

Support Material

The Ideal City?



Tour Title: **Mons, The Ideal City?** Ideas that shaped the city and their limits

General Information



Primary Themes: The ideal city through urban planning & design, safety, cleanliness, inclusion & social life, sustainability, governance & civic participation



Target Audience: From 16 years old, for a group of 3 to 25 people.
No prior knowledge necessary.



Languages: English, French, German, Serbian, Hungarian, Polish



City / Country: Mons, Belgium



Starting location: Place du Bastion Vert, Mons



Distance: 3,5 km



Estimated Duration

Pre-tour activity: 20-25 minutes

The tour: 2h30

Post-tour activity: 30 minutes



Material needed: At least one phone with internet connection per 2 people, headphones, good shoes
Optional (see the activity at the last stop): Post-its, pens.



Accessibility Level: Medium

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Learning Objectives

This tour explores the idea of the “ideal city” through the streets of Mons, from its historical foundations to contemporary life. As participants walk through the city, they discover how ideals of beauty, safety, inclusivity, dynamism, and sustainability have shaped urban spaces. The tour highlights how these ideals were imagined, challenged, or transformed over time, encouraging reflection on who the city serves, how it is experienced, and what makes a city truly “ideal”.

Objectives

Civic Knowledge

- Understand how ideals of beauty, safety, health, inclusion, power and attractiveness have shaped Mons’ urban spaces.
- Explore how historical visions of the city influence contemporary life.

Critical Thinking

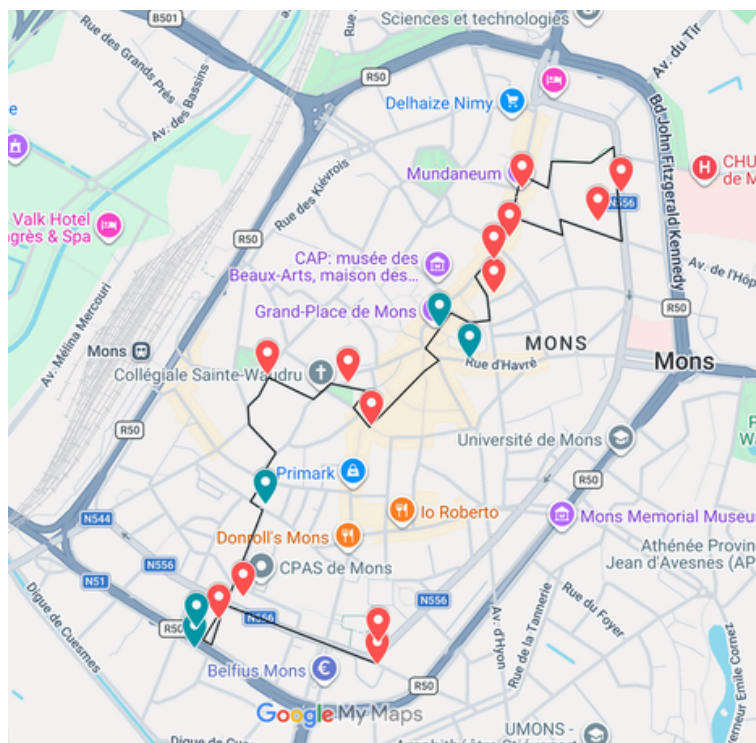
- Examine the city from multiple perspectives, questioning whose needs have been prioritized.
- Connect historical ideas of the “ideal city” to today’s issues of inclusion and participation.
- Challenge assumptions about what makes a city “ideal” and for whom.

Civic Engagement

- Recognize the role of citizens and policymakers in shaping public spaces.
- Identify opportunities to foster a more inclusive, sustainable, and vibrant city.
- Encourage participation in initiatives that reflect diverse urban experiences.

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Practical Information



Legend

- 📍 Main stops of the tour
- 📍 Extra stops or points of interest mentioned in the tour

Stop	Location	Type of Activity	Estimated Time
1.Which type of housing?	Place du Bastion Vert, îlot de Messine	One observation question	4 minutes
2.A Green City	The Hanging Garden, 2 Rue de la Boulangerie	Genially + 360° and pictures to get information	6 minutes
3.A Clean City	Les Bains-Douches, Rue de Malplaquet 2	Reflection challenge. Extra observation challenge during the whole tour	5 minutes
4.Which place for poverty? (1)	Place Nervienne	Observation challenge between stops 4 and 4'.	3 minutes
4 bis.Which place for poverty? (2)	Mons Train Station OR Square Franklin Roosevelt	Critical Thinking Challenge	10 minutes

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Stop	Location	Type of Activity	Estimated Time
5.Architectural representations of power	39 rue de la Poterie	Genially, to explore information with small challenges to unlock the next chapter (mathematical riddle, multiple choice question and dialogue prompt).	8 minutes
6.A city shaped by the citizens	Rue des Fripiers	Creative Task	8 minutes
Extra Stop: Public transport	Grand Place	Observation Puzzle	2 minutes
7.Which relationship to the past?	Statue Leopold 2, next to Saint Elisabeth Church	No extra activity	5 minutes
8.Which place for Justice?	35 rue de Nimy and 1 rue des Droits de l'Homme	Dialogue Prompts	10 minutes
9.An open city	Rue des Arbalestriers	Digital Timeline and short knowledge-based puzzle (fill the blank). Optional: Creative Task, what kind of borders for your city?	8 minutes
10.A city of shared knowledge	The Mundaneum	Logic puzzle to find the next stop	4 minutes
11.Feeling at home in an inclusive city	La p'tite maison folie, 46 rue de Nimy	Optional: experience the exchange economy	4 minutes + 10 minutes (optional)

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Accessibility

The tour route is generally accessible, with no stairs along the way. However, Mons is a medieval city, so the streets are not entirely flat and are mostly paved, which can make the route challenging for wheelchair users or people with visual impairments. Sidewalks can be narrow in some places, which might require walking on the roads. The city center is mostly pedestrian, but it can become crowded during peak hours, which may affect movement.

Concerning the accessibility to the different buildings:

- Accessibility to the hanging garden is very limited, both in terms of time and because of the big stairs that need to be climbed to reach the garden.
- If you decide to go inside the train station, escalators are accessible next to the stairs. Moreover, closer to the road that passes under the station, you can find two elevators.
- You can access the main floor of the Mundaneum for free, which is accessible to disabled people.
- Access to La P'tite Maison Folie is often possible, but there are a few stairs to enter. Access to the garden at the back is not very convenient either to people in a wheelchair.

The tour combines written materials, 360° as well as interactive content and activities, using both digital and non-digital content to engage a variety of learning styles.

All content (including fonts, contrast, text size, and interactive elements) has been designed to accommodate people with Specific Learning Disorders.

In terms of cognitive load, the tour regularly invites participants to observe and reflect on their conception of the ideal city. For each stop, the participants can choose if they prefer listening to the content or reading it.

Safety

Overall, there are no major safety concerns. However, narrow sidewalks in some areas may require walking on the road, so participants should pay close attention to traffic.

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Before the Tour

Total duration: 20-25 minutes

Objectives: Help participants (1) Recognize that different groups may imagine different “ideal cities”, (2) Understand that urban spaces reflect values, decisions, and power relations, (3) Take the role of urban investigators during the tour.

Group Management: Begin with individual reflection, followed by small-group work, and finish with collective discussion. Divide participants into groups of 3-5 students. Act as facilitator, guiding discussion rather than providing answers.

Material needed: Sticky notes or small pieces of paper, pens or markers, board or flipchart, 1-2 printed or projected images of contrasting urban spaces

1. First Ideas About the Ideal City (5 minutes)

Ask participants: “If you could design the ideal city, what would be its three main characteristics?”

Each participant writes three keywords describing their ideal city (e.g., safe, green, lively, clean, inclusive, modern, beautiful). Collect the answers on the board or wall.

2. Competing Visions (10 minutes)

Divide students into small groups and assign each group a role such as residents, business owners, environmental activists, commuters, cultural organizations, politicians... Each group must agree on three priorities for their ideal city from their assigned perspective.

Bring the class together and compare responses using guiding questions:

Did all groups imagine the same ideal city? Were they conflicting priorities within groups?

And between groups? Can a city satisfy everyone at once?

This step introduces the idea that the “ideal city” is negotiated rather than universal.

3. Observing Urban Spaces (5-8 minutes)

Show one or two contrasting urban images (e.g., historic center vs. commercial area, pedestrian street vs. highway...) and ask the participants:

What values do these spaces reflect? Who benefits from them? Who might feel excluded?

Finish by presenting the tour as an investigation: participants become urban investigators, exploring how ideas of the ideal city have evolved and shaped urban life. Explain that everyone is viewing and understanding the city differently, some of these ideas having left their marks in Mons. That is what you are going to explore during the tour.

Invite the participants to keep one guiding question in mind during the visit:

“Whose vision of the ideal city am I looking at?”

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During the Tour



- General facilitation information: For most of the stops, you will find one or several reflection questions. You can choose the ones you like and discuss them with the participants at the stop, between two stops in a more informal way or later on, after the tour.
- For each stop, participants can read the content in the booklet or listen to the audio recording.
- The “urban detective challenge” boxes are extra challenges to do between the stops.

Stop 1 : Place du Bastion Vert, îlot de Messine



Facilitation tips: Before reading the description of the neighborhood, ask the participants to describe what they see. Invite them to pay attention to the type of material used, the construction of the buildings and the environment around the buildings.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- The Messines blockhouse is so named because it surrounded the Church of Notre-Dame de Messines.
- Completed in 2001, after 25 years of construction, the 600 homes were handed over to a public housing association and are therefore accessible to people from most social backgrounds.



Reflection Questions

- If you could design housing today, what would you prioritize: privacy, affordability, ecology, or community?
- Who should have the power to decide what housing in a city looks like: politicians, architects, residents, or private developers? Why?

Stop 2 : The Hanging Garden, 2 Rue de la Boulangerie



Facilitation tips: Invite the participants to close their eyes and share what they hear. Let them discover the content of the stop before exploring the activity linked to the QR code (they must move the light to find the key. Once they tap on it, they get access to a 360° view of the garden). You can ask them what they think about it before inviting them to scan the second QR code that leads to a Genially presentation of the environmental initiatives of the Municipality. They can explore this content on their own, as they want.

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Cultural Heritage Support Notes: Greening building façades is an initiative from the “Agence de développement Centre Ville de Mons”, in collaboration with the Municipality. Every resident or business owner can benefit from personalised support and the provision of plants.



Reflection Questions

- In your ideal city, which space would you dedicate to nature?
- In a dense historic city, what should come first: housing, transport, or green spaces?
- Would you accept fewer parking spaces or car lanes if it meant more trees and parks?
- Is it better to have small green “islands” everywhere or one big park outside the city?
- Would you personally take part in projects like tree sponsorship or façade planting? Why or why not?

Stop 3 : Les Bains-Douches, Rue de Malplaquet 2



Facilitation tips: When the Provincial Institute of Hygiene and Bacteriology is mentioned in the text, walk towards the boulevard and show the yellow building on the other side of the road to the participants, keeping safety rules in mind (cars can come from your right in the street next to the Boulevard). Invite them to answer the riddle before discovering the rest of the content. Before leaving, point at the police tower that will be evoked later on.



The urban detective challenge: As an extra challenge, invite the participants to keep an eye open all along the tour to spot the “empêche-pipi”. You can even plan a small reward for the first ones who will spot one of them.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- The public baths building (1908–1909) is now a community centre.
- La Trouille was the economic hub and the main feature of the landscape in a vast neighbourhood quite distinct from the rest of the city (see next stop).
- The hygienism of the latter half of the 19th century and the early 20th century was a doctrine shared by Catholic circles concerned with social issues, such as the Le Playans, the progressive bourgeoisie and socialist circles.

Support Material



Solution

The names on the building are: Metchnikoff (discovered that certain cells eat microbes), Jenner (first vaccine), Pasteur (Pasteurization and vaccines), Welch (modern bacteriology), Lister (antiseptic surgery), Villemin (demonstrated that tuberculosis is contagious)...

They all illustrate the evolution from a "curing medicine" to a **preventive** one.



Reflection Questions

- Who decides what a "clean city" means? What does it mean for you?
- The public baths were built partly for health, partly for productivity. Today, what do you think cities prioritize most: wellbeing, economy, image, or control?

Stop 4: Place Nervienne



Facilitation tips: Ask the first questions of the text to the participant and collect their answers. You can do the same with the final questions about the Nervienne square, or you can simply ask the participants to discuss the last question in small groups.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes:

- This square was created in the 1860s, following the demolition of the fortifications, of which the 'casemates', built by the Dutch in 1815, still remain.
- Purpose: long used as a (free) car park due to its size, it hosts Mons's largest and busiest market every Sunday.
- The Hospice Glépin (the red building) was the first to take in households.
- The neighbourhood is the same as the one of the first stop (Messines) and it is associated to a quite strong identity feeling even if the feeling of being from Mons seems to be stronger (cf "Les cahiers de la MMM", n°8).

The urban detective challenge: This is the house you are looking for. It is in the Bouzanton street.



Solution

Blue



Support Material

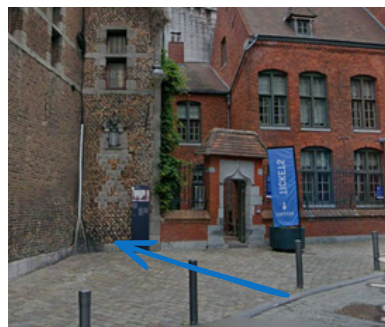
Stop 4 bis: Mons Train Station



Facilitation tips: If you have enough time, you can walk inside the train station. Otherwise, use the pictures. Gather the first impressions of the participants. Then let them discover the simulation activity and ask for their impression again. If you want to explore a bit more the topic of this stop, invite the participants to read the "To go further page". Otherwise, simply skip it and go directly to the reflection question.

When walking next to the Franklin Delano Roosevelt square, underline the absence of benches (compared to the Nervienne square).

After this stop, also pay attention to the "empêche-pipi". You can find one on the right side of the collegiate church (on the other side of the road), and one next to the Spanish house.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- Some extra information about the history of the train station in Mons can be found on telemb.be
- [More pictures of the previous train stations can be found on Youtube](#)
- Another interesting date: 2023 - Wallonia funds a "Zero Homeless Territory" project. Mons receives €4.5 million from this fund for the Aristotle project that aims at creating new housing for people in need. The result so far: three tiny houses were built at the Poliade centre, on the outskirts of the city.



Reflection Questions

- In Mons and beyond, can you think of other examples where urban design excludes certain people? Who gets to feel at home in a city?
- What are the differences between being safe and feeling safe?
- How would you ensure safety in your ideal city?

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Stop 5: Architectural representations of power, 39 rue de la Poterie



Facilitation tips: Make sure to stand in a way to see both the belfry and the collegiate church of Saint Waultrude. Make sure the participants click on "Send" at the first and third questions to validate their answers. You can invite the participants to answer the final question of the Genially, either in small groups of 3-4 people or in big group.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- The Counts' Castle was considered the county's foremost stronghold, measuring 325 metres in length and covering over half a hectare. From the 10th century, it served as the main residence of the Counts of Hainaut. In 1433, the Counts stopped using it as their primary residence and it gradually became a court, a prison, and later an asylum. Lacking maintenance, it slowly fell into ruin before the Clock Tower's collapse in 1661.
- The Canonesses of Mons were high-ranking noblewomen who formed a powerful and largely autonomous religious chapter. Their planned 190-metre tower was a deliberate assertion of their institution's wealth, independence, and authority, both against civic power and against other religious institutions
- Before the Belfry existed, the Town Hall established in 1323 was the primary symbol of urban autonomy, marking the moment city magistrates broke free from the authority of the Counts. The Belfry reinforced and amplified that independence. Interestingly, a second floor for the Town Hall was planned but never got built.

Stop 6: Rue des Fripiers



Facilitation tips: For the creative task, invite the participants to discuss their ideas in groups of 3-4 before opening the padlet and sharing them online.

Urban Detective Challenge: Grand Place



Facilitation tips: When walking through the city center and the Grand Place, invite the participants to pay attention to what was mentioned before: the quantity of benches, their shape, the space left to cars...

Once you have crossed the Grand Place, instruct the participants to do the urban detective challenge (a digital puzzle of the main square). They can do it alone or in pairs. Test the puzzle before to be able to explain how to move the pieces if needed.

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Stop 7: Statue Leopold II



Facilitation tips: If you want to put the content of this stop into perspective, invite the participants to read the "To go further page". Otherwise, simply read the last sentence of that page and continue to the next stop.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

The Borinage is a historical and geographical region of Belgium, situated in Wallonia in the province of Hainaut, to the west and south-west of Mons. Formerly a major coal-mining centre, it is renowned for its industrial heritage, its slag heaps and the working-class culture of its inhabitants, known as the 'Borains'.

Stop 8: The Courts, rue de Nimy and Rue des droits de l'homme



Facilitation tips: Make a first stop "Rue de Nimy", in front of the Courthouse. Ask the participants to answer the question of the first digital card in big group. Then walk towards the "Rue des Droits de l'homme". Make the participants read the description and answer questions 2 and 3 from the digital cards in big group. For each one of these questions, share the information you can find below in the "solutions" section. Finally, invite participants to discuss question 4 in groups of 3-4 people.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- The extension of the Courthouse (rue de Nimy) was made of glass to embody the accessibility and transparency of justice.
- Tour Valenciennoise: a listed 14th-century monument and the last remaining visible trace of the town's second medieval wall
- Mons is a city of justice .The Courts of Justice house the following judicial services: the Court of Appeal, the Labour Court, the Assize Court, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Commercial Court.
- Hainaut Court of First Instance (located at 35 Rue de Nimy) tackles civil and criminal cases, including those requiring the application of international or European standards.
- In Belgium, many jails look like small castles. At the time, architecture was meant to express state authority and command respect. Massive walls, towers, and fortress-like forms were symbolic rather than decorative, reflecting the belief that architecture could support discipline, rehabilitation, and deterrence. Inspired by fortresses and cloistered convents, the prison was designed as a separate world, cut off from the city,
- Some information about the future jail can be found [on RTBF](#).

Support Material



Solutions

Q1: We can read this architecture as a statement about transparency with the idea that justice has nothing to hide, that it belongs to everyone, that it is open to the public gaze.

Q3: In the 19th century, many modern prisons were built in Belgium, serving as a clear reminder of the state's right to use coercion in the interests of maintaining social order. Their castle-like appearance symbolises both a warning to society and its protection. A disturbing symbol and "the prettiest thing imaginable", as Verlaine put it when speaking of Mons' jail.

Stop 9: Rue des Arbalestriers



Facilitation tips: Ask the opening question to the group. If they don't find the answer, share the clue "Turn slightly to your right and look a bit further. What do you see?".

Answer: You see a tower, the Tour Valenciennoise, one of the last surviving towers of the ancient city walls that are also represented on the piece of art. Now, it has been replaced by Boulevards.

Participants discover the first part of the content. Then in pairs, they explore the timeline and do the short "fill in the blanks" activity. Finally, they discover the last part of the content.

You can invite them to do the urban detective challenge (discussion in small groups) during their walk to the next stop (optional).



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- The entrance of the "Passage du Centre" used to be behind this door in the Grand Rue.
- More information about the Doudou can be found on [the website of VisitMons](https://www.visitmons.be).



Reflection Questions

- Nowadays, what does it mean to have an open city and how is it embodied?
- Very often, we can see that the more a city grows outward, the more its heart empties out. Is an open city always a better city?
- Even without walls, what kinds of borders still exist in cities today? (economic borders? Social or cultural barriers? Tourist vs local spaces? Neighbourhood reputations?...)
- When a city evolves, what should it protect?

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Stop 10: The Mundaneum



Facilitation tips: If you want, you can explain the content of the box (the ideals behind the Mundaneum) to the participants to give them some context. You can also visit the main floor of the Mundaneum if you have some time.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- Find more information about the Mundaneum and its history [on its website](#), [in the timeline section](#).
- The ideals of Otlet and La Fontaine emerged because of important developments in the late 19th century: advances in scientific discoveries, transport and communication, which enabled a new flow of goods and ideas.
- Otlet had understood the danger of his own idea. Centralising all the world's knowledge in one place is power, and power gets abused. So he designed the Cité Mondiale not just as a repository of truth and knowledge, but as a guardian of it, a safeguard against manipulation. A hundred years later, the tools changed. The danger didn't. We built the internet; we centralised knowledge and we are still arguing about who controls it...



Reflection Question: What would be the founding principle of your ideal city if you could build it from scratch?



Solution: In this puzzle, "UMONS - 81327" means we take "M" as the first letter of the alphabet. "N" as the second one... and "A" is the fifteenth letter. From there, "***** - 203262319" is actually "20.3.26.23.19" which gives "FOLIE"

Stop 11: La P'tite Maison Folie



Facilitation tips: If you want and if you have at least 6 people in the group, you can do the "skill exchange activity" in big group at the end of the stop. At the end of the tour, you can also go inside and ask if it is possible to show the place to the participants (make sure there is no activity going on and that you are not too many people). The participants can seize this opportunity to talk to the locals that use the space. You can also explore the garden at the back.



Cultural Heritage Support Notes

- The concept of "Maison Folie" was created at the occasion of Lille 2004, European Capital of Culture.

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- In 2002, the Maison Folie was refurbished for the first time. The mindset? To ensure that people using the space would feel like residents rather than mere passers-by. The other goal was to put 'access' to culture at the heart of the project, which echoes the idea that culture plays a central role in the city, especially since 2015 (Mons, European Capital of Culture).
- More information about l'Accorderie Montoise on [RTBF](#).
- More information about the future [Maison Folie on their website](#)



Reflection Questions

- An ideal city isn't just about grand projects and beautiful architecture. Sometimes it's about a house at number 46 that decided to trust people. In your city, where is that place?
- Is an ideal city something you design? Or something that just happens, when you get out of the way and let people in?



After the Tour

Total duration: 30 minutes

Objectives: Help participants reflect on what they discovered during the tour and connect Mons' history to present-day urban challenges

Group Management: Small groups and collective discussion

Material needed: post-its, pens

1. Individual Reflection (10 minutes)

Ask the participants to take two minutes of silence and think back on the tour.

They answer individually on post-its or in big group if the group is small:

- What place or story did you find most interesting? Most surprising? Why?
- Which stop best illustrates that cities are shaped by human choices, not by chance?
- During the tour, did you notice a place where the interests or needs of different groups seemed to conflict? Explain.
- If you could change one thing in Mons to bring it closer to your vision of an ideal city, what would it be?
- Was there a place that challenged your idea of what an ideal city should be? Why?
- Are there other dimensions of the ideal city that you would like to explore?

2. Collective Reflection (optional): Coming Back on the Reflection Questions of the Tour

If you didn't have time to do it during the tour, you can come back on some of the reflection questions suggested in this Support Material. Depending on the size of the group, you can discuss them directly in big group or ask the participants to discuss them first in smaller groups of 3-4 people.

Support Material

3. Group Activity: Designing the Ideal City (20 minutes)

Divide participants into small groups (3–4 people).

All groups receive the following mission: “You are now the urban council responsible for designing an ideal city. You have to agree on a common project and present it to the citizens”.

Participants have to agree on, at least:

- 3 elements their city absolutely needs (things to prioritise or develop)
- 1 element they would limit, transform, or relocate (and how)
- 1 value that would guide all their decisions

Indicate that they can also include aspects of the ideal city that were not mentioned in the tour. After 10 minutes of reflection, invite the groups to pitch their concept of the ideal city.

At the end, inform the participants they can also create their own tour, applying the concept of ideal city to another place or developing another topic.



References

- Maison de la mémoire, “Soeurs Noires”: <http://www.mmemoire.be/la-maison-de-la-memoire/notre-projet/les-soeurs-noires/>
- Les cahiers de la MMM, n°8 to discover the Messines neighbourhood.
- The history of Mons Train Station: <https://www.telemb.be/actu/de-1841-aujourd'hui-lhistoire-des-gares-de-mons/37259>
- Mons train station, archive images: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s1qNXQJvJgk>
- Le Doudou, general presentation: <https://www.visitmons.be/fr/unesco/article/le-doudou-690772>
- Website, Maison Folie: <https://maisonfolie.surmars.be/>
- L'accorderie Montoise, RTBF: <https://www.rtbef.be/article/l-accorderie-a-mons-un-endroit-ou-les-personnes-echangent-leurs-competences-9422257>
- Website Mundaneum: <https://mundaneum.org/le-mundaneum/histoire/>

Moreover, for a theoretical approach of “who shapes cities”, you can explore:

- Henri Lefebvre. (1968). *Le droit à la ville*. Anthropos - or its English translation from 1996.