



COWORKING SPACES: AN OFFICE FOR EVERYONE

Coworking spaces are more popular than ever before for several reasons. They don't just provide a working place but also social contacts and a community. We checked out the coworking space StartBloc in Antwerp to see what working there feels like.

When entering the coworking space 'StartBloc' on the seventh floor of an office building at the Meir it feels like entering a world of motivation and visions. People with different backgrounds work on their dreams here, trying to start up their own company. Some others come to do their freelance work. In any case, the atmosphere arouses an urge to be just as productive as these people. The simplistic, wooden furniture underlines this attitude even more. It nearly screams working doesn't have to be a misery.

A basic office place here costs 185 euros per month. High-speed internet, free coffee, an office address and twenty four hour entrance seven days per week are included. There's also a more expensive option which provides you with a dedicated desk and a cheaper option with only ten working hours per month. The dedicated meeting room in the office can be rented without a subscription to the coworking space.

COWORKING SPACE INSTEAD OF PRIVATE OFFICE

StartBloc has become a place to be for entrepreneurs and freelancers in Antwerp. Originally, the founders of StartBloc didn't even plan on opening a coworking space when they rented the office two years ago. "We were four self-employed friends and we wanted to rent a small office together", explains Bart Bencivenni, one of the founders. "But then they showed us this space and we liked it so much that we immediately thought: How could we start here? How could we manage it?"

They founded a new company for the coworking space and in December 2016 office opened its doors. "After four to five months we didn't have to put any money into the company anymore. From then on it was self-sustainable", Bart says. StartBloc is like full-time job for Bart since then.

PLANNING TO EXPAND

The office, located directly in the center of Antwerp, is small though. It fits a little more than 20 people. This is the reason why StartBloc is planning to expand in the future. "We're actively looking for a second space. Also in Antwerp, but a bit more outside", Bart states. For now, there's still enough space for everybody. "We didn't reach our max yet. But we certainly will one day."

Generally speaking, StartBloc has a lot more members than places. But due to the fact that not everyone is there all the time everything works out. "Some people just hop in every few months or weeks. And other people work here five to six days a week", Bart says.

Over time, a community evolved in the coworking space. Every Tuesday, there's even a community lunch break - with to goal to just chat and get to know each other. "It's basic stuff. Everyone eats and everyone talks and that's the only goal basically", Bart explains. The impact is great though. "We've met so many interesting people", he says. I will always go here with a smile in my face because I like the place and the community."

IT FEELS MORE LIKE WORK

Dorien Piessens is one of the people regularly working at StartBloc. She's raising her own startup and uses the coworking space as a workplace for seven months. With her startup called Uppley, Dorien does wellbeing programs for companies. "In the beginning, when I started my company I was working at home. But the problem with working at home is that you never quit", she says. "That's why I come here instead. I have everything I need and there are other people. It just feels more like being at work. This gives me energy."

Sometimes, the colleagues even make life a bit easier. "Although you work on different topics, sometimes you can help each other out. For example when someone has a good contact for you", Dorien explains.

There's only one thing that's not possible in the coworking space: making long phone calls and discussing. The office usually is a rather quiet place. Only in the meeting room people can talk more extensively. "So when I have colleagues over, we rent the meeting room", Dorien says. "Also when I have to make phone calls I either make them at home or also in the meeting room." The meeting room isn't always free though since there's only one.

FROM 9 UNTIL 20 O'CLOCK

On a normal workday, she arrives at the office at 9 o'clock and stays until 7 or 8 o'clock in the evening. "It's a long time, but when you start up your own company you have to invest the time", Dorien explains. "It's tough. A lot of people have this wrong idea that they can become successful with working six hours a day being self-employed. I don't believe in it." In the end, she thinks all the effort is worth it. "It's like growing up a baby. When you're successful, it motivates you and makes you happy."