



Face check

Which convention type are you?

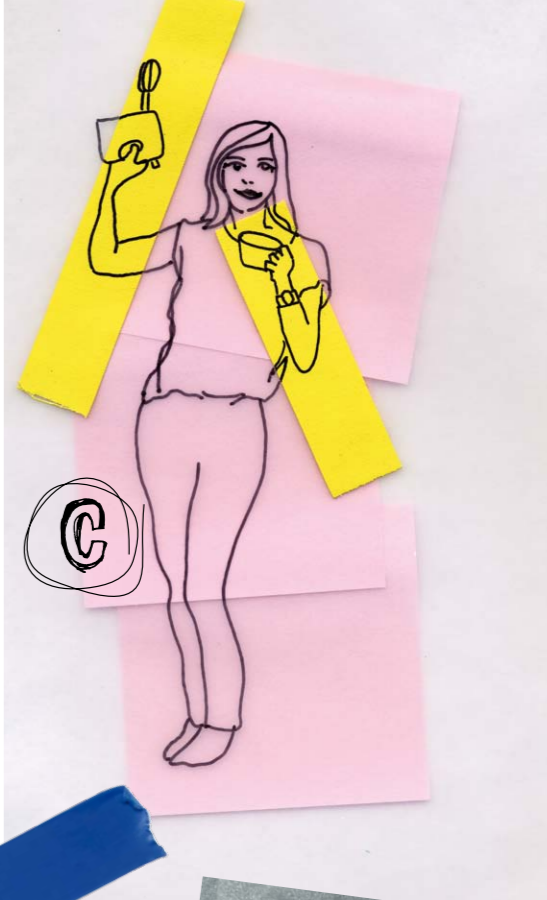
by Marlies Pöschl



C) THE PERFECT MIXER

Every time the lights go on, you hurry to the next coffee table, which is luckily never very far. You find the breaks between speeches and workshops way too short, because everybody knows the most important things happen in the coffee break. You get to meet the 'President of Belgium', the 'Ambassador of Turkey' or even a 'Convention Tourist'. During the excursion where you visit youth work practices in Ghent by bike, you'd just love to stay longer and philosophise with the organisers of 'Neboboot'. The charming bicycle guide has to prevent you from falling off your bike laughing and/or from picnicking out of your lunch bag under every second tree.

While other people might get grouchy, for you there is nothing more sociable than queues in front of dinner buffets: after five minutes you know everything about the people around you, from their opinions on youth policy to the colour of their socks. Well nothing except for watching soccer games on a big screen with other participants, maybe. The big couches on the stage in the café are your second home and the shuttle bus has to blow its horn five times until you finally say goodbye to your new best friend who gives you a purple badge that says 'all inclusive' as a present.

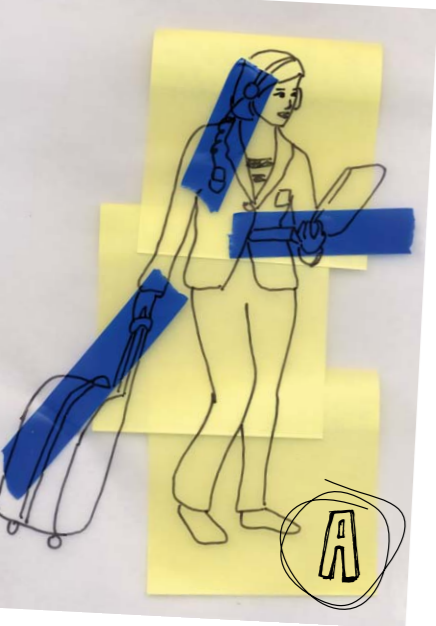


The 1st European Youth Work Convention was not just a conference but an event with many different faces. What did they look like? Were they serious, cool or even sexy? How did you fit in there? And what accessories did you need? You'll find out which 'convention type' you were and – if you didn't attend – what you might have got out of the convention by reading through this experience-based test.

A) THE BUSY BEE

You jumped onto a plane five minutes after your last conference ended and you arrive at the train station in Brussels in a rush. The smiling people at the help desk set up by the organisers of the convention make sure you have a ticket and arrive just in time for the opening. After entering the convention venue 'Vooruit' another helping hand assists you to check in your flight bag at the safekeeping area. You can now fully concentrate on the real issues of youth work and don't have to worry about your documents until you want to take one of the huge shuttle buses straight to your hotel. Don't forget to grab one of the headsets so that you understand every single word that is spoken on stage!

You quickly write a report at one of the working stations put up in the café, then hurry to the entrance of the theatre hall, slip into a seat and look at the stage where the first speaker appears and next to him is a sign language interpreter. The colour of your lanyard tells you how important you are: white is for participants, green for organisers and orange for press. So does your badge: it says your name, function and the country where you're from. You might finally turn out to be 'President of Belgium' this way!



B) THE CULTURE VULTURE

After arriving at the Vooruit building, you spend half an hour walking around, looking at it from every possible angle. On entering, you are fascinated by the colourful tiles on the walls and the well-crafted ornaments on the windows in this former palace of workers' culture. You are blown away by the aura of this place which is now soaked through with theatre, contemporary art, music and dance. In your head, you still hear the concert of Flip Kowlier that took place here a month before. On the first evening the whole building becomes a youth work theme park and you just can't get enough of it: you answer difficult questions in the assessment centre, meet your youth worker soul mate at the speed dating session, hold a speech in the French revolution room and finally end up putting all your wishes for youth work on one bill in what looks like the casino.

During the workshops, you sometimes find it hard to concentrate on the real issues, because every single detail is so beautiful: the lighting, the red velvet couches, the big posters with images of youth work practice. Still you visit as many workshops as possible, because this way you might end up having a complete set of the fancy buttons with slogans and questions about youth work on them. At the guided tour of S.M.A.K., Ghent's municipal museum for contemporary art, you realise that being at this convention is like putting your head into a huge, shiny black bubble. Will all those impressions fit in the white convention bag designed by Belgian artist Roger Raveel?



D) THE NIGHT OWL

During the day, you might be type A, B or C, but as soon as the shadows get longer and the sun sets, the real you no longer needs to be hidden. When disco lights go on, name tags and business cards get blurry, because at night all cats look grey, but it's a shiny, funny and cheerful shade of grey. Whether at the Welcome Concert, the party on the square in front of S.M.A.K. or at the final Gala alongside the river at the back of Vooruit, you chat, laugh, sing, hug and dance. Missing the shuttle bus is no problem because you stroll around in Ghent until you fall into your bed and still appear at the convention at 9 a.m. in perfect shape. You're back to a type A.

