

The people formerly *NOT* known as your audience

All-in

Just imagine a world where all cultural auditoria are fully booked and everyone leads an active leisure life. Nobody is excluded for lack of money, poor physical access, or due to other psychological barriers. In other words, the cultural audience is everyone – not just the educated and well informed.

The Brussels-based audience development organization Cultuurnet Vlaanderen has brought that ideal world a little step closer to reality in recent years. They designed a leisure pass system that brings disparate worlds together. The project is based on a credit saving system offering cultural trial offers for all passholders, while lowering the price barriers for disadvantaged target groups. At the same time the leisure pass generates anonymised participant profile data for research and marketing purposes.

The architecture of the leisure pass was conceived as a user-friendly application with a variety of innovative functions. It utilises NFC (near field communication) technology to identify users and registers their participation and presence at activities to apply accurately targeted discounts.

Scientific basis

The basis for the project was laid down in an earlier scientific study which was conducted in Flanders and Brussels in 2004-5. The research revealed that a considerable proportion of the public does not participate in cultural life. 20% of people are difficult to mobilize. A substantial segment (55%) consists of interested passers-by (in other words, incidental visitors). The reasons why people in this category do not participate more frequently include not only a lack of time or other practical considerations, but also insufficient information and too few events that appeal to them - with the result that they take no interest in the existing options.

This interested but absent audience falls, broadly speaking, into two main groups. The first is an unserved group for whom the participation barriers, generally financial in nature, are too high. For the other, much larger, group, the threshold is not a financial one; they form an absent audience who may respond to incentives to find their way into culture and leisure.

The leisure pass aims to make a crucial difference for both these groups.



Data from pilot project

The leisure pass was launched under the name UiTPAS as a pilot rollout in the town of Aalst and its neighbouring municipalities. The pilot project region, with a population of 133 thousand souls, has an industrial past and is marked by rising poverty – nearly 15% of the population lives below the EU poverty threshold. About a quarter of these people are registered with local welfare service organizations. The pilot region was in this respect well suited to a scientific study of matters such as participation behaviour.

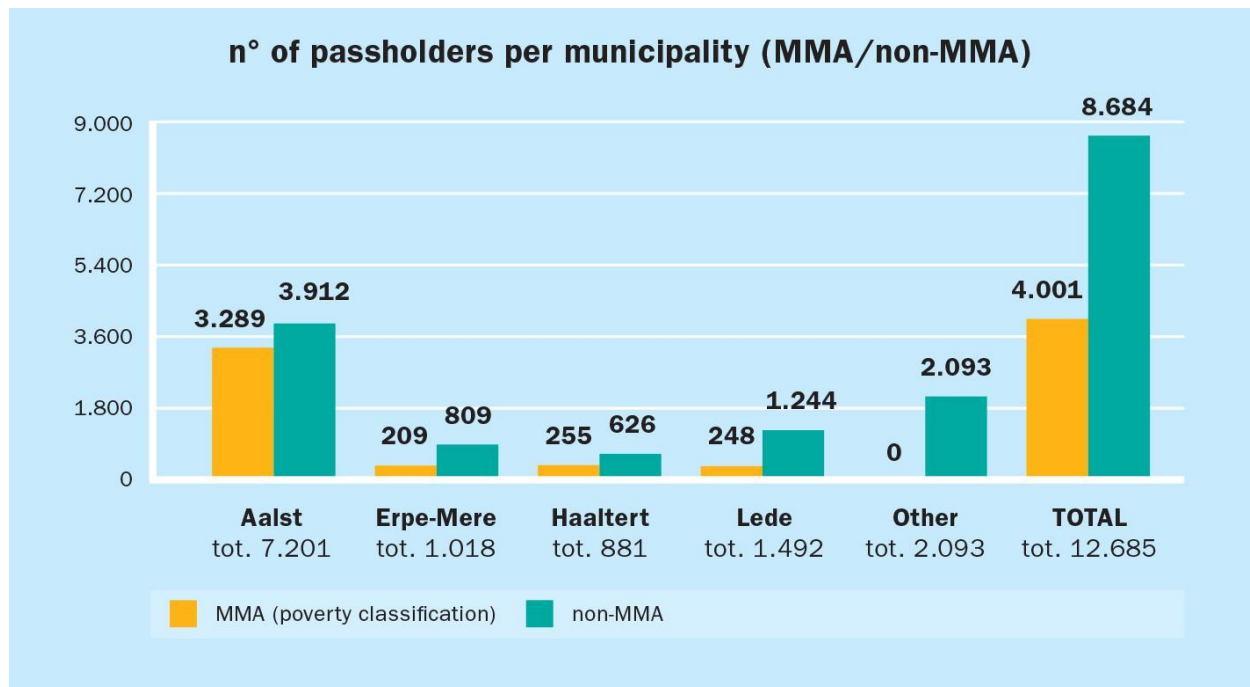
The objectives for the launch were clearly defined.

1 - For existing audiences, the UiTPAS aimed to widen the cultural participation. Points saved on the card enable users to take part in a much wider range of activities at reduced prices – in effect it is a kind win/win situation.

2 - For potential audiences, CultuurNet aims to reward more general leisure behaviour (sports, public libraries etc.) with incentives in the cultural domain. UiTPAS makes no pretence of offering a solution for the 20% “rejectors” from Caen’s study.

3 - People living in poverty are served by a system of anonymous discounts and tailor made outreach projects run by local welfare partners.

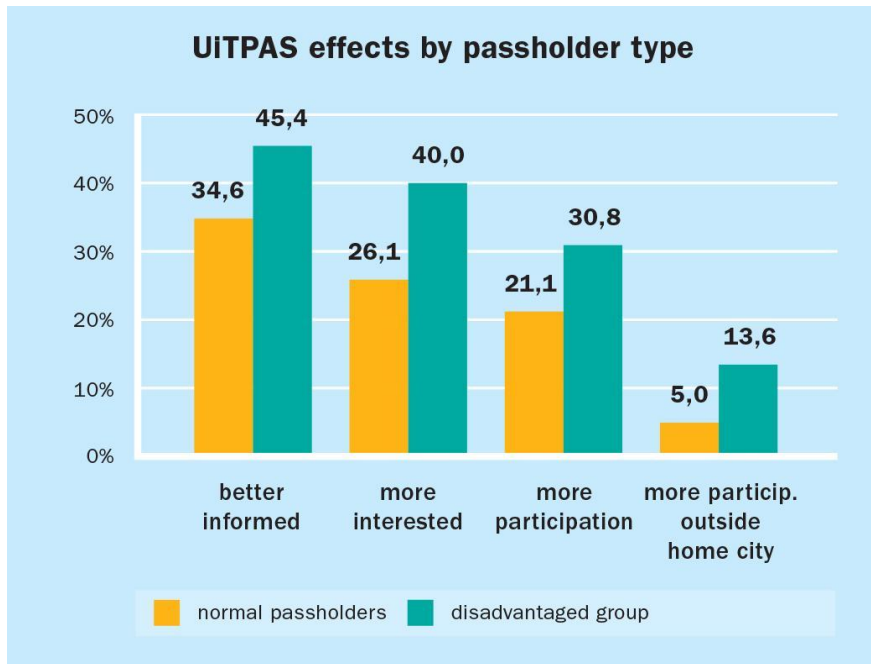
Classic social card systems provide exclusive discounts to low-income users. In practice they tend to work as an inverted status symbol: showing the card feels like an explicit admission of poverty. The UiTPAS leisure pass avoids this potential embarrassment because everyone shows an identical-looking card. It therefore provides an acceptable way to bridge the poverty gap. By the end of the trial period, 12,685 UiTPAS cards were in circulation; of these 4,007 were held by persons in the poverty category.



Before the start of the project in 2012, Ghent University and a Policy Research Centre of the Flemish Government collaborated on a baseline survey, against which the project results would be measurable. A follow-up study took place at the end of September 2013. It included a supplementary survey of a representative sample of Aalst residents, and a new sample survey of UiTPAS holders who started using their cards in the preceding year.

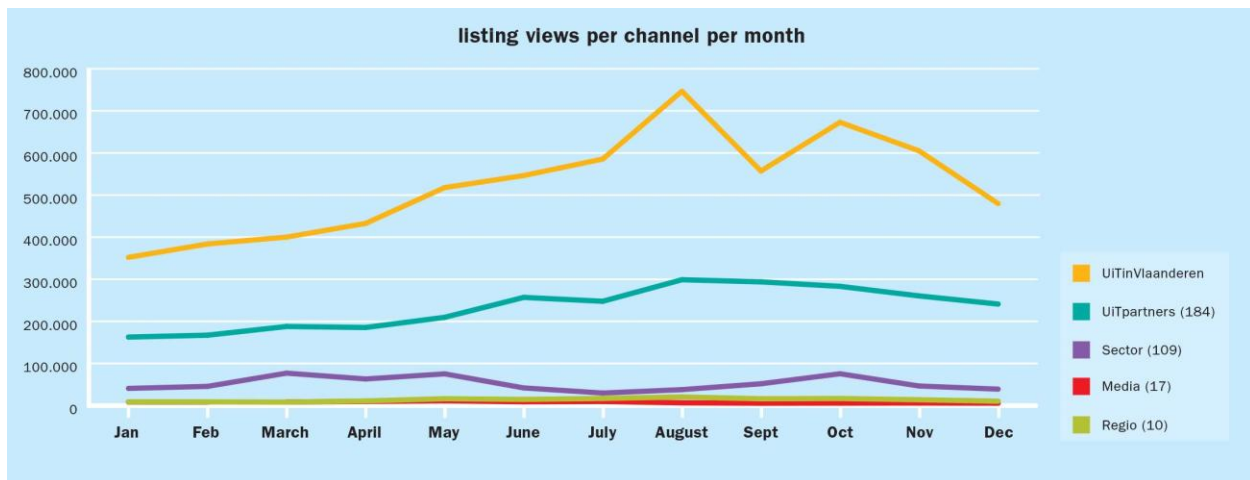
The general conclusion is that the UiTPAS has had a positive effect on participation. The effect was at its most conspicuous among low-income users: UiTPAS holders who are entitled to opportunity pricing have been participating more since the introduction of the UiTPAS, particularly in the more popular cultural genres. They are showing more interest in the range of leisure activities on offer, and are discovering new activities to which they rate positively. Financial and practical barriers are now less of a hindrance, and the information threshold for theatre is reduced. There is however no substantial effect for culture houses which already had a low financial threshold before introduction of the UiTPAS.

The results are more equivocal for the “passers-by” segment. The research revealed that passholders felt better informed, took more interest in leisure activities and found it easier to make choices. The interval between the baseline survey and the follow-up survey was, however, too short to allow identification of the effects on actual participation. The pilot project indicated that the UiTPAS is a powerful communication device which forms an integrated platform for promotion of wider leisure activity offers. The leisure pass facilitates targeted communication towards various target groups. It is also a viable tool for developing and supporting participation-stimulating initiatives and incentives.



Technical layer

The UiTPAS system layer is superimposed on a database previously developed by CultuurNet. The database collects and disseminates first-line information on over 130 thousand leisure activities in the region annually. The power of this database is bilateral. On the one hand, content is assembled from data input by organizers from the broad leisure sector (23 thousand organizers entered their activities in 2013). On the other, the entire content is made available at the output end, for publication on some 500 channels which include the major media players of the region. The database is consulted annually by over 2.5 million users, for whom the entire range of cultural and leisure activities is just a few clicks away.



However, the provision of information alone is not enough to assure a successful programme of behavioural change. The UiTID project was therefore inaugurated in the run-up to the UiTPAS launch. Users with an UiTID can search the “going out in Flanders” website UiTinVlaanderen.be for activities that appeal to them. The “likes” are stored in a database which generates leisure tips for registered users; the database grows continually smarter, and the tips are more and more precisely targeted as a result. Unlike many social media sites, the user remains 100% the owner of his or her own data, which can be changed or deleted at will. There are currently over 100 thousand UiTID accounts and the number is still rising.

UiTPAS completes the picture. It is the opposite of a classic loyalty system that aims to hold onto an existing public and is ideal from the commercial perspective of an individual organization. The UiTPAS is, by contrast, motivated by a collective/democratic policy goal of more participation by more varied segments of the public. After all, the UiTPAS addresses a new segment of the public: indeed *the people formerly not known as our audience*.

Policy level

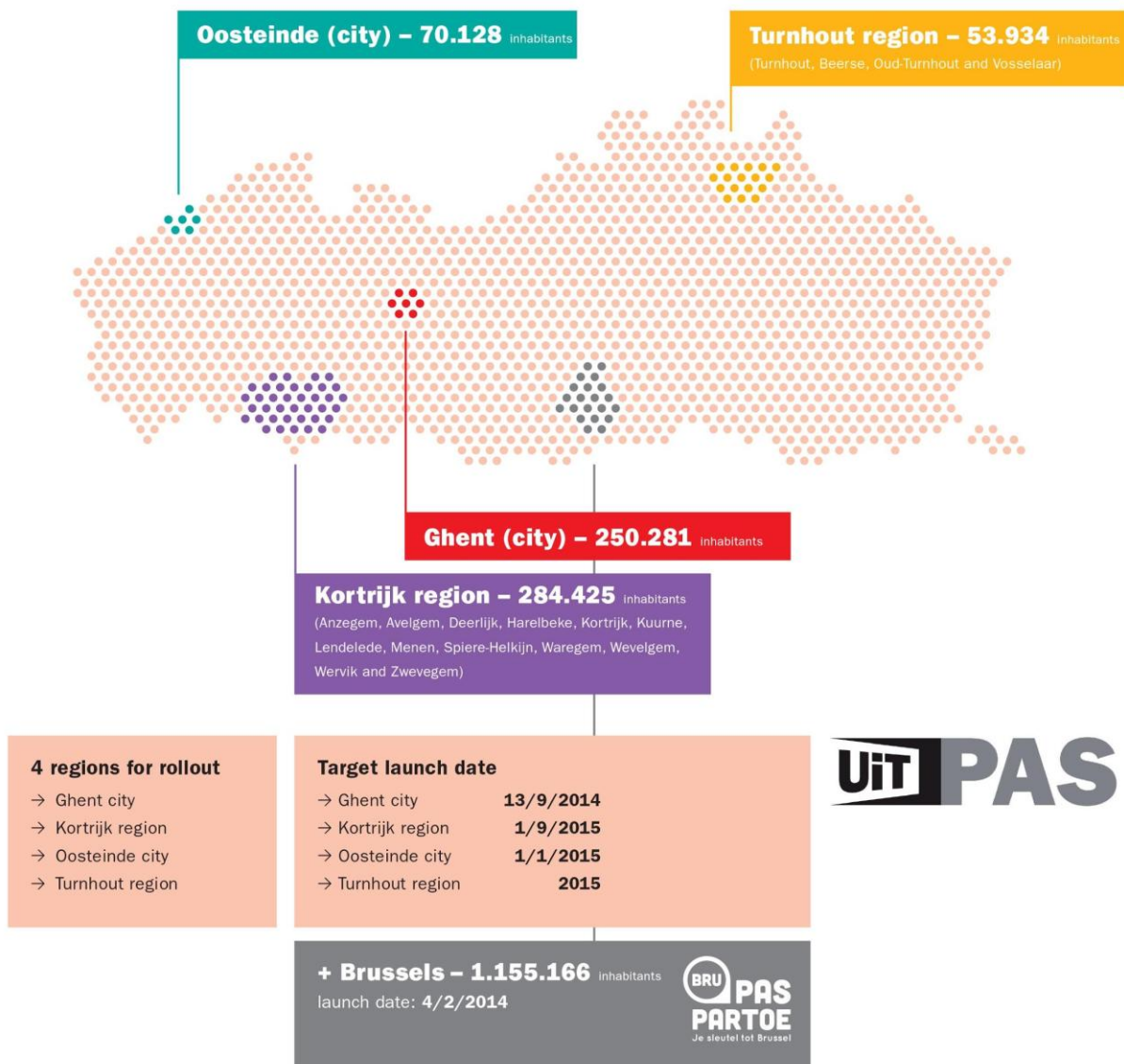
An integrated local leisure strategy (culture, youth and sports) is high on the agenda of many towns and cities. The local authorities develop a strategic outlook and deploy operational assets with a view to achieving a rich and varied offer. They support clubs and societies, conduct an inclusive participation policy and communicate the information necessary to make all this possible.

Cultural behaviour change can only be the outcome of a continued effort in various policy domains. The UiTPAS has an instrumental role in this respect. It is not a goal in its own right, but is an effective tool for boosting behavioural change, and thus functions as a catalyst for realization of the policy objectives. Local authorities can take a step-by-step approach using the tools that CultuurNet provides: the UiTatabank for acquiring and distributing information on leisure options, the UiTID for profiling the potential/actual audience and offering them targeted tips, and the UiTPAS for promoting and widening participation.

Roadmap for the future

Following a favourable evaluation report in late 2013, the Flemish Government has decided to continue the project. The leisure pass will be implemented in an initial rollout phase for Brussels, for the cities of Ghent and Oostende, and for the Kortrijk region. This will be followed in 2015 by a coordinated rollout in the rest of Flanders, making it one of the first regions to possess a real time participation barometer.

UiTPAS Rollout



The icing on the cake is to be launched this year. The UiTPAS project offers a substantial and as yet largely unexploited potential for initiating personalized actions on behalf of specific segments of UiTPAS holders. A rule

engine is being developed to enable effective deployment of the UiTPAS in actions that respond to the personal biography and/or individual leisure behaviour of UiTPAS holders. With this UiTPAS-based rule engine, CultuurNet wants to contribute to more innovation and efficiency (measurable effects) in the domain of collective audience development.

Websites to check out

www.uitinvlaanderen.be

www.uitpas.be

Contact

Peter Bary, Director of Marketing : peter.bary@cultuurnet.be

