

Digital Safari Handelsbeurs x Pulse x Live DMA 4th of February 2022 - recap of the talk

Live DMA and Pulse join forces with Handelsbeurs Concert Hall for a look behind the scenes, to explore their actions and plans for more sustainability, and dive into their ecological and social practices.

Take a look at the clip of **the sustainable story of Handelsbeurs**:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sESy1F95IKE&t=11s>

For this digital safari, we at Handelsbeurs bring three topics to the table: mobility, inclusiveness and network.

Mobility

Mobility is logically one of the more important aspects in the events and cultural sector, as there is a lot of transportation involved before and behind the scenes.

We believe in **Slow Travel** and try to promote this message to the public while taking measures on our own account.

- Handelsbeurs tries to reduce its footprint by choosing **bike rides and public transport**. We provide folding bikes for staff, which they use for meetings in the city and to bring with them for longer travels by train. For prospects within Europe, programmers try to fly less and choose to travel by train if the trip lasts max. one full day.
- For **tours**, we work together with colleagues across cities and countries, so artists don't have to fly over for one concert. Within the Europe Jazz Network we work on international mobility, called The '**Green Rider**'. Work in progress.
- The communication team has also made the choice to distribute flyers within the city with **Cargo Velo**.
- The public is also part of the conversation. We promote public transport and bike travel above the use of a car. We provide bike stands in front of the venue and are looking to increase the capacity. At big concerts the public can have **their bikes repaired during the show**.
- Ideas of our past:
 - We focused on promoting **carpooling** with the app Eventpool. The majority of our audience comes from Ghent itself and the surrounding area. So for us it is better to promote bike rides and public transport.
 - We had a deal with De Lijn (public transport company) to give a free pass to everybody with a concert ticket, to and from the concert. To pay for this, we asked a **solidarity price of +1.5euro** for every concert ticket. Cfr AB Concerts in Brussels who have a deal with NMBS (train company) to have a 50% reduction on transport.

Inclusiveness (ticketing, accessibility)

At Handelsbeurs we try to aim at achieving diversity in all its meanings. We are firm believers of the importance of representation on and off stage and make an effort to create space for other visions and ideas.

We believe that you can't do anything for people without them. So the conversations you have and involvement from the start are very important.

The term Inclusiveness has a lot of different branches.

- For programming, we think about the balance between female - male **on stage**, as well as a diversity in cultural backgrounds. We create space in our programme for others to fill it in, and create in depth relations with key figures of other cultural groups in the city, so we can support them to programme their music in our venue, which led to our Turkish festival, our feast for the moroccan community, our evening with roma musicians etc.
- This balance is also important **behind the scenes**. In our volunteers, in our staff, in our board. It's not always easy to get the right people, the right talent involved. To reach beyond your own network (which is quite white and mid-class). For instance, we tackle this in the way we put out job vacancies as well. We need more women, people of colour, people with disabilities, etc. in higher positions within the organization and in the public eye. This is an ongoing process.
- The third focus is being inclusive with **the public**, for instance with people with financial struggles and accessibility for people with physical challenges or disabilities.

Which we do at Handelsbeurs by:

- Introducing reduction rates for people who can't afford a ticket, having a system for this that is city-wide (**Uitpas-ticket** = 20% is paid by the public, 40% by the city, 40% by the venue).
- Having partnerships with social organizations. We were the first cultural venue in the city to partner with **Enchanté**. This is a social organization that works with people who fall out of the existing safety nets of society. They have a network of cafés, hairdressers etc where customers can donate a suspended coffee or haircut for someone who can't afford it. At Handelsbeurs people can buy a **suspended concert ticket for €7**. Challenge: to work with groups, have ambassadors, invite them for a tour around the building,... reach them correctly and earn their trust.
- But also being accessible for people with disabilities, which is often a very practical affair, making adjustments in the building etc.
 - We also wanted to make an extra effort in accessibility of the venue and the concerts. So at the moment, **for wheelchairs**, we provide a ramp to enter

the historical building and at standing sold out concerts we build a small stage at the back where people with wheelchairs can have a better line of sight. People who can't stand long due to medical reasons can ask beforehand for a barstool on a standing evening (max 10 bar stools per concert).

- We did research **with blind and visually impaired people** in our venue, where they would review the customer's journey of going to a concert at Handelsbeurs.
 - Website is built around the principles of **Anysurfel Label**, so that visually impaired people can order themselves online.
 - Working with the **European Disability Card** (as an organization free to join) to give reductions. We discussed which discount was actually preferred with the people with a disability. The result was a discount of 80% on the ticket price for every person guiding a person with a European Disability Card.
 - Also ribbed tiles at the top of staircases in the venue, and guiding lights for the visually impaired have become important. A lot has to do with the architecture of the venue, which takes time and money to plan. But there are some things you can do easily, such as painting key places in the venue, like elevators and the entrance to the toilets, in a contrasting color.
- Working on:
 - lowered counters at the box office or the bar for people in wheelchairs. + A permanent ramp in front of the building.
 - and so on.

Network

Of course there is an overlap within the topics of today. But as mentioned, at Handelsbeurs we try to form sustainable relations with partners and use our network to endorse good practices and create win-win situations.

We have a small and driven team of 15 people, organizing 120 concerts per season and combining this with the rental of the venue. We don't have a lot of time to spare. That's why we are always looking for new ways to join forces with a wide range of (non-music) organizations and institutions to share knowledge and workload, and enforce each other in this way.

Our main partners (for programming):

- **De Centrale** is another venue in the city specialized in global sounds. With them we organize the annual Istanbul Ekspres Festival, around the Turkish music scene.
- Fixed annual partners like **Jazzlab or Zonzo Compagnie**, which provide bands that tour through the country with a stop at our venue.
- Also we make space in our programme to give full reign to certain **curators and organizations** to provide a programme for certain audiences we can't reach ourselves.
- and so on.

These are the main networks we work with:

- **Europe Jazz Network**, where our artistic director Wim Wabbes is president of. It unites jazz clubs and festivals all over Europe and brings to light themes such as green touring, gender balance within the music scene, creating opportunities for young talent across the borders,...
- Two years ago the **Ghent Arts Network (GKO)** was launched, which provides a new dynamic within the city. They try to unite everyone who contributes to the artistic imagination of the city, institutions as well as individuals, with a special focus on increasing cultural diversity (focus on hiring, creation, audience and programming) and durability. They are practical and action driven and really connect people. Which feels like a breath of fresh air.
 - For example, the different cultural venues of the city paid artists from their network to join GKO in a marathon project where they collected money for the poor and where you could call the artists for free to just talk and get a song or a poem. You could also call them for somebody else as a gift and they would go to the streets of the outer city to give break dance performances or poem recitals at the door.
- On a city scale **Greentrack** unites cultural organizations to reduce their ecological footprint with group buyings and sharing green ideas. Since we joined, every year we analyze our green footprint based on numbers and we can see where we score on a city scale. We are on the board of Greentrack as well, so we try to contribute with ideas and stay on top of the things that can be done. Greentrack became part of GKO.

Addition: Within Handelsbeurs we work as horizontally as possible. There are different thematic groups that meet every 2-3 months, where we decide on topics like 'work and organization', 'durability and diversity', 'programme and communication', 'infrastructure' and so on. Every team member can join the groups to introduce new topics. Every group has its own annual and long term plan and a person who guides the group.

Thanks for listening/reading!

If you want more info about how we work or want to share ideas, contact the team directly via <https://www.handelsbeurs.be/en/contact>