

seven memos for an enlightened building culture

Peter Swinnen / Team Vlaams Bouwmeester





Luc Deleu & T.O.P. office, *Around the world Madrid-Weber-Madrid in 80 days*, 1993

PREFACE

Since the appointment of the first Vlaams Bouwmeester (Flemish Government Architect) in 1999, the Flemish government has worked ceaselessly to develop an excellent architectural policy and to act as an exemplary principal. And with no little success. Broad support has been achieved on the part of both central and local government for high-quality architecture, important themes have been addressed and a growing number of impressive buildings have been completed. Ten years after its introduction, the results of the Vlaams Bouwmeester function are emphatically positive and its importance and necessity have been clearly demonstrated. The third holder of the post can embark on his task with renewed confidence.

Following the initial period with b0b Van Reeth and further development under Marcel Smets, a new phase has begun in which it will be up to the Bouwmeester not simply to meet needs as they arise, but to help shape the agenda too. In a context that is very different to ten years ago, major challenges naturally remain.

The first Vlaams Bouwmeester laid the foundations for a building culture in Flanders by persuading government departments, politicians, principals and designers to sign up to a single, coherent narrative – one characterized by ‘good principalship’ and ‘sustainability’. The second Bouwmeester developed that narrative further, by substantially broadening the sphere of action and actively placing infrastructure and landscape issues on the agenda.



Peter Swinnen, b0b Van Reeth and Marcel Smets,
corridor Henry Le Bœuf Hall, Bozar, Brussels,
3 December 2010

What seems appropriate and necessary now is to have the courage to look further, to reflect even more deeply on the bigger picture and to recalibrate Flemish building culture internationally. What role does Flanders see itself playing in Europe? And what alliances should we forge to enable us to pursue a beneficial and sustainable planning policy?

To answer these questions, we have to make a number of planning, social and strategic choices together. It is therefore apt that this position document by Peter Swinnen, the third Vlaams Bouwmeester, begins with a call ‘to dare to choose’. The ambition laid out here in the form of seven memos draws on the understanding accumulated so far to offer new prospects for high-quality architecture and planning policy in Flanders. It is my hope, my wish and my conviction that we will realise that ambition in the years ahead.

Geert Bourgeois
Vice-Minister-President and
Flemish Minister for Administrative Affairs



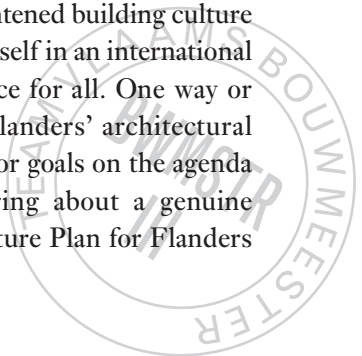
Giambattista Piranesi, *Ichnographiam Campi Martii antiquae urbis* (fragment), 1762.

FOR AN ENLIGHTENED BUILDING CULTURE

The post of Vlaams Bouwmeester – Flemish Government Architect – has been around for a good ten years now, from which we might well conclude that we've moved beyond the experimental phase, that maturity beckons or that a milestone has been reached. Yet none of that should be taken as read.

Which is not to say that the achievements of the first Vlaams Bouwmeester, b0b Van Reeth, or his successor, Marcel Smets, were modest. Far from it: they were genuinely ground-breaking. They established an important tradition and laid the foundations for a conscious building culture – a policy culture in which the Flemish government has sought to map out the role of responsible and inspired principal, with the inevitable trial and error. Nothing so characterizes a policy as its built legacy, its architecture, its approach to urban planning and open space. These are lasting witnesses to today's decisions – the litmus test of a visionary social project.

Projects of that kind are neither a luxury nor just something to do. They are a necessary precondition for an enlightened building culture – a culture in which Flanders dares to look at itself in an international mirror and to function as a high-quality space for all. One way or another, the years ahead will be crucial to Flanders' architectural and spatial development. There are three major goals on the agenda which, if they can pull together, could bring about a genuine revolution: the successor to the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders





Bruce Nauman, *Use Me*, 1988

(Ruimtelijk Structuurplan Vlaanderen) (a fresh opportunity); the declaration of intent ‘Flanders in Action’ (*Vlaanderen in Actie – ViA*), which aims to place Flanders among the top five European regions by 2020; and large-scale renewal in sectors like social housing and care, which can and must give rise to significant urban development processes. Together, these create a unique momentum: a golden opportunity to dare to think about Flanders in the twenty-second century.

There’s a lot of work on the table, therefore, in the years ahead. My aim in these seven memos is to outline the boundaries within which I intend to build – with clear points of emphasis – on the foundations of a first decade of the Vlaams Bouwmeester function. The seven themes explored here are equally important: they set out parallel routes towards a long-term vision of an architecturally and spatially intriguing Flanders. We cannot, however, tackle a challenge as complex as this on our own. The function of Vlaams Bouwmeester only exists, after all, by virtue of passionate collaboration. Consequently, this text is first and foremost a call to pool our strengths, our intelligence and our ideas. It is meant to reach out to enlightened policy makers and to equally enlightened public and semi-public principals; to engaged administrations and agencies; to a visionary building sector, investors, consultants and advisers; to architects, designers, planners and artists from home and abroad; to an inquisitive academic world; to critical media; and to everyone else who, for whatever reason, cannot or does not wish to belong to any of the other categories or families. It is meant to reach out towards a generous building culture.

Peter Swinnen

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Anri Sala, *No Barragán No Cry*, 2002

DARING TO CHOOSE

Nothing is as complex, merciless or crucial as choosing. A society arises and exists by virtue of choice and the freedom to choose. Through choice, we create the examples that shape a culture. It is the duty of government, therefore, to present robust, high-quality and honest examples, to support them and help them develop. It must not leave the choice – the decision – that this presupposes to anyone else: at most, it may seek advice before then making a choice itself. As the Flemish government’s adviser on architecture, public space, infrastructure, public art, landscape and open space, the Vlaams Bouwmeester Team has a key role to play in that process. We are the guardians of the quality of the collective space.

The opposite of choice is compromise, which should never be what we choose. Compromise is always there, seeking tacitly to impose itself. When it comes to architectural and spatial quality, compromise can be neither the point of departure nor the final result. Flanders boasts immense potential and – let’s not be modest – a unique architectural tradition. Having the courage to choose an enlightened building culture is not, therefore, such a distant prospect.

There is nothing new about such a culture: it has been around for centuries. King Leopold II, for instance, put not one but two cities on the map: Ostend and Brussels, albeit financed with ‘blood money’. Leaving aside the style, megalomania and thirst for splendour, what most deserves our attention in this regard is the development process. In each case, Leopold adopted a clear urban plan: a coherent vision, in which a global structure



Colonnade in Parc du Cinquantenaire, Brussels (late nineteenth century)

was first sketched out on the scale of the new city, followed by the allocation of generous public spaces – parks, squares, and avenues – which were then filled with new buildings, districts and monuments. To this day, both cities owe their social and symbolic identity to urban planning under Leopold II. Similar operations are no longer possible or even desirable today. All the same, their urban quality and clarity remain irrefutable testimony to a bold public vision.

Germany's International Building Exhibition (*Internationale Bauausstellung* – IBA) approach is a more contemporary variation on a public vision of the future. It offers a proven strategy for contributing through realized architecture, infrastructure and urban development projects to the debate about the ambitious and visionary development of regions and cities. An IBA should not be confused with a World Expo: it is a development programme focused on both the large and the small scale, taking account of economic, ecological and social changes and closely involving the local population. In other words, the IBA embodies a clear building culture. Just eight IBAs were realized in the last century, each with a different contextual stance, from the repurposing of the Ruhr region (the Emscher Park), through the large-scale expansion of Hamburg, to the reconstruction of a substantial part of inner-city Berlin. Each IBA to date has generated social and architectural renewal. Developments in Flanders like the 'Zuid', 'Eilandje' and 'Linkeroever' projects in Antwerp and redevelopment projects in Limburg come close to what an IBA might be.

To us, 'daring to choose' is all about master planning – providing the robust frameworks for spatial design, without which intriguing architecture is not possible. Daring to choose means we want to ensure a solid, preparatory design path, in which the right parties are brought around the table at the right time so that calculated risks can be taken. And it means never being obliged – or obliging others – to make false choices: between a bridge and a tunnel, say. It means fully supporting, advising and constructively



Welterbe Zollverein, Ruhr (IBA)

challenging public-sector principals. Daring to choose means we have been mandated the task of critically examining a project and, if necessary, putting a stop to it based on objective arguments. It therefore also means deliberately seeking boundaries and overlaps, and benchmarks for quality. Because establishing a benchmark is precisely what government ought to do. Daring to choose entails having the courage resolutely to map out an enlightened building culture. At the end of the day, a building culture is quite simply a precondition for civilization and quality of life.

[ZERO]



Shibam, Wadi Hadhramaut, Yemen

CRITICAL MASS

*By 2050, there will be, in Belgium, two million more people over the age of sixty than there were in 2010. The number of over-eighties will treble. Assuming there is no change in policy, this implies 180,000 additional care places, staffed by 120,000 additional personnel.**

*Under the Land and Property Decree, an extra 43,000 social housing units will be made available for rent by 2020, together with an extra 21,000 low-cost homes and 1,000 low-cost building plots for sale.***

Impressive statistics need to be accompanied by impressive ambitions. The Vlaams Bouwmeester Team is particularly interested in the way the care sector and social housing are evolving, as these issues are bound to have a far-reaching impact on the development of the regional and urban environment, and because they can give rise to interesting typological developments.

The reality is, incidentally, a good deal more complex than outlined above. Within the care sector, for instance, the issues are not limited to that of care for the elderly: a comprehensive approach should also be formulated in which care is viewed as a social opportunity rather than a need to be alleviated. The fact that the care sector takes in the entire life cycle, from birth to death, makes this an even greater necessity. It's hard to imagine a more urgent urban programme. And we find a similar level of urgency in the area of social housing. The established concepts are becoming obsolete: merely



Sanatorium Paimio, Finland (arch. Alvar Aalto, 1932)

keeping up is no longer sufficient. We have to focus on innovation within the sector, dare to stretch concepts, leave the beaten track and come up with new rules that promote spatial freedom rather than social isolation.

We would like, as a first step, to draw up a broadly based position document with the two sectors, based on consultation and reflecting current needs, but with a view to concepts that are clearly innovative. A second step, following a thorough examination, is to focus as rapidly as possible on the realization of high-quality pilot projects. We can draw on the experience the Vlaams Bouwmeester Team has built up in recent catch-up processes for the mobility and infrastructure sector, sports infrastructure and school building. It is very important to take active account here of the impact possible privatization initiatives could have on both sectors.

In addition to care and social housing, the Vlaams Bouwmeester Team detects significant potential within the innovation and environmental sector. It goes without saying that earlier commitments to other sectors will be pursued just as vigorously and with greater precision than ever.

* See Brieuc Van Damme et. al., *Het grijze goud*, Itinera Institute, Brussels, 2010

** Flemish Land and Property Decree of 27 March 2009, www.rwo.be



Paul-Armand Gette, *Le début du paysage – Col de la Furka*, 1991

ViA SPACE

Flanders in Action ('Vlaanderen in Actie' – ViA) is a Flemish government initiative to place Flanders among the top five European regions by 2020. It is an ambitious plan that is fully committed to innovation, internationalization, infrastructure and quality of life. None of these ambitions can be realized, however, without a solid spatial transposition. The ViA Pact 2020 – the 'New Future Pact for Flanders' – states, for instance, that "spatial quality in Flanders remains worrying, despite the region's prosperity". The Vlaams Bouwmeester Team, together with experts and partners from the field, intends to work during the forthcoming mandate to develop spatial and architectural scenarios for Flanders within the framework of ViA's international ambitions.

We find ourselves at an interesting juncture in Flanders' architectural and spatial development. Alongside the ambitions set out in the ViA Pact, a successor will have to be formulated by the end of 2013 to the existing Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders. That successor will have to focus on clear strategic and visionary choices. Given their mutual interests, the Vlaams Bouwmeester Team will collaborate intensively with the Spatial Planning Division, which is responsible for formulating the new plan for Flanders, to develop strategic scenarios for a smart and flexible 'Master Plan for Flanders'.

At the same time, we want to set out a number of speculative architectural and spatial explorations and initiatives of our own in the years ahead. These will be based on the question of what place the Flemish Region might



Cross-border regions (non-exhaustive list)

occupy within a European context in terms of spatial and architectural development. One line of exploration entails the study of cross-regional or cross-border areas – areas with a potentially high profile and an international identity, along the lines of the Trinational Eurodistrict Basel model. Entities worth studying include the Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai Eurometropolis, the Antwerp-Rotterdam Delta and the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion, but also the Brussels periphery and the coastal region. The aim of studying these cross-regional or cross-border areas is to explore Flanders' architectural and spatial margins and to get away from the restrictive central thinking we find, for instance, in the Flemish Diamond model.* Reality teaches us, after all, that the 'centre' need not lie in the middle.

[TWO]

The study that will occur in the framework of ViA Space will be based on real architectural proposals combined in an exploratory atlas.

* The Flemish Diamond represents the urban core of Flanders, bounded by Brussels, Ghent, Antwerp and Leuven, one of the world's most densely populated regions. It was introduced as a planning model in the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders.



Dominique Thirion, *Open venster* (Graaf de Ferraris Building, Brussels), 2002

VARIATIONS ON REAL ESTATE

From 1999 to 2005, the first Vlaams Bouwmeester, b0b Van Reeth, had his offices at the Graaf de Ferraris Building in Brussels – a generic, property developer-type structure in northern Brussels, which he scathingly dismissed as “a coma patient that needs a respirator to keep it alive”. You couldn’t open a single window in the entire building – it was all air-conditioning. Still, buildings of that size were perfectly capable even then of providing their own energy. b0b Van Reeth duly sent a clear signal through his collaboration with the artist Dominique Thirion, who he got to insert four opening windows in a hermetically sealed curtain facade. A question of art coming to the rescue of an epic ‘architectural’ failure?

Getting to grips with a strategic real estate policy of its own was one of the Flemish government’s original motives for appointing an official architect. Several basic conditions have to be met, however, before we can even begin to consider these issues. A clear baseline measurement is needed, for instance, of rented and purchased properties, land, infrastructure and open space. That’s currently under way. At the same time, a core team is required with the right expertise to interpret the results and to extract the necessary outlines from them. That team has recently been assembled. Lastly, parallel to the interpretation and extrapolation of the baseline measurement, the political willingness is needed to make strategic – i.e. not ad hoc – choices regarding an exemplary real estate policy. The Flemish government’s own real estate portfolio has to be packed with exemplary projects that set a quality standard for society. Nothing less than that (although more is always welcome too).



Gordon Matta-Clark, View of *Conical intersect* in progress, Paris, 1975

The fact that the current real estate portfolio is impossibly large and complex doesn't make the task any simpler. Minister Geert Bourgeois therefore decided – together with the Department of Administrative Affairs, the Agency for Facility Management, the Flemish Investment Corporation, the Inspectorate-General for Finance and the Vlaams Bouwmeester Team (all collaborating in the 'Real Estate Team') – to begin by adopting civil service accommodation as a case study through which to scrutinize the overall property policy. For our part, we want to link our commitment within the Real Estate Team to our clear ambition to get to work quickly on realizing pilot projects. The latter need to focus unambiguously on a smarter working environment with due attention for accommodation quality, urban synergy, architectural prestige, programmatic complexity, smart energy use, innovative investment techniques and more besides: in short, they have to be visionary pilot projects worthy of government.

The government ought undoubtedly to assume an exemplary function in this. Real estate policy can, after all, have a major impact on the quality of the collective space. And this is only possible, of course, if that policy is developed from within a long-term vision – a vision that's willing to look beyond budgetary and administrative terms.

COMMISSIONED ART

There is something paradoxical about the idea of ‘commissioned art’: nevertheless, it is a paradox that we seek out time and again. Art is by definition autonomous, unapplied, making it the antithesis of architecture, which always serves a context and, as a consequence, can and may never be emancipated. What art and architecture have in common is their ability to generate freedoms and meaning. That is, perhaps, their only common ground; but what ground it is. Since the creation of the Vlaams Bouwmeester Team, art and architecture have formed an inimitable spatial and symbolic alliance focused on those very freedoms. Commissioned art keeps its finger on the pulse and provides intangible moments of surprise, consternation and interrogation. Only in this way can art be relevant to a society or a government.

Art’s autonomy does not preclude its creation on commission. Indeed, it can be challenged by a commission: some of the most intriguing works of art were, after all, produced to order, in response to a specific request.

Art can charge our collective space. In a cocky or contradictory way, in many cases, while at other times it is barely visible or present. Nor does commissioned art have to result in a permanent spatial presence. Take the text *Sprookje*, which Josse De Pauw wrote in 2005 for a commission from the Vlaams Bouwmeester to mark the plans for a new ‘Word Centre’ in Lennik. His artistic contribution prefigured and challenged the architectural brief and turned it back on itself to produce a new, poetic design brief – an unexpected example of how processes can be reversed and patterns of



Cristina Iglesias in collaboration with Robbrecht and Daem architects,
Deep Fountain (Leopold De Waelplaats, Antwerp), 2006

expectation turned inside out. Art (some actually refer to it as ‘integrated art’) is often incorporated in the building process much too late and too passively, potentially fuelling the misconception that its sole purpose is to decorate the living or working environment. As if it were merely a matter of ornament – something for afterwards.

The art team within the Vlaams Bouwmeester Team continues to focus on art commissions, the societal importance of which can be maximized by safeguarding the art(ist)’s autonomy. More than 200 public art projects have been initiated and/or supported in the past decade, the majority of which fell under the legally defined ‘one percent rule’, whereby roughly one percent of the building budget is allocated to a public work of art. It’s not easy, however, to capture art in terms of percentages. Years of activity in the field teach us that there is a huge need – not only on the part of the principals who are obliged to apply the decree, but also of everyone responsible for developing the public space – for expertise and professional support when working with creative artists. To be able to meet that need, we want to encourage art commissions for sectors that don’t currently display sufficient focus in this regard. We also wish to collaborate actively on the development of a general ‘art commissioning policy’ and the associated tools (e.g. providing information and model procedures, and recruiting professional experts); we want to generate interesting examples of art in the public and semi-public space, whether or not linked with the implementation of the decree (the art team must also be able to function in that respect as a project initiator); and to stimulate the local and international debate about art, by, for instance, initiating research projects in both local and international contexts.



the principal

the bouwmeester

the architect / designer



the design brief:
what does the principal want?

the portfolio:
who is the designer?

the concept vision:
what is the designer proposing?

The Open Call in eight steps (legend)

TOOLBOX

The Vlaams Bouwmeester Team can only be as effective as the tools it uses, and so these have to be constantly refined and renewed. It currently has a limited but very powerful toolbox at its disposal. The most eye-catching procedures are, alongside the advice we provide, the Open Call, the Bouwmeester Prize and the Master Class for young designers. Ten years of testing have given us a solid knowledge of what actually works and which areas could use some tightening up. The government's profile as a public principal has, however, also changed significantly over that period. Building less and less itself and calling more and more frequently on the private sector to realize its societal ambitions, requires a change in attitude, also on the part of the Vlaams Bouwmeester Team. Several initiatives have been mounted:

Open Call

Open Call is a proven and appreciated method whereby public-sector principals can translate their societal vision quickly and intelligently into a building project of an international quality standard. In recent years, however, Open Call has drifted somewhat from being a nimble, open formula, in which designers were asked for a vision, into a straightforward contest in which elaborate, preliminary designs were either expected or received. Open Call therefore needs to return to being a light and effective negotiating procedure for designers with a vision. That way we will be able to make better choices and to investigate more clearly which public projects can benefit from the procedure. After all, Open Call is not a bottomless barrel



01. Yvonne Bouwmeester receives proposals with their projects and listens to their ambitions and expectations



02. Designers choose among the published projects



03. Designers submit their portfolios for consideration



04. Yvonne Bouwmeester studies the portfolio



05. Yvonne Bouwmeester discusses the portfolio with the principal and shortlist four



06. Five designers receive an onsite briefing from the principal



07. Five designers submit their proposals and present their vision of the construction



08. The designer whose vision is best aligned with the brief receives the commission from the principal

The Open Call in eight steps (action)

into which every question or catch-up operation can be stuffed without further ado. Principals must be screened more precisely in terms of their ambitions and possibilities, and expectations must be specified more precisely – in accordance with the level of remuneration – to spare principals and designers alike from predictable disappointment. We will urge principals to appoint a project director: an acknowledged expert who will oversee the project from beginning to end, from definition to completion. Lastly, in addition to further digitizing the Open Call process, we intend to work on a ‘European franchise’. Several European countries are interested in adopting the Open Call procedure, whether or not in amended form, which creates an opportunity for a genuine European network of international building culture.

Master Class for young designers

The Master Class will develop from being a two-yearly event into an annual opportunity for architecture and urban planning students and young artists. The primary focus will be on the intelligent design of targeted project requests which – because of their limited scale, for instance – cannot be picked up by the Open Call formula. The annual Master Class will, logically enough, have half the number of participants, allowing more concentrated guidance and a greater likelihood of actual realization. By holding the event more frequently and targeting it more precisely, we intend to further encourage and challenge schools, academies and universities to dare to excel.

PPP Fair (working title)

Open Call is too lightweight to provide solid support for Public-Private Partnership (PPP) projects. We therefore deemed it appropriate to launch a completely separate and legally autonomous formula: the PPP Fair, the concept of which will be further elaborated in the months ahead.



PPP structure for school building in Flanders

In preparation, however, we would like to consider for a moment the unbridled use of PPP. There is nothing innocuous about having government infrastructure and communal facilities built by private institutions. It means granting the most commercially attractive private partner a substantial say in the future of our cities, our infrastructure, our schools, our homes, our health care and so on. This needn't be a disaster, provided that the private and public agents work hard to realize a common project while advancing the same societal values. Yet in reality, that's rarely if ever the case. What one of them views as a pressing need is frequently just a commercial opportunity for the other. And that's far from all: it's difficult enough already to defend a quality standard under the traditional procedures; but it can be all but impossible to do so in PPP constructions on the current terms, without our department having to recruit a team of top full-time lawyers.

When the first Vlaams Bouwmeester was appointed ten years or so ago, PPP was the exception, bubbling just below the surface. Today, by contrast, it tends to be the rule, even though the Flemish coalition agreement clearly states that PPP may only be used where it demonstrably adds value. In practice PPP is too often presented as a panacea, without anybody really knowing how that panacea actually works. Under no circumstances must PPP become synonymous with a creative, short-term strategy for taking projects out of the budget.

Particular attention should be paid to the DBFM(O) (Design Build Finance Maintain and Operate) model, in which a private partner takes responsibility for the construction and maintenance of public infrastructure for 25 years or more. This concept is so recent that no projects have yet been handed over to the government in Flanders. It is therefore impossible at this point to calculate the actual added value in terms of cultural and financial sustainability. When the main objective of PPP – a win-win balance between price and quality – is almost always lost in practice, it doesn't strike us as unreasonable to ease off a little, stand back and examine the actual



Promotion

added value, before opting instead for real forms of cooperation based on clear and straightforward agreements.

[FIVE]

The tools possessed by the Vlaams Bouwmeester Team today are wholly unsuited to guaranteeing quality within PPP. Partial solutions are, of course, possible, such as specifying price ranges during the tender and BAFO (Best and Final Offer) phase, rather than squeezing the maximum out of the market, or raising the score for architectural quality and cultural sustainability to at least 50% (and having this established by a competent appraisal committee). But a few good partial solutions aren't enough to achieve a solid, global approach.

Our wish at the Vlaams Bouwmeester Team, is to commit ourselves in this regard to helping find solutions for this lack of clarity, as we firmly believe that PPP can deliver socially relevant projects, provided that the points of departure are respected by all the parties concerned.

Bouwmeester Prize

Convincing outcomes from the Open Call, Master Class for young designers and PPP Fair, might – along with other exemplary projects with public-sector principals – be considered for the Bouwmeester Prize, which will be presented annually in future rather than every two years, with categories that change each year. This should enable the government to present its efforts in terms of high-quality architecture to the public in a more targeted way. Alliances will be entered into with the media, moreover, to publicize the Prize in the newspapers, on the Internet and on television.



Bouwmeester Studio

THE VISIBLE BOUWMEESTER

The Flemish government's decision to appoint an official architect as guardian of the quality of its own real estate operations and to advise on the development of an architectural and spatial vision, has both a societal and a symbolic dimension. The Vlaams Bouwmeester necessarily holds a public mandate. To stress the department's public project to as great an extent as possible, we are highlighting the following projects:

Bouwmeester Studio

When b0b Van Reeth and then Marcel Smets were appointed as Vlaams Bouwmeester, they were allocated space at one of the many administrative buildings in the northern part of Brussels – a choice that primarily reflected practical considerations rather than any considered architectural or urbanist vision. The workplace of the Bouwmeester Team could serve as an expression par excellence of how the Flemish government wishes to approach the accommodation of its employees. That is, however, very far from the case today. From our first-storey window we merely look at the city without actively taking part in it. We are invisibly present in a (capital) city.

Pending the implementation of the new real estate policy, we feel it is appropriate to start looking now for a suitable (temporary) location that will make the functioning of the Vlaams Bouwmeester Team visible in the city. Our operations do not, after all, need a full-blooded office space, but rather a studio environment, a no-nonsense space in which thinking about archi-



Sanatorium Joseph Lemaire, Tombeek (arch. Maxime Brunfaut, 1937)

ecture and building culture are effectively tested and displayed, by means of small-scale in-house activities like workshops, seminars, juries, gallery presentations and lectures, staged in synergy with partners like the Flemish Architecture Institute (VAi), the Urban Policy Team (*Team Stedenbeleid*) and the relevant administrations. The Bouwmeester Studio will take the form of an ‘open house in the city’, which is so much more than purely the accommodation of the Vlaams Bouwmeester Team. Nothing, after all, is so culturally sustainable as participating intelligently and actively in the urban fabric. The Bouwmeester Studio can, in this way, become the place where the Flemish government consciously opens itself to the spatial debate, where existing efforts are publicized, and where, in collaboration with experts, new visions of the future are developed, tested and rolled out.

Opinion

One of the Bouwmeester’s most important tasks, alongside advising the Flemish government and local authorities, is to fuel public and political opinion with regard to architecture and spatial quality. The Vlaams Bouwmeester Team will take part even more actively than in the past in the societal debate. The Bouwmeester will contribute – both spontaneously and on invitation – to the discussion of urgent dossiers, through clearly founded and objective arguments. The department’s communication and publication policy will be geared towards raising current themes, exploring them in greater depth and, where necessary, placing them clearly on the agenda.

BWMSTR label

The Vlaams Bouwmeester Team has twenty members. That’s a fair number, but not enough if we intend to do everything ourselves. We have noted, however, that in their quest for a high-quality building culture, a great many

entities are keen to adopt certain of the Bouwmeester's procedures or tools. This is commendable, but it should not be done lightly: our procedures are only as good as their implementation. This interest has, however, got us thinking.

[SIX]

Hence our ambition to develop a quality label of our own along the lines of ISO certification, the Red Dot Design Award or the 'Bib Gourmand'. The aim of the 'BWMSTR' label is to support local, regional and international bodies wishing to commit themselves to a conscious and intelligent building culture. The BWMSTR label is intended to provide recognition, a quality label for public principals, for correct procedures, for inspired local competitions, for ambitious cross-border initiatives, and even possibly for smart PPP formulas or private developments. In short, the BWMSTR label should be a reward and encouragement for success as a public principal. A label that can raise the work of the Vlaams Bouwmeester Team beyond our own borders and limitations.





Five minute concept model (for a house somewhere in Europe) (arch. 51N4E, 2008–2012)

Bouwmeester Council

The visions, actions and objectives of the Vlaams Bouwmeester Team will be subject to regular substantive and operational scrutiny by an external group of experts, to prevent us from gradually drifting off into our own ideas or ambitions. This carefully assembled Bouwmeester Council will cover all policy areas and societal disciplines, local, regional as well as international, that are relevant to the functioning of the Vlaams Bouwmeester Team. The experts who sit on the Council will be asked to reflect – as dogma-free as possible – on everything with which we are occupied, namely the development of an intelligent, generous and forward-looking building culture.

“The Bouwmeester ought to be able at certain moments to lay claim to a project. That’s not the case at present: principals cooperate on a voluntary basis. There are major projects that escape public discussion. I wonder why it is that quality is not required to play a role in certain projects.” (Bob Van Reeth, Een Bouwmeester bouwt niet, Brussels, 2005)

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