

DIVERSITY, LOCAL ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY INTEGRATION



In today's world, where communities tend to fall back on themselves and political context does not entice to integration, the Antwerp diamond industry represents an exceptional mix of ethnic descents and religions in a tiny area who not only work but also live together with great respect for one another. The efforts of the AWDC in this matter contribute to this harmony. This cultural and religious diversity is one of the greatest strengths of the Antwerp diamond industry.

The diamond industry is one of the most international and multi-cultural industries in Belgium: a mini-United Nations one could say. People representing over 70 different nationalities live and work together on a daily basis within a single square mile, maintaining deep respect for each other's cultures and religions. This is truly unique and precious to maintain in times of political and cultural tension at the national and international levels. Obviously, this is not always easy. That is why the AWDC finds it very important to maintain a good relationship with all the different communities, share information and knowledge and make sure the different communities are brought together during various events.

In a comparative study of diamond trading centers (see chapter Antwerp context), conducted by PWC and commissioned by the AWDC in 2017, cultural diversity and acceptance was considered as a very important location factor. Stakeholders highlighted that Antwerp is a fair market where no community or ethnic group has particular leverage. Diversity and acceptance for all people, irrespective of their background, culture, religion and personal situation was noted as one of Antwerp's most important strengths whereas centers like Dubai, Tel Aviv and Mumbai score significantly lower in this category.

Even though our stakeholders agree with this, they also appreciate the challenges it entails.

“Diversity must remain the great asset of Antwerp. Each group brings its own networks and experience. Having said that, each community should ensure each of its members stay in good standing and contribute positively to the industry but also to our city and country.

Unfortunately, most have remained insular, without feeling the need to reach out and understand the trade-off: a license to operate against a contribution to the benefit of all. It is necessary to change the mentality, to encourage people to step out instead of remaining enclosed in their communities. They have to feel and behave like contributing citizens of their city and country”, S. Fischler

Because it is very important to maintain this unique bond between the different communities and religions, the AWDC made it one of its priorities, organizing events during their traditional days of celebration such as Purim, Diwali or New Year. Via its → **social media** channels, the AWDC also emphasizes the multicultural nature of the Antwerp diamond industry by telling the stories of different people and communities. The AWDC unites people during events like the International Day of Yoga or the Antwerp Ten Miles. In the framework of these events, the AWDC cooperates with the Jewish community through partnerships with the → **Forum der Joodse organisaties** and collaborates with the Indian community via the → **Antwerp Indian Association** on a regular basis.

The Antwerp diamond industry itself is often considered to be a community unto itself and relatively hermetic to outsiders. This is, among others, linked to the strong security measures in the district (cameras, closed traffic, presence of the police) and the fact that people tend to stay private for security reasons, which creates a haze of secrecy around the Antwerp diamond industry. However, the veil is easily lifted for the, on average, 2,000 visitors receiving a guided tour behind the scenes of the diamond industry each year. Making the industry open and accessible and changing this perception so as to build a reputation of transparency and openness is one of the challenges the AWDC addresses.

From September 2017 until June 2018, the AWDC organized the Antwerp Diamond Year - Antwerp Diamond Capital since 1447 - celebrating 570 years of unbroken diamond trading in the city. Together with the City of Antwerp, the AWDC organized several events and initiatives to bring the diamond trade into closer contact with the local population.

A few examples:

- **Brilliant Foodies:** a festival that celebrated the culture, food and music of the fascinating melting pot of nationalities and ethnic backgrounds of the people working in our industry. A family day for everyone, featuring a wide variety of activities and workshops. The turnout was great with more than 4,000 visitors.



- School project:** AWDC developed a syllabus for primary schools- 5th and 6th grade - in the framework of the Diamond Year. This enables teachers to introduce the fascinating aspects of the Antwerp diamond industry into the school curriculum, including field trips and projects. A new generation of Antwerpians can get to know the diamond industry via this project. Over 75 schools downloaded the syllabus and about 15 of them took a behind the scenes tour in the Antwerp diamond industry. So, it's safe to say over 3,000 kids were immersed in the sparkling world of Antwerp diamonds.



- Expedition Diamond:** a one-day event in which groups of young people (millennials) went on a diamond adventure throughout the city. The treasure-hunt style expedition involved the teams gathering all sorts of 'diamond' facts and figures, activities and fun. About 100 millennials participated in this diamond adventure.



Even though the diamond industry is often linked to luxury and wealth, the diamond community is aware of the imbalances in the world. The last few years, AWDC decided not to send out Christmas cards and gifts, but organized Christmas campaigns instead. The collected money went to charities like 'Moeders voor Moeders' and 'SOS Children's Villages'.



Throughout the years, AWDC has supported various charities. This is one of the numerous ways the AWDC and the Antwerp diamond community try to contribute to SDG 1: "End poverty in all its forms everywhere", and more specifically via:

- Target 1.2:** By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.