

Ghent University reduces number of air flights

(06-06-2018) Ghent University takes first steps in a sustainable travel policy. For years, it has considered sustainability to be a high priority.

The university has previously taken measures to reduce its ecological footprint, such as energy reduction procedures in the buildings. It now also wants to be an example on the more sustainable travel front.

Output: a mobile Ghent University

On an annual basis, the Ghent University staff engage in a lot of work-related travel due to the increasing internationalisation of research, providing educational and social services, and so on. A significant number of these trips involve air flights. An estimated 15% of the total CO₂ emissions generated by Ghent University are caused by work-related travel. Therefore, the task here was to find a balance between the international activities and managing our ecological footprint.

The majority of work-related travel occurs within Europe. So, it seemed quite feasible that sustainable alternatives to flying could be found.

Train or bus as the default for eighty destinations

The Executive Board approved a package of measures requiring Ghent University staff to use sustainable means of travel more often. The measures went into effect immediately. These include campaigns to raise awareness, continued investments in video conferencing, etc. And, the booking system for work-related travel has been modified.

In practical terms, a list was drawn up of sixty 'green' cities that Ghent University staff, as standard, will no longer take air flights to. These are cities that are reachable from Ghent by bus or train when the travel time is less than six hours or the travel time by train is no longer than by aircraft (duration of flight plus two hours, as the standard duration of the trip to the airport plus check-in time plus transfer time).

When booking a trip to one of these 'green cities', the option to take a flight is no longer displayed as a means of transport. However, if a flight is the only real option, it is possible to submit a request for an exception.

There is also a more restricted list of twenty 'orange' cities where the travel time by train does not exceed eight hours. When booking a trip to one of these cities, Ghent University staff can choose between the train or bus. This is how the more sustainable means of transport are offered as a matter of course

Compensating for CO₂ emissions

The CO₂ emissions from every Ghent University air flight will be compensated for from now on. To this end, Ghent University works with CO₂ Logic (<https://www.co2logic.com/nl>). The university will jointly decide on which projects will be funded.

From the bottom-up to a university-wide travel policy

Sustainable travel is not a new concept at Ghent University. Some departments and research groups in different faculties have taken the initiative in recent years to make their own agreements on more sustainable travel. The board used these efforts as a foundation to build on and develop a university-wide sustainable travel policy.

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