

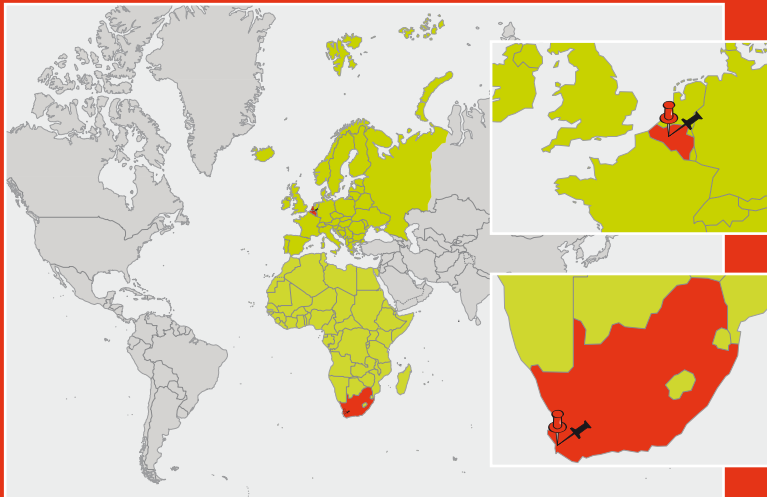
Dilbeek • Stellenbosch



**One, two, three ...  
a Youth Centre!**



📍 **Stellenbosch**, a South-African city of more than 100,000 inhabitants in the Western Cape, is known as a prosperous wine region and as a university city. It is true there is a thriving tourist sector, but on the other hand the city is facing all kinds of social problems, such as a low schooling level, drug abuse, an increasing number of HIV/AIDS patients or lack of housing. In 2002 the Flemish municipality of Dilbeek (B) initiated a city link within the framework of the covenant on municipal international cooperation of the Flemish Government, as one of its pilot municipalities. In consultation with the Advisory Council for International Cooperation in **Dilbeek**, the South-African city of Stellenbosch was selected as a partner.





## One, two, three ... a Youth Centre!

During an introductory visit to its South-African partner, it became clear that Dilbeek could already learn from its partner, right from the start. Stellenbosch draws up a management plan covering several years, the 'Integrated Development Plan' (IDP), in consultation with the population. Through constituency committees the population is questioned intensively on the needs and problems of the city. The city administration of Stellenbosch admits that they tend to pay more attention to the hard sectors, such as public works, safety,... The social softer issues (youth, gender, prevention, the elderly,...) are basically covered by community-based organizations (NGOs, churches and civil society organizations) that depend on donations. Within the IDP the necessity of a proper youth policy is highlighted. Stellenbosch has a very young population that requires proper attention and investment. Not only an active approach of youth unemployment is an urgent issue. The ward councilors also expect that the young people

can be kept off the street through specific youth programs. Initiatives such as after-school centres, leisure activities during school holidays or job counseling are not organized by the local government.

For Dilbeek this situation provided an opportunity to integrate 'youth' as part of the social issues in the collaboration agreement with Stellenbosch. Dilbeek can pride upon dynamic youth work in its own municipality, so it can adequately support and counsel its partner on this issue. For practical reasons, it was decided to start working in Franschoek, a municipal district of Stellenbosch.

It is under the impetus of the city link that two part-time officers were appointed, organizing activities on Sunday for ± 150 children. But due to a lack of support from Stellenbosch (as a matter of fact there was no social service) the officers resigned already after one year.



### Getting started at full speed

As from the appointment of a youth counselor one activity after the other has been organized at the youth centre. A huge soccer tournament was organized, a running club was set up, every Friday a pool competition is organized, four evenings a week there are some theatre, dance or hip hop courses. In time, the centre even intends to start with street theatre, thus boosting the young people's self-confidence. The youth counselor is also hoping to set up a training centre in one section of the premises. A course was given for young people on how to start up your own business. Therefore, it is nice to see that one of the participants recently started up her own day nursery. We are curious to see how many others will follow... Apart from training, the centre especially focuses on recreational activities and self-development. Sports constitute a rewarding activity in this respect. Not only technical skills are learned, but also social skills such as respect for one another, abiding by rules, hygiene,...

After the change of administration in 2006<sup>1</sup> there was another breakthrough. For example, the municipality initiated a consultation procedure for a youth council, however, this is still a fact only on paper. In 2009, a social department was established, being responsible for six soft themes, including youth. This department also ordered the local library to organize small-scale holiday and after-school activities for the first time. By the end of 2009 a youth counselor was appointed, especially for Franschhoek. His task consists of establishing a high-quality youth centre and following up its day-to-day operations. In time it is the intention to develop the youth centre into a real 'Youth Unit', where young people can go to for recreational activities, education and advice.

Establishing a youth centre requires some versatility from the youth counselor. There still is a great need for support from the city: further development of a youth service with its own personnel and budget. Currently, it is still covered by the social department, together with six other areas. Dilbeek was looking at ways to advise and support its partner on this issue. During a working visit of Stellenbosch to Dilbeek, the focus was on practical training: this approach turned out to be more effective than providing theoretical input. The South-Africans visited some thriving



youth centres in Belgium (Jeugd en Stad in Brussels, de Fabriek in Ghent, youth club Pulse in Ternat and so on) as to get an idea of the situation and context. Based on the principle 'learning by doing', the youth counselor followed a youth animator's course and a practical training at 'Jeugd en Stad', in Brussels.

This way Stellenbosch can take along ideas and impressions and adapt those to its own situation. During a joint meeting, they reviewed the youth policy in Dilbeek (playground project and youth initiatives) and 'rewrote' it to match the situation of Stellenbosch, including the necessary alternatives. In practice, a lending service for toys and games was set up so as to support the local playground project. In addition, some pc's are made available to job seekers at the youth centre. There still appears to be a need for further guidance though (training animators, agreements on the youth monitor's fees,...).

In 2010 a volunteer from Dilbeek<sup>2</sup> having experience in youth work went to Franschhoek to further develop the youth action plan together with the local officer. Of course such a practical training requires a proper preparation: briefing by the North-South service and the youth service with respect to the history of the collaboration between Dilbeek and Stellenbosch, youth work and prevention activities in South

Africa, possible tasks,.... During a visit of the youth counselor of Franschhoek to Belgium, the tasks of the volunteer were discussed with him and laid down into an agreement<sup>3</sup>. This was done as to make sure that the practical training meets the expectations of the South-African colleague.

### Working with AIDS

Considering the situation in Stellenbosch youth work is the perfect way to inform and train young people in various areas on participation at local level, in employment initiatives, drug prevention and prevention on HIV/AIDS,.... This latter issue remains a hot topic in Stellenbosch. As a matter of fact, the number of HIV infections appeared to have grown in the city. One

- 1 After the municipal elections in 2006 the ANC, Nelson Mandela's party, became the largest party of Stellenbosch. Therefore a lot of changes occurred in the civil service.
- 2 After a call for applications in the local press, the volunteer with the most relevant experience was chosen during a job interview (leader of Chiro (catholic youth organization), certificate of youth animator course, more than 5 years of experience as a volunteer in diverse institutions such as 'wereld-winkeljongeren' (youngsters in third world imports and information centres), Bouworde vzw and with vzw Project Malawi, holiday jobs in after-school centres and playground projects).
- 3 To this effect a model contract of JINT was used, a non-profit association that is directed by the Flemish government together with the Flemish youth work organizations. JINT has a very valuable experience in the field of preparation and assistance in youth exchanges. [www.jint.be](http://www.jint.be).



of the reasons for this situation can be attributed to the general South-African policy that especially focuses on medical assistance and hardly on prevention. The few preventative actions that are organized, no longer achieve the desired result. So it is just like banging one's head against a brick wall. Also in this area the city link tries to be of use. Together with some South-African and Belgian organizations and key figures from the community, Dil-

beek was searching for the most efficient prevention policy to match the situation in Stellenbosch. They completely changed their approach: they opt for increasing the self-confidence and knowledge on HIV/ AIDS and drugs with children and young people by means of recreational and information activities. In this way recreation is linked to education and prevention. Also in this respect the development of the youth centre is of the utmost importance.

## Lessons learned

### 📌 Listening to the partner city

When Dilbeek wanted to deal with HIV/AIDS prevention, some criticism was heard from Stellenbosch. Prevention is not a separate factor, but is linked to various other areas such as youth, sports – and leisure time activities. Furthermore it is not part of the tasks to be performed by the city, but it is a provincial competence. Through adequate consultation and dialogue, Dilbeek and Stellenbosch were searching for an alternative preventative approach tailored to the local reality. This way it is also possible to avoid initiatives from being installed on the basis of a Western point of view or that the provincial or national approach is not in line with the local reality. For a long time, there has been an overkill of AIDS prevention, so that the message no longer came through. Despite the negative echoes that there is hardly any prevention in South Africa by now, there are still a few organizations that are trying to break the taboo and sensitize the population by means of national campaigns. Two organizations, 'Love Life' and 'Lifelab' are operating in Franschhoek. These organizations have



changed tactics and now focus on training, animation, optimizing the services, working on social skills,.... The population, and especially the young people are made aware of the potential dangers of changing sexual relationships and possibly communicable diseases.

### 📌 **A city link needs time to develop**

The collaboration between Dilbeek and Stellenbosch has been developed with ups and downs. At a certain moment the city link was as good as non-existent. The Western Cape has the reputation of being a rich (wine) region, but there is a huge gap between the rich and the poor. Young people are a very vulnerable group within the region. That is why Dilbeek deemed it necessary to continue supporting and counseling its partner city to further develop the social issues, including a high-quality youth policy. And quite successfully, so it seems. The projects involved not always yield results that are immediately visible, but constitute rather long-term processes that are important to the young local administration. A city link is a fragile construction that needs solid foundations, in order to continue developing in a sustainable way. That is why it is extremely important to work at the pace of the partner city/municipality in order to develop a 'sound' partnership.

### 📌 **Solid political support**

The success of a city link depends on the people that are actively involved in it. Furthermore a solid political support is required as well as adequate staffing. In Dilbeek various municipal services have joined forces for the benefit of the city link project: the departments responsible for youth issues, the environment, prevention and the social service are working together. This way the partner city can rely on enhanced support and the policy capacity and governance is being reinforced.

[www.dilbeek.be](http://www.dilbeek.be) & [www.risdilbeek.be](http://www.risdilbeek.be)



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