



**Good Practice 25:
Averbode Monastery**

SKIVRE Training Scheme



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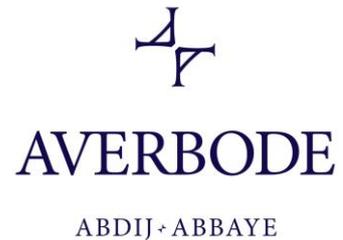
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Good Practice 25: Averbode Monastery, Scherpenheuvel-Zichem, Belgium

Averbode Monastery



Description

Averbode Monastery was founded in 1134 by Arnold II, the Count of Loon. Since its beginning, the activities of the abbey involved agriculture to ensure its sustainability. In the first half of the 16th century, the church of the abbey was rebuilt and richly decorated.

Over the centuries, the abbey faced many hardships, such as looting, fires, and the plague. In the 18th century, it was even sold and demolished, due to political conflicts between the French and the Austrians for control of the Flemish Brabant. During these times, most of the items in the library and the archives were brought to a safe place.

From the 19th century onwards, the abbey began to flourish again. Monastic life was resumed and it became the hub of many activities, such as missionary work and publishing. Nowadays, Averbode has a very bright future, with a wide range of products and a brand new experience center.

The monks at Averbode belong to the order founded by Saint Norbert and are known as Norbertines. In their lives, they strive for unity between community life, prayer, and pastoral commitment. The abbey houses 78 canons, of which 45 live and work in the abbey.

The monastic community has a long tradition of the sustainable production of food and drinks, including baking, cheese-making, and brewing.

The abbey manages the production of several monastic products, which are often outsourced to local family SME's that meet the requirements set by the monastic community and are often under their direct supervision.



1. Publishing house

The publishing activities of the monastery started in 1877 with the creation of the “Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart”, the abbey made a lot of publications to reach out to all the members of the brotherhood.

The business was becoming bigger, so they started buying the necessary machinery to publish more than 25,000 magazines every month.

During the Second World War, their printing was heavily restricted, so the number of publications dropped significantly due to rationing. The publishing activity helped revitalise the abbey from the 19th century onwards.

Years later, the abbey had financial problems because of the cost of new buildings and the machinery for printing was out of their budget. They urgently needed a solution, so they decided to reorganise and made the publishing company a separate company owned by the abbey, instead of an integral part of the abbey.

During the 20th century, the abbey’s press company was a leading publisher of children's books in Belgium, including school books and magazines. By the early 2000s, Averbode had published about 146 magazines, 8,000 books, 2,000 books for adults and over 6,000 youth books.

Nowadays, on the webpage of the publishing branch, it is possible to find all kinds of books and magazines. In the meantime, it has become a market leader for educational magazines in Belgium, both in Dutch and in French. The publishing house also has a strong educational fund with the learning methods for primary, secondary, and adult education. It is also distributed by international education publishers.

2. Averbode production

Averbode has a bakery, a cheese-maturing plant, and a brewery with which they contribute to sustainable production practices. Sustainable agriculture helped them to increase and improve their economic activity by producing their own beer, bread, gingerbread, and cheese.

They work together with local production companies to help them manufacture their products, since the monks of the abbey don’t take a direct part in the manufacturing process.



For the gingerbread, they decided to start working with the business of the Vondelmolen family. This gingerbread has been on the menu at the abbey's restaurant for generations.

For the cheese production, they work very closely with Milcober, a Belgian dairy cooperative with about 3,000 dairy farmers.

For the beer production, the abbey chose to work with Brouwerij Huyghe, which has a rich history of beer making. Brouwerij Huyghe is the only brewery in Belgium to produce Mongoza-beer that has received a fair trade, gluten-free, and organic label. The company also invests in having a smaller carbon footprint and promoting social employment.

For the bread, the abbey community decided to work together with La Lorraine Bakery Group. This group makes authenticity, traditions, and respect for the environment a high priority.

The abbey also has its own shop, where visitors can find all of their products, as well as some regional products from other companies. The books published by the Averbode publishing company can also be found at the shop.

The abbey also has its own café and restaurant, where they also serve their products.

The profits they obtain by selling these products are invested in social projects, heritage-related actions, and educational publications related to their publication company.

In conclusion, Averbode Abbey knew perfectly how to handle all the difficulties they faced throughout the centuries, by making the abbey a sustainable business in itself. Also, we must remark, that they have achieved the perfect formula for combining the production of their products and the creation of good customer experience to its visitors.

■ Why is this a good practice?

Averbode Abbey knows how to be a sustainable abbey. Even though they suffered several difficulties along the way, they were able to overcome them. Averbode knew since the beginning that if they wanted to survive, the abbey would need to find revenue sources, which they did.

Taking advantage of the beautiful landscape and the large fields surrounding the abbey, they created their own products with the help of local farmers.

The monks work on a daily basis to produce high-quality products. Through their business, they create local jobs, contribute to the local economy, and maintain a sustainable abbey.

Averbode transmits the value of its history and products to their visitors by creating a very unique customer experience, where the visitors are totally immersed in the abbey's dynamic on their visit. During the visit, apart from learning more about its history and how they preserved its surroundings, it is possible to have lunch at the abbey, where they can taste some Averbode products, as well as, buy them later in the abbey's shop.

To conclude, we can say that Averbode is an abbey that has maintained its historical tradition of producing monastic products, using similar techniques to the ones they used centuries ago. The Averbode brand is one that produces very high-quality products, and their products are in high demand by the visitors and by locals.

As a monastic community, Averbode is a great example of preservation. For centuries, the monks of the abbey have been very active in charity activities, their publications and through the production of their products.

Pictures



Picture 1: Averbode monastery: cheese, beer, and gingerbread



Picture 2: Averbode monastery: restaurant in the garden for visitors

Source/link

Averbode Abbey, 2019, FRH acceded 27 November 2019

<https://averbodemoment.be/en/home-en/>

Averbode Published Books, 201, FRH acceded 27 November 2019

<https://www.averbode.be/Pub>



Country

Belgium

Topic

SKIVRE Training Scheme	
	Module 1: Introduction Module
X	Module 2: Marketing Strategies
X	Module 3: Monastic Products
X	Module 4: How to Sell Monastic Products Authentically
X	Module 5: Distribution Strategies
	Module 6: Social Media and Communication
X	Module 7: Value Adding Through Networks
X	Module 8: Creating a Strong Brand
X	Module 9: Financing Strategies
X	Module 10: Sustainability Aspects



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