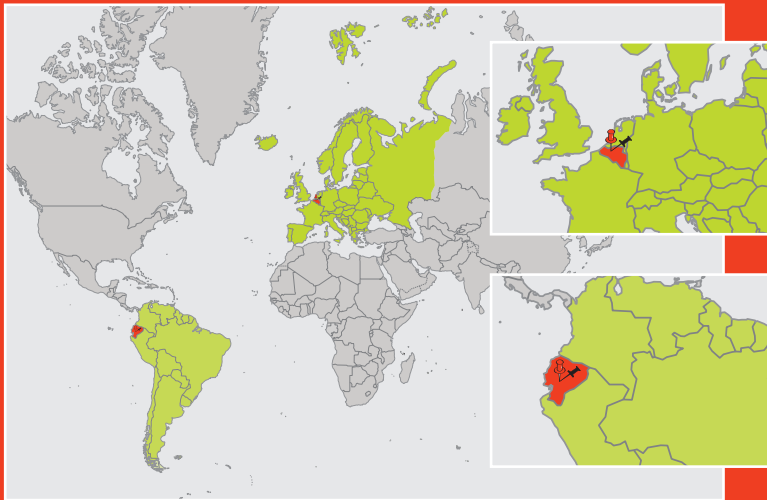
Evergem • Guaranda



**Cooperation with
a local NGO
on waste policy**

📍 **Guaranda** is a city in the Andes Mountains in Ecuador. It is roughly in the centre of the country, but is not accessible by any major roads and the region is somewhat disadvantaged. The urbanized area of Guaranda has about 25,000 residents. The rural part has about 85,000 inhabitants in nine different boroughs. Travel time from the boroughs to the centre of the city varies from fifteen minutes to four hours. The borough has huge differences in altitude: the tropical part has an altitude of 600 m, but other parts of Guaranda are 4000 m above sea level.

Evergem is a municipality in the Belgian province of East Flanders. It is located north of Ghent along the industrial area of Ghent-Zelzate and the Ghent-Terneuzen canal. Evergem has over 34,000 residents spread over three boroughs and nine communities.



Guaranda and Evergem have engaged in municipal international cooperation since 2002. The partners first made contact through Evergem resident Luc Spanhove of NGO Esmeraldas, who ran the Ecuador centre in Ghent until the end of 2012.

In more and more areas of Guaranda, three waste groups are collected selectively: biodegradable waste, paper, cardboard and plastic and non-recycled waste. Waste is one of the spearheads in municipal international cooperation with Evergem. Local NGO FEPP plays a huge part in the cooperation.

The municipality of Guaranda and NGO FEPP complement each other.

As far as waste collection and waste management are concerned, Flanders ranks as some of the best in the world and Flemish municipalities and intermunicipal companies have contributed significantly to that success. In the South waste collection and processing are often still very much developing and illegal dumping is a major problem. Waste is therefore an obvious theme for municipal international cooperation. 'The waste project in Guaranda started five years ago,' says Koen De Baets, who is the North-South official in Evergem. 'Every year separate waste collection is set up in two boroughs. We usually start in the centre of a borough, but in some places we have expanded into more remote areas as well. In some boroughs there had been no waste collection at all before. There we are immediately introducing selective collection in three groups. Selective collection is not fully achieved in all boroughs. Sometimes we have to settle for general waste collection. The boroughs themselves are responsible for the collection of the waste. They can count on the support of the district that

creates the legislative framework and makes financial contributions. The district is responsible for processing and disposal and partly also for the further sorting of the separated waste. Composting and the sale of recyclable waste are partly done by the district and partly done by the boroughs. An illegal dumping ground has now been transformed into a regulated landfill site. That is also one of the tasks of the district and we have supported that process.'

What is Evergem's role in the waste project?

'We provide financial support with resources from the federal programme: about 50 to 70,000 euros a year. This money is used to buy waste collection vehicles and to pay part of the fee to the promoters who need to encourage the population to support selective collection. Of course Guaranda also contributes a lot of resources: the regulation of the landfill site cost several hundreds of thousands of euros. Of course we share our knowledge, but the importance of this should not be



exaggerated. There is a substantial amount of expertise in Guaranda. Our role as a motivator of the various partners is much more important. The partners are the district government, the borough councils and the NGO FEPP.’

Who or what is FEPP?

‘FEPP stands for Fondo Ecuatoriano Populorum Progressio and was established in 1970 following the “Populorum Progressio” encyclical written by Pope Paul VI. It has developed into a consortium of small NGOs that are active in disadvantaged areas all over Ecuador to benefit the local economy, community development and now also fair trade producers and cooperatives. FEPP has a good reputation and is very strong in Guaranda, particularly in the rural areas populated mainly by indigenous people. The local government primarily focuses on the urban areas. It is closest to the 25,000 residents of the centre of Guaranda. The politicians, but also the officials, rarely venture out into the countryside, not just because of the problems with travel, but also because prejudice against indigenous people is still fairly commonplace. The people living in rural areas also rarely visit the centre of Guaranda. Consequently the local government is not really in touch with their problems. FEPP is very close to the residents of rural areas and has made rural development one of its main

aims. Its staff has a very positive work attitude. They take matters into their own hands and they work fast. NGOs tend to be more flexible than local governments, because they are not part of an entire administration.’

What does this mean in practice for the waste project?

‘Guaranda and Evergem have created a waste plan. FEPP was also an important contributor. The NGO performed some preparatory studies, for example. FEPP also plays an important part in the promotion of selective collection to the population. You need to take into account that a large section of the population is unable to read or write. This means that promoters need to visit those people, sometimes three or four times, in order to explain what selective waste collection means and how to do it. They literally empty the bin liner and they sort the contents into three groups. This requires a lot of manpower. In the urban areas of Guaranda the district supervises the promoters, but in the rural areas they are trained and managed by FEPP. The NGO also sets up local committees in the village centres of rural areas. Such a group can consist of the residents of a neighbourhood, but also of the teaching staff of the local school. All these committees attend three training sessions: about waste and the environment, about waste and health



and about waste sorting. They help define what are priority actions for the community, which waste problems should be dealt with first, for example sorting out an illegal dumping ground.

How does Evergem provide the financial support to FEPP? Via the district?

'No, the support goes directly to FEPP. The NGO manages the resources and its accounts are extremely transparent. The reporting is easy: a phone call or email is enough to obtain all the necessary information.'

Is this not a delicate subject for the Guaranda administration?

'It is not easy. We chose to provide direct support to FEPP because the relationship with the twin town was a little difficult at the start of the federal plan. We issued a request for a partner that could assist Guaranda in implementing the waste plan in rural areas. The people responsible at FEPP have also visited Evergem. They have access to our expertise. In the meantime our relationship with the twin town administration has improved a lot. The Guaranda district can also see that FEPP plays a very important part in working with the rural population. Of course the fact that the resources are managed by FEPP remains a difficult subject.'

Are there any disadvantages to this approach?

'Of course it sustains the situation in which the local administration rarely spends time in the rural areas. We do make certain that officials attend the progress reviews with the local councils. However, the FEPP remains the point of contact for local communities rather than the local administration. We have noticed that the waste plan is an important part in the decentralisation process from the district to the boroughs. The boroughs do have some of their own powers. The waste plan serves as an example of what decentralisation is or could be, of how the district and the boroughs can cooperate. Strengthening decentralisation is an important element of municipal international cooperation, but there is still a lot of work to do: it is about resources and power. Evergem can play a part as an objective partner, as a confidential advisor.'

How long will Evergem support the implementation of the waste plan?

'Will Evergem also receive federal funds for its municipal international cooperation in the future? That remains to be seen. At the start of the waste project in 2008 the objective was that Guaranda would act independently after five years. This is currently not the case, so we need to continue our cooperation. The district government is not yet fully responsible for paying the promot-



ers in the rural communities, for example. It is always difficult to find sufficient funds in the Guaranda budget. We have also underestimated public awareness. Raising awareness is a long-term process that cannot be completed in five years. We also still need to work on embedding the waste theme in a legal framework. Some steps

have been taken already, but enforcing the legal framework is an entirely different matter. It is currently not yet feasible to sanction people engaging in illegal dumping or refusing to recycle, even though it has been included in a regulation. There is still plenty for us to do in the waste field for the next few years.'

More about municipal international cooperation between Evergem and Guaranda

📌 **Library project.** Evergem and Guaranda are working on various themes. The library project came strongly to the fore over the past few years. A mobile library serves eighty primary schools and a few secondary schools in the rural areas of Guaranda with a reading promotion programme. The target group are both the pupils and the teachers, who receive training to work with books in the class. The library in the city centre has also reopened and is mainly used for schools. Koen De Baets: 'Evergem does not really introduce knowledge, as knowledge is present in Ecuador. Its role is mainly that of a supporter and motivator. If we hadn't repeatedly insisted on the use of a central library, it would never have happened. We suggested the concept of a mobile library, which also exists in other South American countries and we continued to insist that one should be implemented in Guaranda. Of course the project can only succeed if there is a relationship of trust between both municipalities. Mutual visits by people such as library employees have contributed to that.'



- 📌 **Self-confidence.** The self-confidence of the people in the South has grown dramatically over the past decade. Koen De Baets: 'People used to ask my opinion on just about everything in the past, because I am a foreigner with an education, but now the people of Guaranda value their own knowledge.'
- 📌 **Reciprocity.** This is a difficult issue in many cases of municipal international cooperation: what does the North learn from the South? This is the same for Evergem, but still there are examples of reciprocity. Koen De Baets: 'The better childcare centres in Guaranda are extremely serious about hygiene. The children brush their teeth three times a day, for example. On the initiative of the childcare department, this has now also been introduced by some childminders in Evergem. Both towns also cooperate with regard to play. In the North the focus is on free play and the importance of play for a child's development, in the South play is much more guided. The community focuses more on the wellbeing of the group, which is also reflected in its forms of play. That can also teach us something.'

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