

I want to talk to people I don't know about subjects that matter

BEFORE YOUR CONVERSATIONS: CHOOSE YOUR APPROACH

STEP 1

1. IN WHICH CONTEXT DO YOU WANT TO HAVE CONVERSATIONS?

by myself, in my own time

in an organised way, with others

I find myself in difficult conversations spontaneously

Go to STEP 2.

We never had these conversations on our own, we always went as a group into public space. We think it is possible to do it alone (in a park, on the train, at the school gate...), but advise that you think about how you will take care of yourself. Check our CARE TIPS in STEP 2.

Are you part of a local group?

yes

Consider organising a conversation day or project with members of that group. What would make them enthusiastic?

no

Consider approaching a local community or cultural centre to see if they are interested in organising a conversation day or project. Alternatively, ask them if you can put up a flyer to find other interested people.

2. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT?

A specific topic

Choosing your own specific topic gives a clear direction to a conversation. We had conversations on racism, nationalism, inequality, 'the other', social identity, belonging, climate... Every participant can choose an individual topic, or you can choose the same topic with the whole group.

3. WHO DO YOU WANT TO TALK TO? WHERE DO YOU WANT TO HAVE CONVERSATIONS?

with passers-by in public space

door to door

at a place related to a specific group

on appointment

(+) more people, more chances to meet interested people
 (-) conversations are shorter, as people have less time
 (!) busy spots like shopping streets can be harder, you could look for spots where people are relaxed, like a park.

(+) people feel more at home and tend to have more time
 (-) people suspect that you are a politician or a salesperson
 (!) think about how to introduce yourself: as yourself or in a role? You could make a small leaflet that explains the project and why you are doing it.

(+) a specific target group (e.g. right-wing voters, people in poverty, young people) gives a clear focus
 (-) conversations can be less diverse, more repetitive
 (!) If the place is linked to an organisation, it can help to inform the owners of the place beforehand.

(+) people are prepared for a talk and are willing to invest the time it takes
 (-) the threshold is higher, as people need to sign up in advance
 -> See the online toolbox for tools you can use

5. DOCUMENTATION

DURING YOUR CONVERSATIONS: HAVE A GOOD DIALOGUE

STEP 2

1. HOW TO START A CONVERSATION?

Formulate a short but CLEAR INTRODUCTION of who you are and what your goal is. If you are doing these conversations in connection with a local group or cultural institution, you can use this context as an opener or as an explainer if people ask.

INTRODUCE THE TOOL OR ASK THE QUESTION you have chosen in STEP 1.

We often had a small flyer with extra (contact) information, that we could give to people that showed interest in the project itself.

2. HOW TO HAVE AN EQUAL CONVERSATION?

The foundation for a true dialogue is TAKING AN EQUAL POSITION and LISTENING WITH CURIOSITY. It's opening up to each other rather than trying to convince the other in a verbal competition. A fair conversation can bring our conversation partner AND ourselves a new perspective. In these dialogues you can take different roles.

3. HOW TO DEEPEN A CONVERSATION?

Once you have gotten into dialogue you may be coming up against one or more of these challenges:

The other person is expressing a lot of racist, sexist, classist or homophobic clichés, and seems to be on autopilot rather than giving thoughts to your questions.

- Keep on listening and ask questions out of curiosity rather than judgement.
- Steer the conversation in a more personal and concrete direction.
- Play the Innocent person who doesn't know anything and asks lots of questions about everything the other says.
- If you feel personally attacked or offended, you can tell the person this, provided that you feel safe enough.
- You don't have to continue a conversation you're not comfortable with. You can set your boundaries and end the conversation.

The conversation is too polarised.

Try to use humour.

You do not know what you want to talk about, so it's difficult to give it a direction.

Don't be awkward.

It's difficult to go deeper.

**START
HERE**

This is a flowchart based on the experiences in the Door to Door project. Follow the steps, answer the questions and find tips and tools for dialogues with people who think differently, based on your preferences and possibilities. Good luck!

TOOLS

DO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT?

I'm open to any societal concern of my conversation partner

An open starting question leaves more space for your conversation partners to express what they are concerned about in society and to determine the topic of your conversation. → See 'How to deepen the conversations?' for directions you can take from there

Formulate a clear open QUESTION you want to start the conversation with, for instance:

- How do you feel about living here?
- What are you most afraid of in the future?
- If you were the mayor, what would you change? How?
- What made you happy or angry in the news recently?
- Do you feel more desperate or hopeful? Why?

4. HOW DO YOU WANT TO GET INTO CONVERSATIONS?

visually,
playfully

A playful, visual tool can help when you find it difficult to start talking to strangers in public or if you have the feeling that strangers are hesitant to talk to you in public spaces in Belgium.

verbally

HOW DO YOU WANT TO DEEPEN THE CONVERSATIONS?

after the conversation

during the conversation

HOW DO YOU WANT TO DEEPEN THE CONVERSATIONS?

How do you find yourself in these situations?
CHALLENGES:

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CHALLENGES:

The conversation is too comfortable, you seem to broadly agree.

The other person is complaining a lot about something.

Look actively for which directly political questions you might disagree on, or switch to possible solutions. Ask what your conversation partner would do as politician.

Ask what they think they can do about it.

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A creative tool that you could use is PICK YOUR PIC: show a big piece of cardboard with 15 to 20 pictures that express their concern or how they feel about living in their neighbourhood, for example. You ask why they have chosen that picture and the conversation can start. => Find our selection of pictures in our online toolbox.

A simple and visual tool for a specific topic is the SIGN TOOL. Formulate your topic into a question or statement and write it in big letters on a piece of cardboard. Approach people in a busy place or let them come to you.

- Examples of signs we have used:
- "Gezocht: trotse Vlaming" (on Flemish identity)
 - "I am political" (on politics and activism)
 - "Ask me why I came to Belgium" (as a newcomer)
 - "I want to talk to you about nationalism"
 - "Who cleans your house?" (on gender roles and class distinctions)
 - "Who do you blame?" (on polarization)

A playful tool is the TOWER. You build a tower of wooden blocks with different phenomena and groups in society written on them, like 'football', 'noise', 'mosques', 'CD&V', 'bio food', 'loneliness', 'CEOs', 'migrants'... You ask people to remove the blocks they don't like until the tower falls. (=> Find our proposal of 50 phenomena in our online toolbox.)

An example of a tool that is playful and invites people to do something rather than immediately give their opinion is the FLAG TOOL. On the Flemish National Day we asked people how they would redesign the Flemish flag by drawing another animal, symbol or other design on a yellow piece of cloth. We asked them to display it in their window or outside their house. Spontaneously we got into conversations about Flemish identity and nationalism.

Examples of tools for the public space:
- STREET SALON: Install a sofa, a carpet, some plants etcetera on a square and invite people for tea or coffee and a chat. You can prop up a sign with a specific question or simply a phrase like "I want to talk to you".
- SITE-SPECIFIC TOOLS: Position your conversation tool in a building or a location...

See 'How to deepen the conversations?'

WHICH ROLE OR POSITION DO YOU WANT

Depending on what position you decide to take in the conversation, you can ask specific questions in different ways. You can ask specific questions to:

I mainly want to LISTEN

I want to make my conversation partner REFLECT

LISTENING TIPS

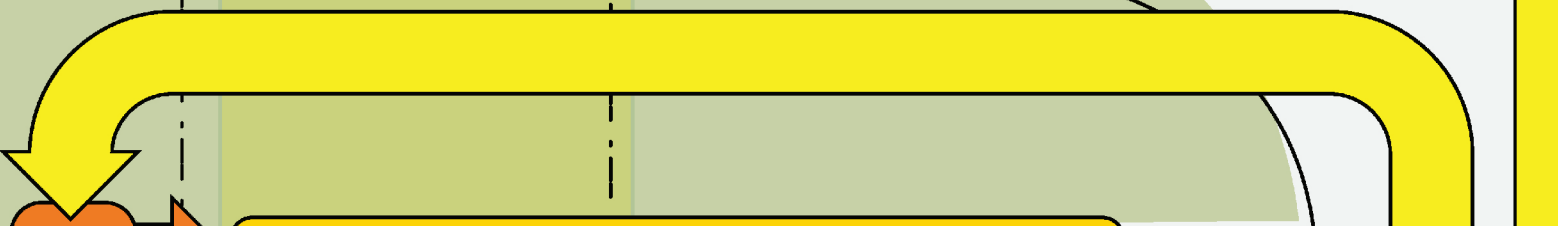
- Approach the other as someone with knowledge and experience.
- Be curious and postpone your judgement if you can!
- Summarise or rephrase what the other has said in the way you understood it. Check if they agree with that rephrasing.
- Ask open questions to try to understand what the person is trying to say and what position or experiences those thoughts are coming from.
- Don't be afraid to let silences or pauses be part of the conversations. These can be important moments for both conversation partners to reflect, before continuing the conversation.

DEEPENING QUESTIONS you can ask to get a better understanding:

- What is important for you when it comes to values?
- What's your main concern here?
- Can you give me an example?

DEEPENING QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK TO MAKE

- Which experiences in your own life have made you think this way?
- Is there anything you have in common with the person you are blaming here?
- What would you do in their situation?
- How does this impact your life?
- What would you need to happen to change your mind?



AFTER YOUR CONVERSATIONS: SHARE YOUR INSIGHTS

STEP 3 1. HOW TO REFLECT ON YOUR CONVERSATIONS?

If you want to draw conclusions from different conversations or you want to share the conversations with others, it can be useful to keep track of what has been said. Be aware though that the better you document conversations (for example on camera), the higher the threshold can be for people to talk to you.

WAYS TO DOCUMENT YOUR CONVERSATIONS AFTERWARDS:

- Write down key sentences or significant quotes after every conversation.
- Record a voice note to reflect after a conversation or at the end of the day.
- Create a song, poem or image based on the conversation you had.

4. HOW TO END A CONVERSATION?

Often these conversations come to a natural ending point. When you feel the other person has said all they have to say in the conversation, or when you feel it yourself, you can thank them for the conversation.

2. HOW TO SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES?

- individually
- in a group

Share a conversation or statement that stuck with you, for whatever reason, with a friend or family member. It can help you to keep processing the conversation, and it can also produce new insights.

QUESTIONS THAT CAN HELP YOU REFLECT ON YOUR EXPERIENCES:

- What was the most memorable conversation you had?
- Do you see any common threads through different conversations?
- What did you learn about people's views on society?
- How did these conversations influence you and your views?
- What would you like to do differently next time?

HOW DO YOU WANT TO FEEL?

The collected insights and opinions could be seen as starting material for a longer and more collective process of dialogue on today's society in a street or city.

After some hours of one-on-one conversations, it can be fruitful to provide a debriefing in which all participants can share how it went. You could document this round of experiences in text, audio or even video.

3. HOW TO GIVE SOMETHING BACK TO THE CITY/STREET?

Do you want extra advice/information? Check our toolbox at

WHAT TO TAKE IN THE CONVERSATION?

In conversation, you can deal with these challenges directly and deepen the conversation.

Listen to their opinion

I want to listen and also SHARE my ideas

Let someone REFLECT:

Ask people

Share your opinion?

TO INVITE YOUR CONVERSATION PARTNER TO LISTEN TO YOU, YOU CAN ASK DEEPENING QUESTIONS AS:

- Are you curious to hear my opinion?
- Can I share my experience with you?

HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND OTHERS?

Having several conversations in a row can be draining and emotionally difficult at times. It is important to give attention to taking care of yourself and other participants.

CARE TIPS — SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO ON YOUR OWN:

- Mark a clear beginning and end of your conversation practice
- Create a ritual or other way of letting go of difficult conversations.
- Do a short meditation, like deep breathing or focusing on the sounds around you.
- Have someone who is available as a contact person, in case you need them.

CARE TIPS — SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO IN A GROUP:

- Go to the same street or square together, so that you always have someone you know nearby.
- Have someone from the group available in that place or by phone, who you can approach to talk about a conversation you've just had.
- Provide a comfortable place to take some rest.
- Create a way to communicate as a group during the day, for example a WhatsApp or Telegram group.
- Pair up as a duo to feel safer in conversations.

CONVERSATION?

END THIS DIALOGUE?

Invite all conversation partners and other residents to a COMING BACK MOMENT. For example in Ninove, we installed an open-air terrace with small tables for four people, offering a drink. On every table we provided a selection of collected quotes on small papers, that people could pick to discuss further.

with more conversations

YOU COULD THINK OF DIFFERENT TRACES IN PUBLIC SPACE:

- An exhibition of portraits of conversation partners in the local cultural centre or the space of a partner organisation.
- Writing collected quotes on a square or spreading posters for people to hang in their windows.
- Leaving a mark of the conversation on the spot you had it in the street. For example writing "a conversation about racism happened here" in chalk.

in a visual way in public space

Check our online toolbox for pictures and extra descriptions of each tool.

WHAT'S NEXT?
WHAT DO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT NOW?
WITH WHOM?

...ation with a certain history. For example, to talk about racism, you might pick a building from the colonial era and ask passersby if they know where the materials or the money to build it came from. At the Broeltorens in Kortrijk, formerly used as a toll bridge, we placed a toll sign and stopped people. They could only cross the bridge after 'paying a toll' by answering a question.

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Examples of successful door-to-door tools:
- STREET NAMES: Find a street name that you can use to talk about an interesting topic. For example: ask inhabitants of the "Toekomststraat" how they see the future of the city, or ask the neighbours of "Leopold II-laan" about their views on colonialism.
- SWAP YOUR COFFEE MUG: Ring at the first house with a coffee mug and ask people if they want to swap it for one of theirs. With this mug, you ring at the neighbour's house and do the same. It's a good start for conversations about ownership, sharing, neighbourly contact.



In Antwerp, we chose Sint-Jansplein to talk specifically with people with an immigrant background. To what extent did they feel at home in the city that promotes itself with 'this city belongs to everyone'? We used a POLL TOOL in cardboard, on which people could indicate their answer on a scale of 1 to 10. We took a picture of every conversation partner with their score.

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Examples of other TOOLS THAT DIRECTLY DOCUMENT THE CONVERSATION:

- Asking people about their favourite spot in the neighbourhood and taking a picture of it.
- Presenting yourself in a wedding dress as Society and asking people what they need to marry you. They write their answer on your dress with a marker.
- Asking people to formulate an alternative for the city slogan on a photoshopped picture with an empty billboard.