Customer case
Harelbeke

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Harelbeke demonstrates that smart city projects are feasible for all cities

Harelbeke is one of the forerunners when it comes to the concept of smart cities. However, as a smaller city, Harelbeke does not have the resources that Flemish cities such as Antwerp, Ghent or others enjoy. Nevertheless, they are managing just fine and finding the right balance, mainly thanks to a fairly far-reaching technological standardization, good consultation between government and administration and by getting down to work. The objective is to be able to support more policy decisions with more data. To this end, they are collaborating with Inetum-Realdolmen – a collaboration that fits in perfectly with the practicable and affordable way of working that Harelbeke has opted for.

Focus on mobility

Frederik Hellyn, ICT manager at Harelbeke, explains the significance of mobility: "As in many cities and towns, mobility is a concept that is a crucial element when it comes to smart city projects. Among other things, we too want to be able to manage traffic better, make larger parts of the city car-free, have fewer paved streets and make school environments safer. In doing so, we are working towards a city that we want to make more attractive as a whole. Harelbeke in its current form is a little too much of a transit city, so we want to get passers-by to stop here more often to discover our city."

The reason the city opted for a smart city project was due to renovation work in the city center. Frederik Hellyn: "The market square of Harelbeke was recently redesigned. This project also involved streamlining traffic with parking guidance, among other things. For this purpose, we first of all mapped out the parking behavior in and around the market. Together with Inetum-Realdolmen, we opted for a flexible solution with cameras rather than a sensor per parking space. This is because we can use smart cameras for all sorts of other applications. That way we also only have to provide a connection once." The cameras do more than detect parking spaces. They monitor the traffic in the street and provide insights into when it is busy or not. It also provides a basis for developing a camera network for safety in the city.

"To better manage traffic around the market, we will soon launch a smart parking system. Parking signs will indicate how many free parking spaces are left. This

will allow us to prevent citizens from driving around unnecessarily in search of a free parking space. There is also a dead-end street at the market in which a school is located. Too many cars drove into the street, realized there was no parking space, and then maneuvered out again. This is a situation we wanted to avoid with all those children in the area."

"We commissioned Inetum-Realdolmen to take on this project because they are experts in smart city projects, they think along with the client and are also up to speed on the latest technologies. Our current plan is to map even more traffic flows in and around the city in terms of congestion, safety and the environment. We will soon be starting a project in which we will be using a camera and a bollard to prevent access to 'shortcuts'. Together with our mobility officer, we can then adjust plans if necessary or intervene at a later stage."

"With every project, it is important that the data generated remains the property of the city, that the application is always compatible with the other applications and that everything is future-proof."

FILIP HELLYN,
FINANCE POLICY OFFICER

Data as the basis for policy

Filip Hellyn, Harelbeke's finance policy officer, demonstrates the importance of data collection. "By using cameras and other sensors and analyzing the data they produce, the city government no longer has to rely solely on their gut feelings or on what is going on among citizens on social media when making some decisions. Thanks to such data, policy can be made based on concrete facts and figures."

Harelbeke is opening up its data itself and centralizing all data on Microsoft Azure for this purpose. "We collaborated with Inetum-Realdolmen to check whether the Microsoft cloud is GDPR compliant, and it is," says Filip Hellyn. "For an organization like our city, Microsoft does offer a good solution because it is relatively easy to manage. We can use it to affordably develop an entire smart city. We previously worked with Microsoft products such as Windows Server, SQL databases and Active Directory. Recently we added Office 365, Azure, Flow and Teams. The latter is earmarked to soon replace our telephone exchange."

Harelbeke now only has a few more guidelines to keep its smart city projects well under control. With every project, it is important that the data generated remains the property of the city and the application is always compatible with the Microsoft platform. A further requirement is that the city's own employees can also work on the hardware and software to a limited extent and carry out repairs. This keeps the projects affordable.

A bond of trust through different projects

The collaboration with Inetum-Realdolmen started years ago within the context of a framework agreement that was originally drawn up by Kortrijk and which other cities and municipalities were subsequently allowed to join. Frederik Hellyn: "Things are going well and we have established a trusting relationship since then, so we continue to make use of their services within this agreement. We started a second process about three years ago when we decided it was time to switch to the cloud for our email traffic. Inetum-Realdolmen was able to show that using the full Office 365 package, and not just the email functions, could be an interesting option. We took their advice and gradually standardized on Microsoft's products. That turned out to be a good decision. For analyses and reporting, Inetum-Realdolmen suggested using Power BI from Microsoft. Power BI is both practically and financially within our reach and is also very scalable and user-friendly. Again, we looked at whether the software would be future-proof.

Filip Hellyn: "We have already taken the first steps in terms of data collection and now we need to take it further. There are numerous possibilities both in terms of the city's policies and in terms of our residents. We want to let our own people do their job as best as possible. Externally, we want to communicate the smart city project to provide more transparency about governance. We will make more data accessible to our citizens. They too can then look for correlations and contribute to policy. In the meantime, we have started our next project by looking into the possibilities of sensors that measure air quality. And Inetum-Realdolmen will support us here as well."

"When making decisions, the city government no longer has to rely purely on a gut feeling or on what is going on among citizens on social media. Thanks to data from cameras and other sensors, we can implement policies based on concrete facts and figures."

**FREDERIK HELLYN,
ICT-MANAGER**

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

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