



Five Years: 'Ambassador of Mechelen'

In 2021, CVO Crescendo launched the first edition of the **Ambassador of Mechelen** course. The initiative was created from the belief that being an ambassador is about much more than having knowledge of a city's history or heritage. While traditional guide training often focuses on information and storytelling, this course focuses on something broader: creating a meaningful connection with the city and sharing that connection with others.

A Three-Step Approach

Over the past five years, the course has developed its own vision of what it means to be an ambassador. This vision can be summarized in three steps.

STEP 1: Discovering Value Through Passionate People

The first step focuses on meeting people who are deeply committed to a particular aspect of the city. Throughout the course, participants meet a wide variety of guest speakers: *engineers, artists, historians, entrepreneurs, volunteers, nature experts, sustainability specialists, ...*



These speakers do more than share information. Their enthusiasm inspires participants to look at familiar places from a new

perspective and to discover aspects of the city they may never have noticed before. Curiosity and appreciation often begin with these encounters.

STEP 2: Experiencing and Exploring the City



The second step encourages participants to actively engage with the city through experiences and hands-on activities.

Over the years, participants have explored topics such as accessibility, sustainability, local heritage, social inclusion, culture, and nature.

Activities have included visits to city archives, workshops on traditional Mechelen lace, meetings with newcomers, sustainability projects, and exercises designed to help participants better understand the experiences of people with

disabilities.



Research, reflection, and small assignments further encourage participants to explore their surroundings and develop a deeper understanding of the city. Through these experiences, a stronger connection with Mechelen gradually emerges.

STEP 3: Becoming an Active Ambassador

The third step begins when participants start sharing their own interests, talents, and expertise with others.

Many ambassadors continue to contribute after completing the first year of the programme. They remain active in the follow up course. They organise activities, introduce fellow ambassadors to local initiatives, and share personal passions ranging from sustainability and sports to architecture, music history, heritage, and community projects.

“The goal is not to impose expectations but to create an environment where people feel encouraged to contribute in their own way.”

An important aspect of the programme is the development of a strong **ambassador community**.



Since 2023, ambassadors have organised an **Ambassadors Café** twice a year.

These informal gatherings bring together current participants, alumni, guest speakers, and other interested people around themes connected to Mechelen. Recent editions focused on artists inspired by the city and on the natural environment surrounding Mechelen.

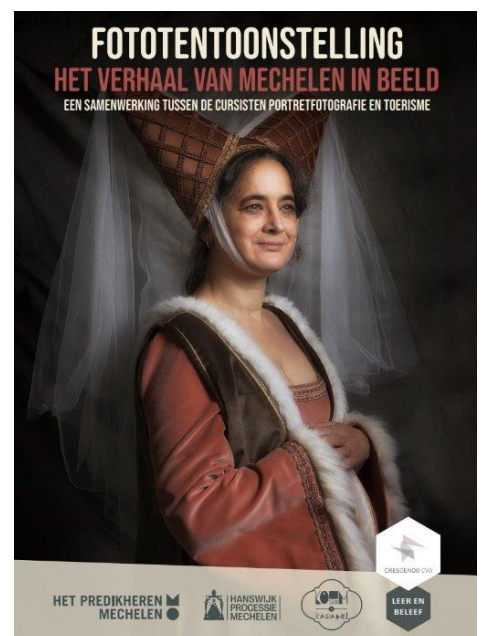
The Ambassadors Café has become an important platform for networking, inspiration, and continued engagement.

Projects in the City

Over the years, ambassadors have participated in several projects that increased their visibility within the city and strengthened connections with local residents.

One project combined a city walk with a fashion exhibition created by CVO students. Visitors followed a route through the city while ambassadors shared stories, initiatives, and points of interest along the way.

Another project, **The Story of Mechelen**, brought historical figures from different periods of the city's history back to life through portrait photography and exhibitions in local shops. The project offered residents and visitors an accessible introduction to the city's rich past.





The ambassadors also developed a **Living Library** concept, in which participants present themselves as "living books." Visitors can engage them in conversation, often using a personal object as an icebreaker. This approach has proven to be an effective and informal way of connecting people.

Since 2025, the Living Library has also been part of the city's welcome receptions for new residents, where ambassadors help newcomers get acquainted with Mechelen and answer questions about life in the city.

After Five Years: New Initiatives and Future Growth

One of the most significant spin-off projects is **Greeters Mechelen**, which became only active in may 2026 as part of the international Greeters network. Volunteer ambassadors offer visitors a personal introduction to the city based on local knowledge and personal interests. The initiative was developed and launched through the efforts of several ambassadors and has already received strong interest from visitors.

A second initiative, **Mechelen Today**, will be launched next year. This new course will connect ambassadors and newcomers by introducing them to the city's history, organisations, neighbourhoods, and contemporary life while encouraging them to build their own network within the community.

In Conclusion: Looking Back on Five Years

Five years after its launch, Ambassador of Mechelen has grown into much more than a course. It has become a network of engaged citizens who share a common curiosity about their city and a desire to contribute to it.

The project has demonstrated that ambassadorial work is not primarily about transferring knowledge. It is about creating connections: between people and places, between newcomers and long-term residents, and between the many organisations, stories, and initiatives that make a city unique.

The experience of the past five years shows that when people are given the opportunity to discover, experience, and share what they value, they naturally become ambassadors for their city.