

Program summary - Translation by Jiri Hladik, candidate no 35

Dear Leuvenaar,

With this election program, we want to make Leuven into one of the most caring, green and prosperous cities. We wrote an ambitious manifesto, counting 800 new ideas. To do so, we talked and discussed with hundreds of people at expert days and Mee Met Mo walks. I would like to thank all of them for sharing expertise and experience with us, so that we can make Leuven a city ready for the future.

This text also summarises what Leuven is and must stay for us: an open and connected city with many opportunities and where people get possibilities to get ahead.

I want to be a mayor for everyone, no exceptions. Leuven must grow further into a green empowering city where diversity is a force. In Leuven we care for each other, in openness and solidarity.

People are the solution, not the problem. I believe in a city where you work together for the future, with everyone who feels involved. Time and time again I see that this works. We have to use each talent in our city to come up with smart solutions.

These times demand a mayor who connects, not divides, who can, in a firm fashion, bring everyone together and get them to cooperate to make Leuven even better. That's only possible if we consciously choose for an open and connected city, away from polarisation and with attention for everyone. My team and I guarantee this to you.

Mohamed Ridouani

Housing: a home for everyone

Leuven grows by 1,000 inhabitants a year and that puts the housing market under pressure. In the next years, we must use all means available to the city to make Leuven accessible and affordable for everyone. We want that all generations can find housing in Leuven: families with children, the young, seniors... And we want that the many singles can find an affordable place tailored for them. There is need for more social housing and more efforts for the group just outside of eligibility. We see this need as a stimulus to be innovative and to present new solutions.

The space in Leuven is scarce as it is in high demand for housing, shops, business, open spaces etc. This specific situation requires its own creative solutions. Key issue is the use of scarce land to make sure that we utilise it as well as possible. Increasing housing density smartly only works if public space around is sufficiently large and green enough, so that everyone can breathe.

We have learned our lessons from the past; the efforts of recent years have produced results. In the last twenty years, we have caught up enormously by investing heavily in order

to satisfy the demand as much as possible. Many houses have sprung up and numerous housing projects are still in the pipeline.

We want to make as many houses as possible available for families. The city intervenes by putting a halt to dividing family houses into student rooms, by stimulating a controlled growth in student rooms in new projects in close cooperation with the university and by quality checks of existing student rooms. The growing offer on the apartment market brought about that apartment prices are below the average of Flemish big cities.

In the meantime, the city has gained experience with budget housing and innovative housing. But that has not solved the problems yet. Housing remains one of the most important challenges of Leuven.

Although we heavily depend in housing policy on the Flemish and federal governments, we do not accept the high housing prices. Leuven must be a city for everyone, irrespective of income. From Leuven we keep insisting that the housing policy is changed.

Mobility and road safety

Biking safely, walking in clean air, many spaces to meet up... A healthy city of human dimension. By implementing the traffic flow plan in the city centre we made a big step to more space and safety for pedestrians and cyclists; the car traffic is better organised and several parts of the city have limited car access, but there is still space for improvement. We want to improve life quality and road safety also in the other city districts.

Care & Well-being: strong together

Each person has a right to good care. In a city where we care for each other, everyone has access to affordable and good health care, personal care and help. This can only be achieved by strong cooperation on all levels and with all possible partners. In order to fulfil our vision of a caring city, we actively enquire the Leuvenaars' needs on care and well-being. We discuss as often as possible with all actors in the care and well-being sectors in the Leuven region, but also with Leuvenaars themselves. We work together with new citizens' and inhabitants' initiatives to operate as broadly as possible. Both in central Leuven and in each outer district, we bring care to the highest level.

Our goal is to make Leuven Flanders' city of care where everyone finds the fitting care.

In finding the fitting care, we place the person into the centre of attention. We oppose the trend where also in care everything has to be faster, cheaper, large-scale and where the human aspect disappears into the background. We opt for strong public care which everyone can receive when necessary. Because each of us needs care at a certain moment in life. From birth care and child care, doctors, physiotherapists and hospitals to home and senior care. In Leuven we want public care that is hospitable: everyone is welcome with their request and everyone can receive care to which they have right. The doors of the care offered in Leuven are open for everyone.

One cannot leave services like human care to the whims of the market; it is shared societal responsibility. Commercialisation of public services in our neighbouring countries leads to ever less service for the citizen for a higher price. In our view, there is no place for profit thinking in the care and well-being sectors which mostly work with seniors, children and the most vulnerable people in our society. Even the so-called „socialisation“ of care in order to achieve savings is not an option. Our care must be, above all, good, affordable and accessible. That is why we must invest again, and more, in our public services, such as health care, senior care, child care and education, on the basis of a social vision of solidarity. Without long waiting lists, without conditions, without barriers. Real public care.

Equal opportunities and fight against poverty

Poverty is injustice, not a choice. This is why the fight against poverty is an absolute policy priority for sp.a Leuven. We have to use all the opportunities that the city has under its control to continue this fight. An integrated approach in reducing poverty is crucial. We propose an ambitious plan tackling poverty based on permanent monitoring in the neighbourhoods.

We want to give additional opportunities to people in poverty, so that they can participate in society: we make people stronger and to focus on those who lost their way or are at risk of losing support and help. The fight against poverty, especially against child poverty, is a policy priority and that is why it will receive support in the budget. Each euro invested in the fight against poverty has many times higher return later. The tackling of child poverty also goes hand in hand with a strong family policy.

Education

We, Leuven Socialists, believe strongly in the power of high-quality balanced education. Education offers people a perspective for a good life in which they can make choices autonomously. We want to enable and support in Leuven, the education city par excellence, a varied and high-quality offer of education establishments, forms and initiatives.

We believe in the fundamental equality of all people and we see education as the ideal context to accentuate and develop it among the (younger) citizens of our city. In doing so, we see diversity in all its appearances in our contemporary society as a strength. In addition, we make efforts to make space in Leuven's schools for topics like international solidarity, peace and the art of living together.

We only achieve high-quality education where each pupil gets all opportunities to develop one's talents only by cooperating with all those involved: teachers, headmasters, parents, childcare staff, pupils... This is why we further promote „Samen Onderwijs Maken“ (SOM, Making Education Together), a network where all partners are represented.

The city can play a supporting and steering role in a number of areas where coordination is necessary in order to guarantee and stimulate changes of all Leuven's children and youth. Each pupil must be able to make a fitting choice of school and field of study. We stimulate coordination among school managers in order to harmonise the programming of fields of study with the pupils' needs. In its directing role, the city also negotiates with the Flemish government to receive extra funding, so that we can guarantee a good school for each child.

Sustainable city

In the coming decades, we face the challenge to evolve into a sustainable and carbon-free society. By 2030, we want to make Leuven one of the livable European cities, with clean air, a lot of green and water, and sustainable energy. We already won the European Green Leaf Award, a prestigious climate prize, for all the efforts made by all of the city to achieve this ambition. We turn Leuven greener, we work on sustainable mobility and make big efforts in energy production and consumption. 60 % of Leuven's CO2 emissions come from buildings. The lower the energy consumption, the lower our emissions. And the lower the costs.

Throughout our program, we propose how we can realise this in a socially responsible fashion. In this chapter, we focus specifically on energy, buildings, consumption, agriculture, and green and water in the city. However, it worth explicitly referring to the mobility chapter. After all, traffic generates 25 % of emissions on Leuven's territory; therefore, a shift to sustainable means of transport is necessary to achieve the transition.

Families with young children

Everyone want the best for their child. All children deserve all chances. In Leuven, your future counts, not your origin. Each child in our city must be able to live to the fullest and develop itself, be able to discover what his or her strengths are. Parents must be able to rely on this. For this reason, the quality of our child care, education from kindergarten to university, and of our public spaces so important.

Youth

At the end of 2017, Leuven won a prize as a youth city of Flanders. There is a lot in motion with the teenagers in Leuven. MijnLeuven supports the teenagers' own projects. In this way, the Leuven youth can have ownership of their city. We have to continue and expand these supporting policies. In this support, the outreaching youth work plays an essential role in order to reach each teenager. The right support will expose a lot of talented teenagers and divers youth cultures will arise which will to a great extent determine Leuven's identity.

Besides these projects that arise bottom-up and which often grow into new networks and associations, we may not forget about the classical youth associations. The need for infrastructure, means and support is large there, too. Sport and culture associations, youth houses and youth movements still make up the largest part of teenagers' leisure activities.

More space is needed for the youth – space where everyone can discover their talents, but can also just relax. Thanks to the traffic flow plan and the car-free city centre, a lot of usable public space becomes available. This offers many opportunities. In addition, interesting buildings are vacant in Leuven. There is a big need for more indoor public spaces in our city where everyone can have their way. These spaces have to be meeting places, furnished, equipped and decorated by the teenagers themselves.

There is also more space needed to organise events, performances and parties. The city can provide more affordable halls and offer more support, both in financial, material and organisation terms. In addition, the city can encourage organisations and help them in their search for fitting locations and moment and help them in dealing with other challenges. In this way the organisers will feel appreciated in Leuven. The nightlife will get a boost by an increased offer of party halls. A varied nightlife is as important for the city culture as museums.

There is a large student population in Leuven. They contribute to making Leuven a bubbly city. We make sure that students feel involved in the city and encourage them to participate.

Work, business & tourism

A well-functioning city is a precondition for economic prosperity. There is a lot in motion in Leuven. Since a number of years, the atmosphere feels more like what you would expect in cities like Copenhagen or Barcelona. Think of Hal 5, a new meeting place in Kessel-Lo, or De Smidse, an indoor food market at the Vaartkom where also the new Sluispark has become Leuvenaars' favourite place. Also, restaurants, bars and shops are busy experimenting with new concepts. Coffee and design in one shop, a packaging-free shop, crafts markets...

The Leuven economy evolves into one of the strongest, most international and innovative ones of Flanders with engines like the KU Leuven university, UZ Leuven hospital, imec nano-electronics centre, AB InBev brewery and a host of high-tech and creative businesses. We have united these important economic actors into Leuven MindGate, where a fruitful interaction among them can arise. In this way, our city strengthens also its European appeal in this field.

Public spaces and city development

In the past decades, Leuven's appearance has changed dramatically. Old industrial sites like the Vaartkom and the Centrale Werkplaatsen have been transformed into modern and pleasant residential areas with enough space for green, water and meeting. This is our vision how the city has to develop further: increase housing density in a smart way and grow inwards where possible in order to respond to the housing demand. We do this with a lot of attention for the public space and sufficient infrastructure, such as shops, schools, child care, sport facilities, meeting places... We continue investing heavily into this.

Beautiful and enjoyable public space improves the quality of housing, working, shopping and living together: it determines how hard people want to be at a certain place. We want that our streets and squares are safe, welcoming, attractive and lively.

Leisure, art and culture

Creativity is the buzzword of the 21st century, in all its meanings. Creative people are capable of getting involved in a future-oriented way to improve and innovate. Artistic creativity generates astonishment and imagination. The power of imagination – the connection between art and culture, science, entrepreneurship and education – is the engine of our progress. At the same time, we pay attention to participation in culture, we use culture as an amplifier; each inhabitant must be able to participate in the city's cultural life. This culture participation has to be one of the pillars of the Capital of Culture project.

Leuven's cultural heritage is a unique strength. All of these give the city an international outreach: beautiful buildings including the town hall and the Groot Begijnhof, the culture of giants and the Jaartallen, association of people born in the same year.

Leuven hosts lots of associations which are the city's rich resource. They spring up as never before which at the same time poses a challenge: space. We are looking for solutions to make new space available and to stimulate associations to share space.

The Leuven music scene deserve all the support, too. In Het Depot, Leuven has a music house that is home to many new talents. These talented people have to get a stage for the many events.

These events and the nightlife give the city a dynamic atmosphere. Yet, we have to be careful not to overburden certain neighbourhoods, without jeopardising the city's appearance and atmosphere.

Sport and movement

The busy everyday family life makes it difficult to include enough physical exercise. Nonetheless, it's incredibly important to move sufficiently. We feel fitter, have a higher well-being, more energy... Sport brings people together, in sport associations and events or just in the street and the playing field. Everyone benefits from movement and sport; this is why we set up initiatives in the entire city – in the centre, in the playing fields, the other city districts and social housing sites. Since sport and movement are so important, they have to be affordable for everyone, accessible and available in the neighbourhood.

As city, we can take an active pioneering role in several respects.

Living together and diversity

A society that gives room to dialogue and meeting and that cherishes openness and empathy between the various communities and cultures is stronger and more futureproof.

We bring people together by creating strong neighbourhoods, by sport and culture nearby and by green and meeting spaces. People know each other and feel at home in their neighbourhood, however varied and diverse their neighbours are.

The city has a lead-by-example function in this area, not only in its staff policy, but also in its image and communication. An important task of the city is to support and appreciate inhabitants and initiatives that contribute to making diversity a strength.

Our society does not stop at city or country limits. We show solidarity also in the international context by practising development cooperation. In this way we work for a better world.

Prevention and safety

Safety is a fundamental human and social right. 97 % of all Leuvenaars feel safe in Leuven and in their neighbourhood. We have to keep it that way. The hard safety (maintaining public order, rules, cameras...) goes hand in hand with soft safety (furbishing public spaces, green, people in the streets through events, social security, community building by citizen associations...). We have achieved a lot in both areas. In the future, we will increase investment into safety with a focus on the human factor. We wish to extend our police force and to solidify cooperation with all involved actors.

Also other policy areas in which the city and the social centre OCMW are active contribute to safety in a preventive way. For example, under the mobility heading, 30 km/h zone, building bike paths and bike streets and moving car traffic from the city centre to the ring road through the loop system are also safety measures. The waste and tidiness management counteract garbage in the streets and illegal waste dumping, which often increase the feeling of insecurity. Housing policy measures prevent burglary and theft. Youth and sport

policies keep teenagers occupied in a positive manner. These and other domains contribute to safety in an integral way.

Public services and citizen participation

The growing complexity of urban issues brings about that cooperation is not a matter of choice but of necessity. We embrace it happily and with conviction. The policy for the future will be done with the entire community: inhabitants, organisations, institutions, businesses, other public authorities... with attention for each target group. The government authority remains crucial as rule giver and guardian of the common interest, but it is no longer the only actor.

This is why we must step up these cooperations and the connections between different actors. Not only exchanges among citizens or organisations themselves are necessary, but also between different groups.

We will achieve this by setting up various cooperation platforms, by stimulating active participation and by ensuring that we are close to the people.

We can increase the inhabitants' life quality and solve problems more efficiently also by using smart technologies. The following unique strengths are the other factors for succeeding in making Leuven a Smart City: the student population, the presence of world-class knowledge institutions, the compact city centre with opportunities for meeting, the presence of pioneers in open innovation and our role as a real regional hub city and point of reference for a number of services in the region.

Seniors

Many people over 60 are active inhabitants who enjoy their free time and want to contribute to their neighbourhoods with knowledge and experience. That's an enormous wealth for Leuven.

People stay in a healthy condition for a longer share of their lives, so that they can also live longer active lives. We want to give them all the opportunities for that. Leuven wants to be a city friendly to all age groups. We want to support seniors to live independently in their own homes and familiar surroundings as long as possible.

We want to support the participation of seniors. The provision of appropriate housing, stimulation of social contacts, availability of accessible infrastructure and care for age-friendly refurbishing of public spaces are all important in this context.

Each senior must receive the care that fits them best. At home, in day care, a homecare centre or elsewhere, without a waiting list and in their own home city. In order to be able to maintain this care, a varied offer of care is necessary with seamless and flexible transitions between short-term and long-term care forms.

Animal welfare

Leuven carries out policies friendly to animals. Pets are family members and are seen with love. But still sometimes things go wrong. We want to prevent and limit all harmful situations as much as possible.

Accessibility

Everyone, with or without a handicap, must be able to fully participate in the life of the city. That starts with adjusted housing that is affordable and continues to areas, such as mobility, sport, culture and business.