



IXELLES & ITS TWIN CITIES

Bonds of friendship and solidarity across
borders and through the ages



**Ixelles
Elsene**



Biarritz



Kalamu Matonge

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About Ixelles

A few words by Christos Doulkeridis, Mayor of Ixelles



The portrait of our municipality is painted in a thousand colours. Ixelles is a municipality in perpetual change with 170 nationalities, a human diversity which makes its richness, a formidable cultural offer, a pleasant living environment, a real economic and commercial dynamic, a rare district life in an urban setting, several universities and schools, etc. Cultural exchanges are part of its DNA and are its strength.

I think it is essential to go and see what is going well elsewhere and to share our achievements with others for mutual enrichment. So all networks, or all forms of networks, are positive, because they allow us to see further and to get rid of the impression that we have reality and truth on our side. It also allows us to realize that often we are not alone in having faced certain problems.

In its project, the Board of Mayor and Aldermen wants, in addition to promoting cultural exchanges via schools, associative and artistic projects, to continue to strengthen North/South cooperation. We wish to encourage a new way of exchange. For example, by organising donation campaigns in schools in order to collect non-perishable products, with the help of associations and NGOs. Then, among other projects, we also want to recover decommissioned professional equipment from public services (administration, first aid service, etc.) in order to donate it to the countries with which we collaborate.

During more than 60 years, wonderful projects have been born from our twinning projects. The variety of actions shows how essential this practice is at the level of our municipality. It shows us every day that democracy is enriched by diversity.

Christos Doulkeridis,
Mayor

For an inclusive, multicultural and open municipality !



Since the start of my political engagement, I have always endeavoured to fight against all kinds of discrimination and inequalities, and also to promote dialogue and cultural diversity which are, in my eyes, Ixelles's greatest wealth.

Throughout my personal and professional life and from a very early age, I have been confronted with racism and injustice which have led me to embody the values of sharing, meeting other cultures and solidarity.

It is therefore with great interest and true passion that I embraced my new responsibilities as Alderman in charge of Twinning and International Cooperation in the autumn of 2013.

Young people and sports being my main priorities, I am very pleased today to be involved in international exchange projects and to help encourage our municipality and its citizens to have an openness to the world.

Indeed, the overall results of the collaborations we developed over the years with our various partners are more than positive and are a source of mutual enrichment and inspiration both for educational, political and community-based stakeholders and for the young generation of Ixelles and elsewhere.

In the future, I therefore want to maintain the bonds of friendship and the networking dynamics that have been initiated with our twinning partners - Biarritz, Kalamu, Zababdeh and Megiddo – as well as with the community-based sector in Ixelles, or even other cities and municipalities worldwide, for example the urban municipality of Mali in Guinea-Conakry.

Furthermore, I believe the encouragement of cultural and youth exchanges or the sharing of practices, as well as the continuation of our cooperation activities benefiting the populations in the South, are the cornerstone of town-twinning. These projects are, indeed, unique opportunities to promote mutual discovery and understanding and to stimulate active citizenship, but also to strengthen solidarity and tolerance and in this way social cohesion and peace between peoples.

Twinning makes our municipality more open, more humane and more united and so I hope our twinning projects will continue for many years to come!

Bea Diallo,

Alderman in charge of Twinning and International Cooperation

Ixelles, a multi-faceted municipality

A stylized orange world map is positioned in the upper right background. A red location pin is placed over the region of Belgium, indicating the location of Ixelles.

Portrait of Ixelles

Ixelles is one of the 19 municipalities of the bilingual region of Brussels Capital. It extends over 6.34 km² and has nearly 85,000 inhabitants.

Its most ancient history scarcely distinguishes it from that of many villages which, in the Middle Ages, formed a sort of "crown" around the main cities.

There is considerable evidence of the Belgian architects' genius, whether it dates from the Middle Ages (La Cambre Abbey and its magnificent church) or from today. The private residences from Horta or Blérot rank alongside public buildings in terms of aesthetics (for example, the former National Broadcasting Institute that became the Maison de la Radio – Place Flagey, the "école des Etangs" ...).

Since the 19th century, Ixelles has been the centre of intense cultural activity due in part to the presence of political refugees fleeing from censorship or the police in their countries of origin. Welcoming, open, eager for innovation and progress, our municipality has also become an avant-garde place for Belgian artists from all disciplines. Rarely has such a small area housed so many innovators in disciplines as varied as dance, music, plastic arts, literature, theatre and cinema.

The presence of two world-famous universities (ULB and VUB) in Ixelles also contributes to the vitality of this cultural tradition: the high quality of the education which is provided and of the research which is carried out attract the best minds just as strongly as the freedom of thought which constitutes its philosophical basis.

Today, Ixelles is also synonymous with major events and places of novel cultural discovery. Examples of this are the Jazz Marathon which enlivens our streets and caresses our ears each spring; the Ixelles Museum – that will reopen in 2023, larger and more modern than ever – with a collection of artworks that contains more than 12,000 pieces by great artists (Berthe Morisot, Constant Permeke, Paul Delvaux, Gaston Bertrand, Picasso, Magritte, Toulouse-Lautrec ...); Boondael Chapel, dedicated to the diffusion of the works created by young Brussels artists; or even the intense activity at entertainment venues such as the Marni, Mercelis, Varia, Molière or la Toison d'Or theatres. Last but not least, the various movie theaters: UGC, Vendôme, Kinograph ...

Of course, these institutions and this intense cultural life exist within a particularly dense economic and social fabric. Some large, many medium-sized and a host of small companies have replaced the breweries of the past centuries. Crafts and trade remain the backbone of our economic activity, to which has been added, for over twenty years, the very important service sector.

One very characteristic example of this commercial dynamism is the district of the Porte de Namur, which also has a large number of associations. Today, this colourful district exudes a very specific charm. Here you will hear many languages being spoken, eat as if you were in Africa or Asia, and see all the colourful clothes ... This neighbourhood of the Haut d'Ixelles now discourages the use of cars while increasing the quality of life.

Today, Ixelles is home to a great many different nationalities and has a foreign population of more than 45%. Our fellow citizens live their different lives whilst showing mutual respect towards others and curiosity in discovering them. Alongside the headquarters of the European Parliament, the democratic centre of the developing European Union, there is room for district-sized groups that make up such a rich fabric of community life, one which has gradually become aware of its importance and its citizenship mission.

The Board of Mayor and Aldermen



The Department of Twinning and International Cooperation

The Department of Twinning and International Cooperation was initially created to manage the exchange activities with the city of Biarritz, our first historical twinning.

Over time, and particularly in recent years when new partners have come to enrich the bonds of friendship that our municipality maintains with other entities throughout the world, the department's activities have significantly changed and have been greatly diversified.

Indeed, this diversification reflects the growing importance of the development of partnership dynamics between local authorities in the eyes of the United Nations and the European Union.

Currently, the Department of Twinning and International Cooperation carries out three main missions:

- **Relationships and project development with the four twin towns:** the municipality of Ixelles is twinned with the municipalities of Biarritz/France (1959), Kalamu/DRC (2003), Zababdeh/Palestine (2003) and Megiddo/Israel (2012). Many projects are developed every year in close collaboration with each partner. Moreover, the department offers the population of Ixelles the opportunity to get support for projects or activities with our four twinning partners.
- **International cooperation:** the municipality of Ixelles is undertaking development cooperation projects with its two partners from the "South", namely Kalamu in DRC and Zababdeh in Palestine. Since January 2019, the municipality of Ixelles has been developing an international cooperation dynamic with the urban municipality of Mali in Guinea-Conakry.
- **Global citizenship and solidarity education:** organization of events and activities raising awareness on international solidarity for the population of Ixelles and our international partners; but also collaboration with primary and secondary schools situated in the municipal territory.



Would you like to know more about our activities, develop an exchange or solidarity project or apply for subsidies?
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The Twinning and International Cooperation team

Biarritz, a friendship of over 60 years !



Portrait of Biarritz

Located on the Basque Coast in France, Biarritz is universally known today.

This seaside resort, with a surface area of 11.66 km² and more than 25,000 inhabitants, welcomes its visitors "with open arms". It offers natural assets and a range of varied activities, whilst keeping its element of mystery for those who know how to enjoy its places, culture and history.

Biarritz was little more than a little fishing harbour throughout the Middle Ages when the course of its history changed dramatically in the 19th century when the imperial couple Napoleon III and Eugénie de Montijo transformed it into a popular seaside resort. Salt water baths continue to prove their value to this day with thalassotherapy and fitness centres increasing in numbers. The story is well-known. Afterwards, Biarritz became a leading destination for European sovereigns, celebrities and socialites, who are now joined or succeeded by theatre, music and even television stars... In 1843, Victor Hugo, charmed by *"this white village with its red roofs and green shutters, set on crops of grass"* already anticipated that Biarritz would become fashionable.

Aware of its touristic assets, Biarritz gladly unveils them to its visitors. They include a magical seaside from the Pointe Saint- Martin to the "Basque Coast", along the "Grande Plage" ("the Queen of beaches"); the Old Port in its cove; the unusual "Fishing Port"; and an architectural heritage protected by a remarkable diversity, as well as many historic sites and attractive museums, such as the Imperial Chapel, the "Asiatica" Museum of Oriental Art, the Lighthouse, the Sea Museum and the splendid "Cit  de l'Oc an", inaugurated in 2011.

Biarritz can be proud of its dynamic cultural life. Noteworthy events include the "Festival International de Programmes Audiovisuels" (FIPA) which brings together several thousands of spectators, as well as over 3,000 professionals each year in January and during which 500 unreleased audio-visual programs are presented; the " Festival des Cin mas et cultures d'Am rique latine " at the end of September, which also attracts a considerable number of visitors; and the "Centre chor graphique national" and its dance company "Ballet Biarritz", whose creations and talent have crossed borders and oceans and who are highly appreciated here in Ixelles as well and will be invited to perform here again. Dance is also celebrated during "Le temps d'aimer", a yearly festival which welcomes the grand international companies in a subtle balance of classic and contemporary; and in 2009 and 2014 Ixelles welcomed the *Oldarra* and *Itsasoa* Basque choirs whose powerful, stirring songs resonated through La Cambre Abbey.

Biarritz is also an internationally-renowned sports venue. It is one of the most beautiful destinations in Europe, with its "Le Phare" golf course, in the heart of the city, the "Centre international d'Ilbarritz" next to the beach, and nine other greens within a radius of 30 kilometres. Surfing, a spectacular sport imported from Hawaii, has flourished here, thanks to the extreme variety of "spots". We must also mention the "Biarritz Olympique Pays Basque" (BOPB) rugby team which won an impressive series of French rugby championship titles in 2002, 2005 and 2006. Sports in Biarritz also include tennis, horseback riding and, of course, Basque pelota with its dozens of specialties ... the most spectacular being "cesta punta" which combines strength, finesse and elegance.



Origin and history of the twinning



In order to consolidate peace and build Europe, the first twinning projects brought German and French municipalities together as of 1950. In the mind of its architects, it was supposed to reflect everyone's concerns and interests and to create and develop bonds of friendship between the inhabitants of the twinned municipalities, thus committing them to play an active role in the construction of a united Europe. Encouraged by the Council of Europe as of 1956, this movement quickly spread, including in Belgium.

Ixelles quickly followed this recommendation: during a deliberation on 28 January 1958, the municipal council unanimously voted to twin the municipality with the city of Biarritz.

A priori, however, nothing predestined these two cities, so very different both in terms of their geographic location and their demography, to be united. It was, in fact, the friendship between three citizens, two French and one Belgian, which was behind this initiative:

Edouard CAILLAU: A "Biarrot" established in Brussels who hosted magnificent shows at the famous cabaret "Chez Paul, au Gaity";

André DASSARY: A famous singer from Biarritz and very well-known in Belgium where he performed many times;

Tony VANDEN BOSCH: A merchant from Ixelles whose wife was originally from the Basque region.

Together, they were able to convince **Charles JANSSENS**, Deputy Mayor of Ixelles and pioneer of the European construction (he was one of the Belgian representatives at the European Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg) and **Guy PETIT**, Senator and Mayor of Biarritz, to commit to the twinning process. At a ceremony organized in the Basque city on **5 September 1959**, they made the solemn commitment to permanently join their municipalities.

Summary of more than sixty years of exchanges

Contrary to other municipalities that would limit their twinning projects to exchanges between municipal councillors, Ixelles and Biarritz have always wanted to develop lively relations and **concrete projects involving their respective inhabitants**. To this effect, multiple and highly varied exchanges have been organised over the last sixty years as part of this twinning project.

Among them, specific attention has been devoted to the **youth exchange programmes** which is, in our opinion, the best way of ensuring the continuity of the twinning project. Municipal officials have always considered that it was through young people that the spirit of the European unity, an essential goal of twinning projects, could best be materialised. Moreover, from 1962 to 2020, more than 2,000 young people from the two twinned cities have benefited from these exchanges. Progressively integrating specific themes (for example: health, sport, water, the environment ...), today these projects have taken on an educational and awareness-raising dimension that is considered essential for the development of an active citizenship.

Among the young people who have taken part in these exchanges, there are many who, now as parents or grandparents, have continued to visit Biarritz or Ixelles, as these exchanges allowed them to form deep bonds of friendship with their neighbours.

Throughout these sixty years of friendship, many other projects have been developed, in particular exchanges of sports, cultures and practices. Amongst the most original we may quote: the arrival of a delegation of police officers from Biarritz in 1990 who were assigned to regulate the traffic around the Porte de Namur; the bicycle journey to Biarritz of several municipal employees from Ixelles in 1999; the organisation of a Biarritz fair on the Avenue de la Toison d'Or in 2009 for the fiftieth anniversary of our union; the project of an international theatrical event carried out by young people from Biarritz and Ixelles under the direction of the internationally renowned Mexican film director Guillermo Navarro and lastly, the organisation of rural Basque sports games on the Place Flagey in July 2019.



Kalamu and both our Matonge districts

Portrait of Kalamu

Kalamu is one of the 24 municipalities that make up the city and province of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Kalamu River, from which it draws its name, runs through its entire length. With a surface area of 6.60 km², this municipality is comprised of 18 administrative districts among which we find, notably, the district of Matonge.

This urban municipality has a population of approximately 180,000 inhabitants for a surface area similar to that of the municipality of Ixelles, which means that it has a very high population density (27,273 inhabitants/km²). Moreover, Kinshasa is currently one of the most populated conglomerations in the French-speaking world, like Paris and other cities such as Dakar or Montreal.

The main languages spoken in Kalamu are French, the official language of the DRC, as well as Lingala which is one of the many Bantu languages spoken throughout the whole country.

The Kalamu municipal administration employs more than 500 agents and officials. They are both centralised and decentralised: centralised by the action of different departments which make up the administration, and decentralised by the real synergy which exists between the municipality and local structures run by the very essential district managers.

The municipality of Kalamu is home to very popular and lively areas: the district of Matonge and the Place Victoire (or Place des artistes). It was at Place Victoire that Patrice Lumumba held his first meeting, on 28 December 1958, before a crowd of more than 10,000 people. The artwork in the centre of the square represents two hands joined together. Created by the sculptor Alfred Liyolo, it is dedicated to Congolese artists and symbolises their unity.

With their many bars and restaurants, these two leading venues are among the main nightlife areas of Kinshasa. Here, in particular, you can find artists from all disciplines who have set up their headquarters in the district, such as the sculptor Freddy Tsimba. One of his works can be seen in Ixelles in the heart of the Matonge district. The district is also home to many talented musicians and dozens of recording studios and record companies.

Furthermore, in Kalamu you will find the mythical stadium Tata Raphaël which hosted one of the most legendary boxing matches, namely the fight between Mohamed Ali and George Foreman for the world heavyweight boxing championship title in 1974. Now renamed "Stade des Martyrs", it is the headquarters of the national football team of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

It also hosts athletics competitions and major cultural events, such as concerts by world-renowned African artists.

Finally, Kalamu has many schools, as well as an abundant community life benefiting the most deprived people, among others the many children and teenagers living in the streets of Kinshasa, known as "Shégués".



Origin and history of the twinning



Ixelles experiences multiculturalism on a daily basis. After maintaining a special relationship with Belgium's African community for many years, our municipality has been twinned with that of Kalamu (Matonge) in Kinshasa in the DRC since 2003.

At the end of the 1950s, Maisaf, the "Maison Africaine", was founded in the heart of Ixelles to provide a meeting place for Belgium's African population and to accommodate Congolese students who had been awarded scholarships.

Very quickly, as Congo's independence had increased the flow of African migration, merchants, travel agents and restaurant owners settled near the institution, and the district acquired the nickname of Ma-

tonge, in reference to the very lively artists' quarter in Kinshasa. The joint presence of companies and the many associations and public administrations, have largely contributed to the dynamism of this district.

Matonge in Ixelles is today internationally recognised as THE African district of Belgium.

So, naturally, the municipality of Kalamu therefore turned out to be an essential partner for Ixelles and, since 2002, several contacts between the municipalities of Ixelles and Kalamu (Matonge) have been established.

On 30 June 2003, the Board of Mayor and Aldermen of Ixelles officially twinned with the municipality of Kalamu. Since then, numerous cultural and development cooperation projects have been undertaken between our two cities.

First steps in international cooperation

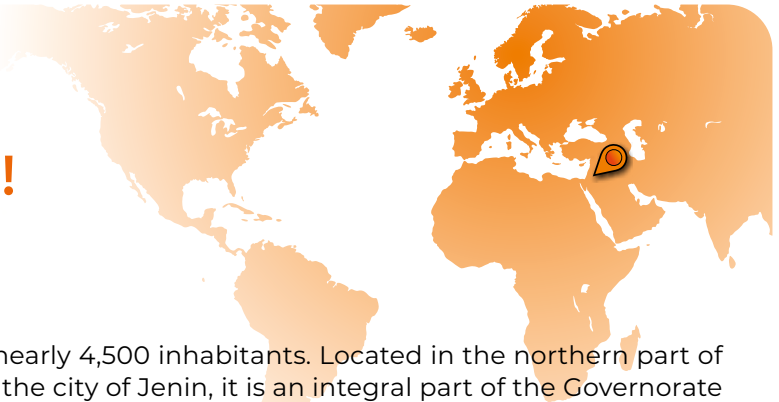
For more than 10 years, twinning projects with the municipality of Kalamu, as well as with different local partners with whom synergies have been developed, have focused more specifically on the themes of education, access to water and also culture: actions to repair primary schools in Matonge and Yolo Nord (health infrastructures, water purification station, delivery of desks and school equipment ...), inter-school twinning projects, support of projects for children living in the streets, placement of a sculpture by Freddy Tsimba entitled "Au-delà de l'espoir" in the Matonge district of Ixelles, or even the giant reproduction of an artwork by the contemporary artist Chéri Samba that is displayed in the Chaussée d'Ixelles in the vicinity of the Porte de Namur...

Along with these multiple projects, our municipality has since 2007 been committed to the **municipal international cooperation (CIC)** programme. This project, developed over a six year period, has notably been funded by a subsidy of over €400,000 granted by the Belgian Cooperation for Development. During a second step, Ixelles and Kalamu have been selected to participate in the 2014-2016 and 2017-2020 phases of this large-scale project. The main objective of this programme focuses on the institutional reinforcement of the municipality of Kalamu, notably by improving the Civil Registry and Population departments. A great deal has been achieved in this context:

- Contribution of expertise and skills via several training programmes for municipal officials (for example: "Operating elements of the Civil Registry and Population departments", "Census techniques", "Introduction to the training practice", "Archiving", "Personnel management"...);
- Improving infrastructures and working conditions of municipal officials as well as conditions for receiving the population (for example: repairing electrical installations, roofing, installation of sanitation infrastructures for officials and citizens, construction of a model district office ...);
- Conducting the population census of the municipality of Kalamu (+/- 180,000 citizens);
- Creation of an "Information/Awareness Raising" unit and organization of various campaigns for the population (e.g. birth registration);
- Creation of an "Archiving" unit and upgrading of documents, etc.



Zababdeh, an essential twinning !



Portrait of Zababdeh

Zababdeh is a small Palestinian city with nearly 4,500 inhabitants. Located in the northern part of the West Bank, 15 km to the south-east of the city of Jenin, it is an integral part of the Governorate of Jenin. Its territory extends over a surface area of 5.5 km², approximately one-third of which is inhabitable. The remaining area is considered agricultural land and is made up of vast plains (nearly 2 km²) allowing for the cultivation of vegetables, barley and wheat, as well as mountainous areas in which olives, almonds and figs are the main crops.

The first local authority was created in 1950 and the first local council was set up in 1995 under the direction of the Palestinian National Authority. In 1997, the local council was replaced by a municipal council. The first municipal elections were held in May 2005.

This is one of the biggest multi-faith villages in the West Bank, with a large proportion of Christian citizens. Here there are two mosques and several churches of different faiths (Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican). Dating back to Roman times, the village today preserves the remains of mosaics and vestiges from the Byzantine period. Zababdeh is also located not far from various ancient Christian holy places, such as the Orthodox church in Burqin, considered the third most ancient church in the world, the ancient city of Dothan, Jacob's Well and the city of Nazareth: its central location makes it a very popular dwelling amongst pilgrims and a place renowned for its legendary hospitality.

Today, Zababdeh has two nursery schools and three primary and secondary schools. It is also home to the Arab-American University of Jenin, whose student population is gradually changing the landscape and demography of the village. Indeed, when the university term is in session, nearly 1,000 students and employees live in Zababdeh, which is considered an important service centre for the university population.

Though the village has continued to expand since the construction of the University on its heights, Zababdeh nevertheless has a highly rural character, farming being a central activity in this region. Within the village district, there are notably the P.A.R.C. (Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees) offices, a Palestinian agricultural development NGO active in the field of access to water and sanitation, and the Naïm Khader Centre for Training and Rural Development, an important centre for agricultural training.

Moreover, each summer the city organises a music festival in order to promote young talent. Zababdeh notably has various folklore groups honouring Palestinian culture, such as the Zababdeh Band for Folklore and Dabkeh dance group who were welcomed to Ixelles on two occasions: in 2012 for an evening festival entitled "Welcome to Zababdeh" and again in 2013 during the celebration of the 10th anniversary of our twinning.

Zababdeh is also one of the founding members of the international network of "The Most beautiful villages of the Mediterranean".



Origin and history of the twinning



Zababdeh is also and above all the native city of Naïm Khader, intellectual supporter of the creation of a secular and democratic Palestinian State cohabiting peacefully with Israel, who lived in Ixelles and was assassinated there on 1st June 1981. As the first representative of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) to the Belgian and European authorities, he participated in the creation of the Belgo-Palestinian Association in 1975. The twinning of Ixelles with Zababdeh pays homage to his memory and his militant action for peace and dialogue.

The beginning of these relations therefore dates back to **27 November 2003**, the date on which the twinning between Zababdeh and Ixelles was

formalised in the presence of the mayor and several representatives of this Palestinian municipality. A ceremony to mark the official twinning in the presence of representatives from Ixelles was then organised in Zababdeh in 2005.

An evening of discovery of the Palestinian culture and city of Zababdeh was held in 2004 in Ixelles. On this occasion, private donations were given to the municipality in order to financially support the most disadvantaged schoolchildren of Zababdeh.

In the same year, the granting of a subsidy by the Ixelles municipal council allowed for the funding of a feasibility study relating to the setting up of a sanitation network in the village.

2018 marked the 15th anniversary of the twinning between Ixelles and Zababdeh. For this occasion, several activities were held in Ixelles to discover the Palestinian culture: a culinary workshop and a buffet tasting, a dabkeh demonstration, the installation of a commemorative plaque honouring Naïm Khader, etc. Later that same year, a street named after Ixelles was inaugurated in Zababdeh, in the presence of a delegation of representatives from Ixelles.

Synergies and quality-oriented projects

The projects carried out with Zababdeh concern two main themes: on the one hand, the issue of **water and sanitation**, and on the other hand, **youth and education on cultural and religious diversity**.

Water and sanitation

The people of Palestine suffer from a poor access to drinking water supply and sanitation networks that are largely inadequate with respect to the international standards for the protection of public health. So naturally, our partnership has focused on these issues. Several subsidized projects were carried out between 2012 and 2019, supported by various funding bodies (Wallonie-Bruxelles International, Fonds de Solidarité Internationale of VIVAQUA). Each project includes, in addition to a technical and infrastructural component, an educational dimension by raising the awareness of the beneficiaries and the general population through various channels (training workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, educational activities in schools, etc.). Citizen participation is another important aspect of our collaboration. Thus during the 1st project, "More Water for Palestinian People in Zababdeh" (2012-2014), a Water Management Committee was created. Composed of representatives from the municipality, civil society, and different religious communities with a strong focus on women's participation, this committee continues to this day to address all issues related to water supply and sanitation in a concerted manner. Many achievements have been made over the years:

- Construction of rainwater collection and storage cisterns to ensure access to water for the most disadvantaged families in Zababdeh (more than 500 beneficiaries);
- Installation of domestic and semi-collective wastewater treatment systems to allow their reuse for irrigation of food gardens;
- Construction of 4 metal tanks of 250 m³ and irrigation networks for agricultural land;
- Establishment of an agricultural cooperative focused on the development of innovative agricultural techniques;
- Numerous training courses in food crop farming, water management, environmental protection, etc.

Youth, education and interculturality

Concerned about youth and wishing to promote early awareness of the other, Ixelles and Zababdeh have organised several youth exchanges, thanks to the financial support of the "Erasmus +" programme. The first one, which took place in two phases between June 2013 and July 2014, focused on the theme of water and brought together pupils from public schools in Zababdeh and from the Centre scolaire Eperonniers Mercelis in Ixelles. Following the success of this first experience, a second double youth exchange project brought together the pupils of the 3 schools of Zababdeh (the 2 public schools, as well as the Latin School) and the members of the Youth Council of Ixelles around the issue of intercultural and religious dialogue. Following the first phase, which was organised in Brussels in March 2019, the Ixelles delegation should go to Zababdeh in late 2021 or in 2022, public health conditions permitting.

Megiddo and our growing bonds of friendship



Portrait of Megiddo

Megiddo is located approximately 90 km to the north of Jerusalem and 31 km to the south-west of the city of Haifa, a coastal city in Israel situated on the banks of the Mediterranean Sea. This place overlooks the Jezreel Valley to the north and is an important crossroads on the main road connecting the centre of Israel with the Lower Galilee and the northern region of the country. Consequently, Megiddo remains a site of strategic importance as it is located at the northern entrance of Wadi Ara, a mountain connecting the Jezreel Valley with the coastal plain of Israel.

Established since 1944, the Megiddo Regional Council extends over nearly 200 km² and is made up of nine kibbutzim and 13 moshavim. Its population is less than 13,000 inhabitants. There are three primary schools and one secondary school, as well as many clubs, associations and youth movements providing informal educational activities.

Megiddo emphasizes culture through its singing and dance groups, but also through its various sites such as the theatre and municipal gallery that welcome many shows or even the Wilfrid Museum which presents permanent exhibitions ranging from collections from India, China, Thailand and Cambodia, to native art from the ancient Middle East and artefacts from local archaeological sites. Furthermore, the museum exhibits works of modern painting, photography, sculptures and textiles and offers a wide range of community educational programmes (guided visits, creative activities in the museum's workshop, etc.).

Megiddo is also home to one of the country's most important archaeological sites: Tel Megiddo. This site, which has been excavated many times and is still the subject of new discoveries, includes 26 layers of ruins of ancient cities and covers nearly 7,000 years of history. According to biblical accounts, the hill of Megiddo is also known by the name of Armageddon, a symbolic place for the last battle on earth between Good and Evil.

Finally, Megiddo possesses an important rural character. Its landscape is a mixture of forests and agricultural fields bathed in a Mediterranean climate, which makes it a particularly popular site for hiking and leisure activities. Moreover, the village has a biosphere reserve recognised by UNESCO as a model area conciliating the conservation of biodiversity with sustainable development. The environment is therefore a leading concern for Megiddo.

It is also in its woods that two major events for the region take place every year: the "Natural Connections - Land Art Exhibition" (since 2016), a unique artistic symposium bringing together Jewish and Arab artists from Israel, as well as international artists, around a process of collective creation, exclusively using sustainable materials offered by nature. The sculptures thus created remain in place and become concrete symbols of the values of peace, dialogue and tolerance for the many visitors to the nature reserve. Secondly, the "Yaarot Menashe Forest Festival", is a music festival promoting young Israeli talents, like Asaf Avidan in 2012, but also a more international scene, which has already welcomed several groups from Brussels in the framework of the Ixelles-Megiddo twinning.



Origin and history of the twinning



Since 2004, following the formalization of its twinning with Zababdeh, and under the leadership of the "La Paix maintenant" movement that is working towards sustainable peace between Israelis and Palestinians, Ixelles has been developing privileged contacts with Megiddo, a municipality that is geographically close to Zababdeh.

Through this dual twinning, our desire was notably to provide support to the advocates of peace by creating spaces for and means of dialogue, meeting and cooperation between the two peoples. In this way, we hoped to succeed in building bridges across walls. With this initiative we wanted to promote

peace in the Middle East at a local scale, but also raise awareness among the citizens of Ixelles about the real problems in this region.

A further collaboration was set up between Ixelles and Megiddo following the participation of this municipality in the educational and artistic project "Discover Each Other Through Water" (2010-2011) which was devoted to the discovery of other cultures through the theme of water. A dialogue and a desire for partnership were created in this manner between the seven municipalities involved in this project.

In December 2011, a delegation from Ixelles visited Megiddo in order to materialise the twinning and, on 16 February 2012, the municipal council of Ixelles ratified the official twinning act between Ixelles and Megiddo. The same year, in May 2012, the Mayor of Megiddo and several local representatives were also welcomed to Belgium for one week of visits and exchanges in order to define our future projects and collaboration. A ceremony to celebrate the twinning was organised at the town hall of Ixelles to mark this occasion.

Sharing and cultural exchanges

Our joint activities with Megiddo mainly concern **culture** and **education**.

The spring of 2011 saw the first bilateral exchange project take shape: a group of Congolese rumba from Ixelles was sent to Megiddo to take part in the "Yaarot Menashe Forest Festival". This first collaboration was a real success and the group was received with great enthusiasm by the organizers and festival-goers. This musical collaboration between Ixelles and Megiddo continued for several years. From 2014 to 2018, Megiddo continued to receive musicians from Brussels within the framework of the "Yaarot Menashe Forest Festival", which has become even more successful and popular over the years. Various talents from the Brussels music scene have performed there: La Smala (2014), Great Mountain Fire (2015), Omar Perry (2016), La Chiva Gantiva (2017), and OPMOC (2018).



Convinced that art and music are excellent ways of promoting encounter and dialogue between cultures and peoples, Ixelles welcomed an artistic group from Megiddo in 2016: the *Megiddo Yemenite Dance Troupe*. This group, made up of a dozen dancers, recreates and preserves the traditional dances of Yemeni Jews.

In 2018 and 2019, Megiddo welcomed a visual artist from Ixelles in the spring within the framework of the "Natural Connections - Land Art Exhibition" project.

After their participation in the two multi-stakeholders projects on global citizenship education ("Discover Each Other Through Water" in 2010-2011 and the "Millennium Youth Project" in 2013-2016), Ixelles and Megiddo continue to place education at the heart of their partnership. Each year since 2016, two art history and archaeology students from the ULB (CReA - Centre de Recherches en Archéologie et Patrimoine) have been invited to participate in an excavation course each summer at the Al-bright Institute of Archaeological Research, that is in charge of the excavation campaigns on the Tel Megiddo site, one of the most important archaeological sites in the country.

Mali, bonding with Guinea-Conakry

Portrait of Mali

The urban municipality of Mali was created in 1991. It is located more than 500 km from Conakry, the capital, in the Futa-Jalon region (Middle Guinea), in the north of the country, close to the Senegalese and Malian borders. It is a mountainous region with heavy rainfall, nicknamed "the Water Tower of West Africa". Despite this, the alternation between the dry and rainy seasons, coupled with the obsolescence of the existing water supply system, does not protect the population from serious water shortages during the six months of the dry season.

Guinea-Conakry, classified as a "Least Developed Country" (LDC) by the UN, has been hit hard by the Ebola epidemic. Despite a very great potential for development (in terms of human capital and important natural resources: mining, aquifers, agriculture, forestry, etc.), the country is still struggling to meet certain challenges. The city of Mali, in particular, is located in a region with strong agricultural potential but suffers from a series of problems directly affecting the well-being of its inhabitants (a lack of resources, particularly in terms of education and health care; rapid environmental degradation and overexploitation of natural resources; lack of access to safe drinking water despite abundant water resources, etc.).

The municipality of Mali covers an area of 574 km² in a very rugged mountainous area. It has a total population of 40,242 inhabitants, divided into 16 rural districts and 4 urban neighbourhoods. The majority of the inhabitants belong to the Peule ethnic group and are Muslims. The main language spoken by the inhabitants of Mali is Pular.

Mali's economy is essentially agro-pastoral, with a very large rural population (85%). The main agricultural activities are crops produced for household consumption (taro, cassava, okras, potatoes, eggplant, maize, etc.), market gardening and fruit growing, which represent an important source of income in spite of the difficulties of conservation and export; and finally, extensive cultivation of outlying fields (rice, millet, sorghum, fonio, groundnuts, etc.).

Handicraft occupy between 15 and 20% of the population and are also an important source of income: weaving and dyeing of renowned cottons (indigo), carpentry, blacksmithing and pottery, but also spinning, basketry, sewing, embroidery, saponification. Many of these activities are carried out by women, grouped in cooperatives. At the commercial level, weekly markets are held in the town centre or in the districts.

In addition, the region around Mali is home to some exceptional natural sites, including the famous "Lady of Mali", a singular rock formation of Mount Loura (the highest point of the Futa Jalon massif, at an altitude of 1,515 m), in which a woman's face can be seen.

Concerned about its youth and wishing to develop and maintain bonds of friendship beyond the Guinean borders, the urban municipality of Mali is a member of the "Tripartite des jeunes de la sous-région", an organization that brings together young people from Mali, Kédougou (Senegal) and Kéniéba (Mali).



Origin and history of the bonding process



The impetus to bring Ixelles and Mali closer together was given by Bea Diallo, Alderman in charge of Twinning and International Cooperation, at the beginning of 2016. Following the addition of Guinea-Conakry to the list of priority countries for the Belgian Development Cooperation Agency, the Department of Twinning and International Cooperation studied the possibility of developing projects with this country, and more particularly with the city of Mali.

Thus, a delegation of Guinean representatives was invited to Ixelles in 2017 for a first meeting, with the aim of defining possible areas of cooperation. A delegation from Ixelles then went to visit Mali in April 2018. This field mission allowed us to deepen our knowledge of the concrete realities of our Guinean partner and to work together on the design of a first concrete project related to improving the access to water.

Water, source of life

In 2018, the municipality of Ixelles obtained funding from the Fonds de Solidarité Internationale of VIVAQUA to implement a first project. Built in partnership between the municipality of Ixelles, the municipality of Mali, the Société des Eaux de Guinée (S.E.G.), and civil society organisations, this project focuses on securing the drinking water supply for the 11,000 inhabitants of Mali's urban neighbourhoods, aiming to rehabilitate and improve the existing water supply system serving these neighbourhoods. It also addresses issues essential to the sustainability of the project, such as citizen participation, gender, environment and health, notably by:

- raising public awareness on sustainable water management, hygiene standards and prevention of water-borne diseases;
- creating water management committees (composed mainly of women, the first beneficiaries and users of the water points) and the training of their members in management, maintenance and hygiene.

Through this project, we hope to contribute to improving the daily lives of the inhabitants of Mali, who suffer greatly from the shortage of safe drinking water.

With its active experience in international cooperation and local development, the municipality of Ixelles also hopes to participate in other concrete improvements in Mali, particularly in the areas of education (support and projects in schools), capacity building of the local administration (digitalisation, etc.) and employability of young people, among others.



Global education and networking: Ixelles, a pioneering municipality

The municipality of Ixelles has been active in global citizenship and solidarity education for many years. It carries out both recurrent activities to raise awareness about North-South inequalities and large-scale medium-term actions of global citizenship and solidarity education. Indeed, through these awareness-raising activities and in line with its cooperation projects with the South, Ixelles is particularly keen to make its citizens aware of inequalities and North-South relations.



Global education in a school environment

As part of its mission to raise awareness of international solidarity, the Department of Twinning and International Cooperation launched a new free local service for the school community in Ixelles in 2016, from primary to upper secondary level, all networks of schools combined. The aim of this service, which is intended to be a practical tool offering free and personalised support and guidance, is twofold: raising awareness among pupils through assistance with activities, and the implementation of class or school projects, thanks to a personalised guidance for teachers.

Awareness-raising actions

Week of International Solidarity: Ixelles took part in the Week of International Solidarity on several occasions. It has organized three editions entitled "Eau secours! L'eau, un trésor à partager..." (2008, 2009 and

2011) with the aim of raising citizen awareness about the issue of worldwide access to water and sanitation. In 2012 and 2013, the Advisory Council for International Solidarity of Ixelles set up several activities to raise public awareness on North-South migration (cinema-debates, action theatre, cultural festival for solidarity, cycle of events for the municipal staff, etc.).

Solidar XL Festival: Our department has collaborated on several occasions with the "Solidar XL Festival", profits of which are intended to support solidarity projects. It takes place each year in Ixelles following the Brussels Jazz Marathon.

In 2009, the "Un banc pour tous" operation notably allowed the purchase of school equipment and the funding of scholarships for primary school children in Kalamu. And, in 2013, the funds we collected allowed us to support our twinning partners, through, on the one hand, a project helping children living in the streets of Kinshasa (Matonge district), and on the other hand, the repairing of homes and public infrastructures in Zababdeh that had been damaged by serious flooding in Palestine in January 2013. The 2018 edition was dedicated to the migratory justice theme, and, on this occasion, the Twinning Department had a booth which offered a series of animations for the general public on prejudices related to migration, alongside the street educators.

Fair Trade Week: in 2017, our department collaborated with the Eco-Council and the Youth Department on the project "Ecoles des devoirs, devoirs citoyens". This project was intended to raise awareness among children, parents and activity leaders of the "écoles des devoirs" in the municipality of Ixelles about the challenges of fair trade, during a festive and solidarity-based afternoon (theatrical show, exhibitions, sustainable fair trade snacks). In 2018, it was the project "Caravan'XL: ma commune se bouge pour le Fairtrade" that contributed to raise awareness among the members of the municipal staff and the users of the municipal stadium and of the crèches, thanks to a sustainable and solidarity-based travelling caravan (tastings, fun activities, exhibitions).

"Electronic Solidarity": On December 6 2019, our department offered the Brussels public an evening dedicated to the struggle for women's rights and to international solidarity. This evening dedicated to female DJs and electronic music was a real success, gathering more than 750 people. It raised more than €4,000 to finance an environmental project in Palestine and allowed us to reach a new audience.

Support to associations and civil society members

Lastly, each year Ixelles supports many associations and international solidarity NGOs through the granting of project or operating subsidies. The activities are diverse: raising public awareness on international solidarity issues as part of the "Opération 11.11.11." carried out each year by the Centre National de Coopération au Développement (CNCD -11.11.11), exchanges and sports with the support given to the RISC Football association for its participation in the JAB tournament in Biarritz; support to the education of young Palestinians through the granting of scholarships via the association Hope-Esper-Hoop; and many others.



Multi-stakeholders development education projects

Since 2010, the Department of Twinning and International Cooperation has embarked on the management of multipartite projects. Indeed, our municipality, with the financial support of the European Commission, has been in charge of two big networking projects involving local authorities and awareness- raising about North-South relations. It has thus shown itself to be a true pioneer as it was the first Belgian municipality to be awarded subsidies for this type of projects.



2010-2011

"Discover Each Other Through Water" (L'Eau-tre Découverte)

This project took place over 2 years. Initiated and coordinated by Ixelles, it consisted of the networking of 8 cities and municipalities from Europe, Africa and the Middle East: Biarritz in France, Cascais in Portugal, Kalamu in the DRC, Megiddo in Israel, Mizil in Romania, Zacharo in Greece and Zababdeh in Palestine. Focused around the themes of access to water and mutual discovery, our cooperation has thus focused on water, an essential element for all life, and the on-the-ground realities of the different project partners (drinking water, sanitation, access to water resources, pollution, etc.). The "Discover Each Other Through Water" project comprised 3 components: educational, artistic and participatory, involving the creation of an Advisory Council for International Solidarity that focuses on development education.

2013-2016 - "Millennium Youth Project"

The "Millennium Youth Project" was carried out over a three-year period and was aimed at secondary school students. Like the previous project, it brings together municipalities from the North and the South and integrates both our twinning partners (Biarritz in France, Kalamu in the DRC, Zababdeh in Palestine and Megiddo in Israel) and new partners such as Cascais (Portugal) and Mizil (Romania). Pursuing many objectives, it aimed primarily at raising public awareness and strengthening local authorities' support for international development commitments and, in particular, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To take part in this project, a secondary school class and two teachers were selected from each partner municipality. The high point of this beautiful adventure was a meeting organized in Ixelles in May 2015, during the last year of the project, the "Millennium Youth Project Festival", which allowed young people to meet and together defend the eight Millennium Goals, in particular thanks to the collective artworks created by the pupils of each participating municipality. The "Millennium Youth Project" also enabled the involvement of young Belgian audio-visual students who made short films about the advocacy campaigns conducted in the partner localities. These were screened during the MYP Festival and accompanied the educational manual that was published at the end of the project.



Further innovative projects and new perspectives

In 2014, our municipality, in partnership with the province of Hainaut, has initiated a network of Belgian local authorities for Palestine. This network, currently composed of about ten cities and municipalities, aims to improve the coherence of the actions on solidarity and decentralized cooperation with Palestine through exchanges of skills, good practices and experience, but also the implementation of joint projects.

Since 2016, our municipality has contributed, alongside other Brussels municipalities (City of Brussels, Jette, Anderlecht, Etterbeek, Molenbeek) to the development of a "regional network of international solidarity" in Brussels. This multi-actor network called "SOLIRIS" brings together representatives of civil society organisations, Brussels' municipalities and the Brussels-Capital Region, and aims to support and promote international solidarity initiatives within the Region.

In 2019, the municipality of Ixelles obtained financial support from Wallonia-Brussels International to implement a project entitled "National Youth Conference for Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue" with the municipality of Zababdeh. This project addresses another important aspect of the Palestinian reality: that of the coexistence of religions and cultures. The conference is scheduled to take place in September 2021 in Zababdeh, with the participation of more than fifty students from West Bank universities, as well as a delegation of students from the Département de Philosophie et Sciences des Religions et de la Laïcité of the ULB.

Finally, the Twinning and International Cooperation Service is now looking at the possibility of developing new projects and partnerships, both in terms of development cooperation - for example with Senegal or Morocco - and in terms of civic education projects and cultural encounters (organisation of so-called "breakaway journeys" for Ixelles' youth). The unit also develops one-off activities to raise awareness among Ixelles' citizens of conflicts breaking out all over the world, the victims of which are ordinary people. In 2021, Ixelles intends to act in order to raise awareness and support the people who are victims of the Nagorno-Karabach conflict.

A heartfelt thanks to the policy makers and officials of Ixelles who have supported and sustained the twinning projects for so many years.

Many and sincere thanks to all our partners around the world for their work, activeness and dynamism in carrying out these fine projects.

A special thanks to those who helped describe and illustrate the work of the Department of Twinning and International Cooperation through their writings and photography.



Zababdeh



Megiddo

