

DEPARTEMENT CULTUUR, JEUGD & MEDIA

ULTIMAS 2016
Flemish Culture Prizes
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Ultima 2016 Sociocultural Work with Adults

TOESTAND

Vacant spaces have a negative impact on the city. Not only because new commercial sites are opened elsewhere, but also because vacant sites lead the surrounding neighbourhoods into a spiral of dilapidation, which is associated with an increase in petty and more serious crime, and thus the feeling of insecurity, etc. The authorities are aware of this, and so try to tackle the problem with levies on vacant buildings and by awarding subsidies to projects that breathe new life into neglected sites. However, such subsidies are usually reserved for public social welfare centres and social housing projects.

The non-profit organisation Toestand is a grassroots initiative by local residents themselves. Allee du Kaai, for example, is a breeding ground and a platform in the city where ideas and initiatives arise and are implemented in practice, with close interaction between all parties involved. The occupation is non-invasive and non-aggressive, it is a positive statement. Vacant buildings are given a temporary purpose that serves the collective good. In this way, Toestand not only highlights the issue of vacant buildings in Brussels but also takes an original and positive approach to dealing with it.

Toestand's actions have the effect of a catalyst: they bring people into contact with sociocultural initiatives, they allow people to meet each other across dividing lines, they try to initiate a social dynamic in neighbourhoods that are written off by society, they involve the population in the creation of new public spaces... Toestand is a thorn in the side, that pushes forward squatting as a positive alternative, as a starting point for bottom-up renewal, for improvement...