



# A + 299

December 2022 – January 2023

Special Edition: Quality Matters





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## Opinion

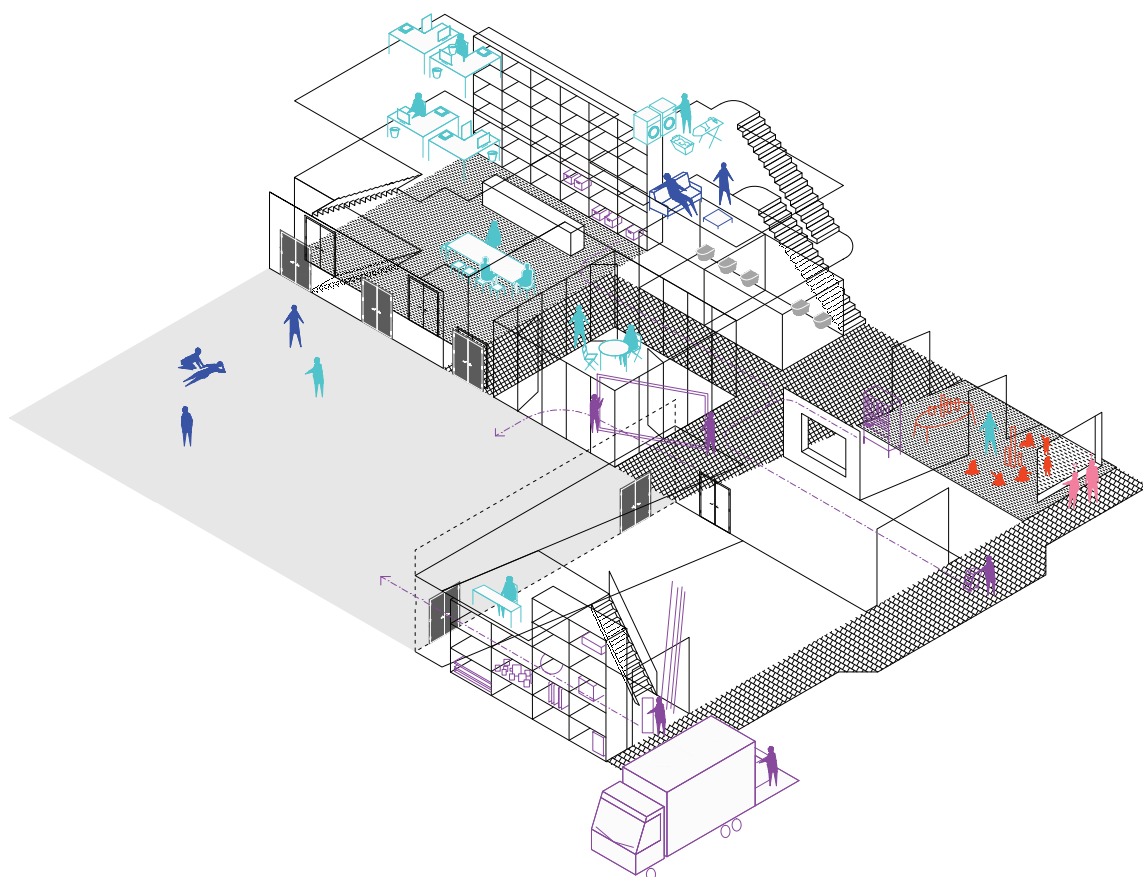
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*Emmanuel van der Beek*





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# Editorial

'The Belgian architecture scene is one of the most interesting at the moment', said Konstantinos Pantazis of the Greek office Point Supreme when, as a jury member, he reviewed the entries for the 2021 Brussels Architecture Prize. He is not alone in this belief. At home and especially abroad, Belgium's architectural production and accompanying architecture culture have long been regarded as authoritative and worthy of close attention.

'Belgium is enjoying one of those golden architectural moments when new architects emerge and high-quality design practices find the clients and the circumstances in which to shine, both at home and abroad', Paul Finch, editor of *The Architectural Review*, wrote in 2018 in an issue devoted to Belgium. *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* followed a year later with a special issue entitled *Belgique, une architecture négociée* (Belgium, a negotiated architecture).

'Belgian architects master the art of the palimpsest as much as the budget of their projects', claimed editor-in-chief Emmanuelle Borne. 'Between History and histories, daring and mastery, the Belgian scene is currently a guarantee of quality, humanism and poetry.'

The most tangible evidence of the esteem Belgian architectural quality is held in are the numerous publications devoted to it and the various awards it has obtained, for instance for projects like *Unless Ever People* by De Vylder Vinck Taillieu architecten in collaboration with Bavo and Filip Dujardin, a project that won the Silver Lion at the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale.

The reasons are not all that obvious. As Paul Finch pointed out, it is about a concurrence of circumstances. A combination of good commissioning, inspiring and innovative training, a positive economic climate, a stimulating architectural policy and, of course, enough local talent. It is the evolution of the policy especially that bore fruit in terms of

quality. At the end of the last century, for instance, the first Flemish Government Architect was appointed, an independent quality controller for public buildings in Flanders. In his wake, the Flanders Architecture Institute was also set up, where architecture culture enjoys a platform, a showcase and support. Both grew into important actors that created the conditions for quality architecture. They in turn were followed by the Cellule architecture of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, a Government Architect for the Brussels-Capital Region, several City Architects, and the ICA/WB, a centre for architecture culture in French-speaking Belgium.

The quality of the built environment is not only actively promoted at regional level but also locally, in cities such as Charleroi, Antwerp and Ghent, where City Architects ensure a progressive policy that supports outstanding architecture. Thanks to innovative (selection) procedures for competitions, pilot projects and design research, instruments have been developed that support high-quality projects and give young architects a chance to win public commissions. Socially relevant themes such as climate change, repurposing, the circular economy and energy transition are high on the agenda. Meanwhile, several generations of architects have already been able to develop and build up a body of work in this innovative architectural climate.

In this issue, which we produced in collaboration with the teams of the Brussels Government Architect, the Cellule architecture and the Flemish Government Architect, we let architects, policymakers, clients and users have their say. We also take a look behind the scenes of Belgian architectural production.

Lisa De Visscher  
*Editor-in-chief*





# Opinion

*Why does Wallonia not (yet) have a Government Architect?*

Judging the tree by its fruits, all Belgian experts in urban planning and architecture agree: Wallonia is seriously lagging behind on virtually all issues relating to ecological emergency and spatial planning. Today, and despite a few (empty) promises, the region is still incapable, for example, of sticking to a voluntarist and operational road map for the drastic reduction of its urban sprawl ('Smurf' housing and economic activity zones). This obvious deficiency has had several harmful consequences: the artificialization and sealing of agricultural land, toxic car dependency, fragmentation of non-human habitats, the erosion of biodiversity, zoonoses and much more.

Wallonia is also the poor relation in terms of quality Belgian architecture. The Brussels and Flemish architecture scenes are acclaimed across Europe. On the other hand – and in spite of some valiant efforts by lone fighters who have been hindered rather than endorsed by the public apparatus<sup>1</sup> – too few remarkable projects have emerged out of Wallonia. The architectural climate is so mediocre, so clientelistic even, that a number of good Belgian offices are reluctant to participate in competitions that are not organized by the Cellule architecture.

With these observations in mind, could a Government Urban Planner – a term that broadens the position to a spectrum of matters that is more wide-ranging than just architectural quality – help to galvanize radically more sustainable and resilient territorial policies in Wallonia? Could a Government Architect finally raise the quality of *all* public projects? Could he or she – as has been happening already for twenty-three years in Flanders and thirteen in Brussels – create, through a critical mass of quality projects, a new Walloon culture of architecture and urban planning that would trickle down to the (often backward-looking) administrations and to the major private developers?

The fact that we have to ask these questions is answer enough ...

The worst of it is that these questions are, in essence, the very questions that Willy Borsus, Member of the Walloon Parliament<sup>2</sup>, put to Philippe Henry, the then Minister for Spatial Planning, in a session of the Walloon Parliament in 2011. And who has been the Walloon Minister for Spatial Planning since 2019? Willy Borsus! And Phillipe Henry is today the Minister for ... Climate.

After so many years, the overlong inability of the successive Ministers for Spatial Planning to create a function that could have, among other things, helped to reduce the catastrophic effects of climate change (floods in 2021, drought in 2022, etc.) is no longer just a matter of lethargy, but a grave political fault. All citizens should be moved by a righteous anger at the culpable inaction of much of the Wal-

loon political apparatus. Worse still: today, these climatic events (#NewNormal) are used by these same politicians as a screen to once more postpone the creation of the position of Government Urban Planner. What hypocrisy! People have died, others have lost everything and this could have partly been avoided ... Yes, the lack of a long-term territorial vision is killing citizens, whether their death be a violent or slow one! And this is happening not only in Australia, California and Spain but here and now in Belgium. How many more disasters must happen before Walloon politicians create the position of Government Urban Planner? This person will be no Sun King, but will help to implement a new urban and architectural vision to get Wallonia out of its administrative muddle, its general apathy and its feudal political clans. Supported by a large, multidisciplinary and efficient team, this person will, thanks to their independence, help the authorities to take the necessary measures, especially if these are unpopular and do not help politicians to get re-elected.

The debate organized by the Cultural Institute of Architecture Wallonia-Brussels in February 2022 in the Walloon Parliament<sup>3</sup> highlighted the many benefits of the position. These exchanges also showed that sufficient resources are available to set it up quickly. It is therefore necessary to stop playing for time until the 2024 elections and, instead, to make up for lost time.

Let's learn from our neighbours who have gone down this road before us and let's cooperate with them to respond, with courage and panache, to the crucial challenges of spatial planning and the sustainability of human settlements in Wallonia.

Everything we need is there, we can't wait any longer: the time for action is now!

Gilles Debrun

*Practising architect, lecturer at the Faculty of Architecture of UCLouvain*

- 1 See the recent open letter addressed by the Walloon section of the Belgian Order of Architects in late October to the Walloon Region: <https://ordredesarchitectes.be/actualites/la-wallonie-en-mal-dam-bition-architecturale> (in French).
- 2 <https://www.parlement-wallonie.be/pwpages?p=interp-questions-voir&type=28&iddoc=33112> (in French).
- 3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQIYjQQ9SFc&t=os>.

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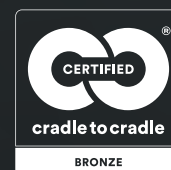


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# Quality Matters





# The comforts of architecture

*Bart Tritsmans*

Coda vzw in Wuustwezel is a unique place. In a new building by noAarchitecten, Coda combines a palliative day centre and a hospice besides offering home care, palliative care and bereavement care. It also houses the headquarters of Netwerk Palliatieve Zorg Noorderkempen (NPZN, Noorderkempen Palliative Care Network) while aiming to be a meeting place for the community. When the Flemish Government Architect and the relevant minister launched a call for ambitious clients in 2012, Coda was selected as one of five Pilot Projects Invisible Care. Coda was assigned an architecture expert, a care expert and a project manager to prepare the project definition and to guide the selection process. Alex de Kind, who started at Coda as project manager and has been its director for two years, gives his views on the pilot project.

↓  
The palliative day centre Coda is a house where people can eat and have a drink together and where no one wears a uniform. The architects of noAarchitecten replaced the existing monastery farmhouse by a new construction

consisting of guest houses, residents having a front and back door and being able to visit one another. The patchwork of roofs and façades of the old building formed the basis for the new design.





Alex de Kind receives me in Coda's offices. While he prepares coffee, we look out through the large window, between the gabled roofs of the day centre's living space, over the fields where the morning mist is slowly dissolving in the September sun. De Kind then launches enthusiastically into his ambitions for Coda (and how they are being thwarted by a tangle of regulations), about the spatial translation of 'well-being' (he doesn't like the word 'care'), and about the importance of the Pilot Projects Care for the future of society.

### Well-being as a mission

'The care landscape in Flanders is just as subdivided as our spatial planning', de Kind observes. One of his ambitions is to remove the partitions between different care institutions, in both administrative and organizational terms as well as in architectural terms. In preparation for the pilot project, Coda carried out an analysis of the strengths and missing links in the functioning of the centre. Inspiring examples included Maggie's Centres in the UK and the many hospices in the Netherlands. 'When Coda was founded in 1996, people came here from the Netherlands to see what we were doing', says de Kind, 'but today we turn to the Netherlands because there are hardly any palliative centres like ours in Flanders'.

Coda can call on a wide network of partners, volunteers and donors, and it also wants to be a meeting place. 'Our annual barbecue, which once started as a fundraiser, attracted 2,500 visitors this summer', laughs de Kind. 'That's what I call collateral damage of the right kind. We want to convey the message that Coda is not just a place where people die, because nowhere do people live as intensely as here'.

### Spatial translation

As the smell of soup wafts into the offices from the kitchen, Alex de Kind explains how, together with architecture adviser Marlies Röhrer and care adviser Marc Cosyns, he studied the project definition. 'We asked ourselves, How do you give a face to invisible care? And how do you create a building that can optimally facilitate care?' Together, they looked for a way to translate the programme into a master plan that would combine care and architecture. 'The collaboration was quite organic. For example, Marc Cosyns emphasized the importance of a village feel to facilitate care for each other. This led Marlies Röhrer and me to the idea of guest houses, where guests would have a front and a back door and would be able to visit each other.' Coda aims to provide a place tailored to the individual. 'We want to →

↓  
For this project, the architects did not deliver a shell, but finished off the building down to the last details. References to the monastery farmhouse – such

as the large grooved barn doors and a recurring sculpted column – show that they approached the design assignment from the viewpoint of the guests.



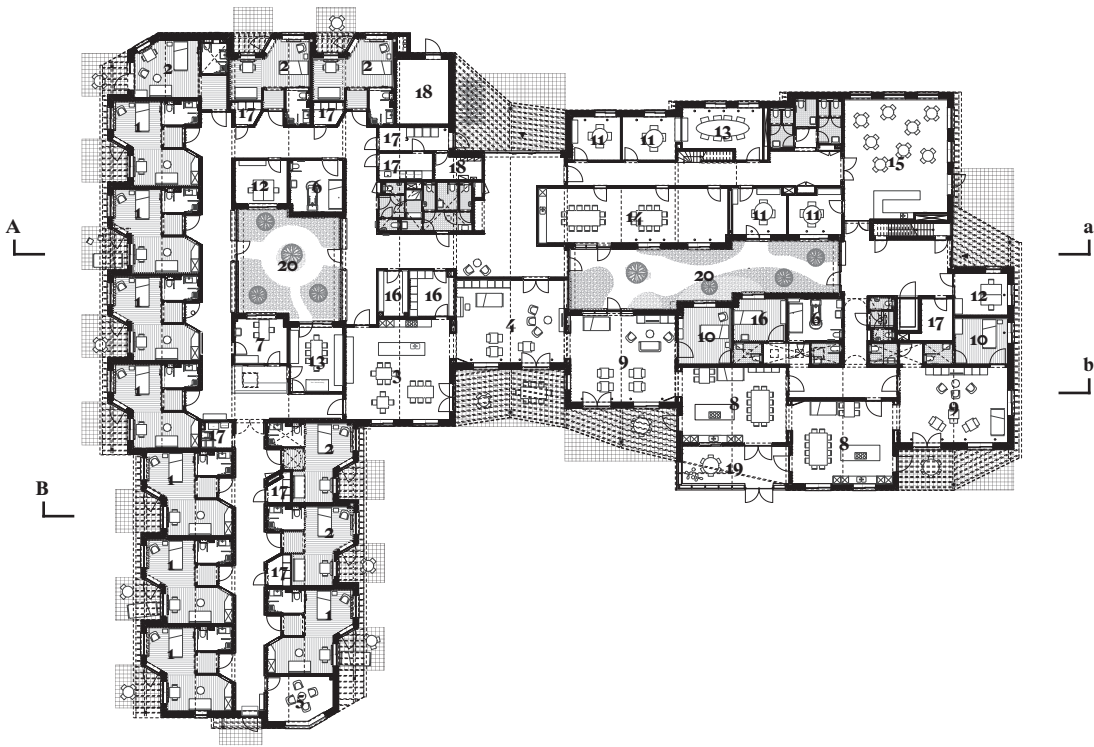




Section Aa



Section Bb



Floor 0

- |                                |                               |                      |                   |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1 guest room hospice           | 5 quiet area                  | 9 communal living    | 15 meeting area   |
| 2 guest room short-stay        | 6 communal bathroom           | area day centre      | 16 wellness area  |
| 3 communal kitchen hospice     | 7 nursing station             | 10 resting area      | 17 storeroom      |
| 4 communal living area hospice | 8 communal kitchen day centre | 11 conversation area | 18 technical room |
|                                |                               | 12 office            | 19 winter garden  |
|                                |                               | 13 meeting area      | 20 patio          |
|                                |                               | 14 activity area     |                   |



Architect  
noAarchitecten  
Website  
noaarchitecten.net  
Project name  
Coda  
Location  
Wuustwezel, Belgium

Programme  
Palliative care centre:  
two day-care centres,  
hospice with eight rooms,  
five short-stay rooms,  
local service centre

Procedure  
Pilot Projects Invisible  
Care (Team Flemish  
Government Architect)  
Client  
Coda vzw  
Landscape architect  
Jan Minne Gardenist  
Lead contractor  
Vanhout.pro

Completion  
June 2020  
Total floor area  
2,577 m<sup>2</sup>  
Budget  
€ 5,052,292  
(excl. VAT and fees)  
Product/Supplier  
Vande Moortel (bricks)

approach palliative care as broadly as possible and to provide support for the network of our guests. Coda should offer a home where people can have an aperitif and eat together and where no one wears a uniform.' That human dimension also had to be translated into the architecture. De Kind worked for years in a consultancy for care buildings and wanted to avoid Coda having the aura of an institution on account of its appearance. 'We want to be an open centre, and so the feeling of the building as an entity that had grown organically was very important', he says.

### Organic

Out of the three design proposals, it is the design by noAarchitecten that was selected. They proposed to replace the existing monastery farmhouse by a new building to provide

guests with as much comfort as possible as well as to optimally integrate the different functions. The patchwork of roofs and façades of the old building formed the basis for the new design. 'When one of our guests visited the new building, she remarked that the living room looked much better after the renovations. The fact that guests hardly noticed the difference from the old farmhouse shows that the architects perfectly managed to reconstruct the organic character of the building.' Although the negotiations during the construction process were not always easy, de Kind particularly recalls the architects' commitment to the project. 'They were very sensitive to the spatial qualities of the building. Today the architecture facilitates much better the goal we want to achieve in Coda.'

→



←  
The main quality of the design lies in the meeting areas that were created: a winter garden and deep window sills that are perfect for intimate conversations. The succession of spaces makes social contact possible, but also offers resting areas from where to enjoy views of the park garden.







↙  
The floor mosaics, colourful kitchens and fixed furniture show that the architecture is above all a translation of the human dimension.



© Filip Du Jardin



© Filip Du Jardin



### Place of comfort

The architects didn't just deliver a shell for this project but finished the building down to the smallest details so that it would immediately offer a warm, home-like hospice. References to the monastery farmhouse – such as the large grooved barn doors, a recurring sculpted wooden column and floor mosaics as well as colourful kitchens and fixed furniture – show that the architects approached the design task from the guests' point of view. 'The greatest quality of the design is in the meeting places that were created', de Kind reveals. In the winter garden there are two empty flute glasses for an aperitif. Talking in whispers so as not to disturb the resting guests, we walk past the living space to the corridor that runs around the winter garden. 'The deep window sills are ideal for confidential conversations. The succession of spaces allows for social interaction while also providing resting points from where to enjoy the view of the park garden.' A balance between social contact and privacy was also sought inside the guest houses: the sleeping and living areas can be separated, and beds can be moved onto the screened-off terrace so that guests can get some fresh air.

### Pioneers

Although the architecture is primarily a translation of the human scale, it also reveals a certain activism. By linking up the spaces of the various care functions, Coda seeks the limits of the legal frameworks with a view to creating an environment in which human well-being is central. De Kind observes that the care landscape in Flanders faces some major challenges, and he emphasizes the role of other pioneering projects such as Huis Perrekes and the Symbiosis Foundation. 'From the perspective of the Flemish Government Architect, this is probably a highly successful project, and let me be clear, without the Pilot Projects Care we would never have been able to realize Coda's new building. But from a well-being perspective, there is still much work to be done. With this pilot project, our ambition was to initiate a shift in care. We hoped that realizing Coda in 2020 would lead to thirty Codas in 2030, because we are convinced that the small scale can offer solutions.' ▲ ■ ●

↓  
The design of Coda gives a face to invisible care: it is a building that can facilitate care optimally but where the importance of

meeting, discussing and comforting remain in the foreground. Care and architecture come together in Coda.



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↳ The former military barracks on Generaal Jacqueslaan in the Brussels municipality of Elsene/Ixelles is being converted into student housing and research facilities for the neighbouring universities of VUB and ULB but also into (social) housing and neighbourhood facilities. In the run-up to the redevelopment, a brief was drawn up for the temporary occupation of the public domain. The eye-catcher was the velodrome on the former training area.





# Learning step by step

Pieter T'Jonck

With their neo-Renaissance façades, the Frits Tous-saint barracks on Generaal Jacqueslaan (the R21) in the Brussels municipality of Elsene/Ixelles appear less impressive than the Quartier Baron de Witte de Haelen barracks on the other side of the railway, in Etterbeek. The barracks are also smaller, 'only' 4 ha compared to 6.5. And yet these barracks are set to become the reference point in the area. Indeed, together with the VUB, ULB and various public housing corporations, the Brussels-Capital Region has repurposed the site as Usquare. brussels, a place for research and education with a food hall, a neighbourhood cinema, (student) housing and much more. The temporary use that SeeU organized on site until recently provided a foretaste of what is to come. The team of the Brussels Government Architect (BMA) supported the fascinating planning process, which relied on a range of work methods. It began with design research and a new planning instrument, the PAD/RPA, but also relied on competitions for designers, additional research and temporary use. As this report shows, this all yielded a rare abundance of quality.

↘

The heritage lends itself to a mixed programme. The design by evr – BC – Callebaut, who all advocate a circular approach, may provide for the demolition of a building to allow wider access to the enclosed site, but the demolition material will be reused on site as much as possible.





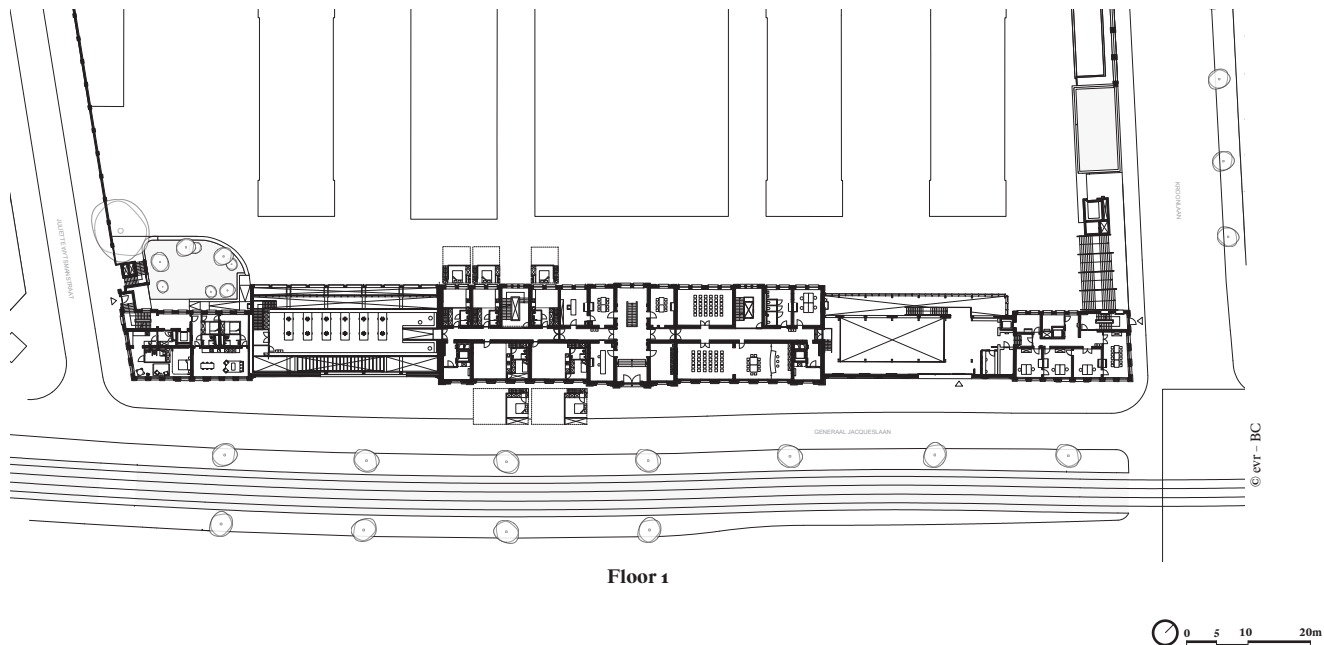
Sébastien Rodesch, project manager at SAU/MSI (the Brussels-Capital Region's Urban Development Corporation), begins his story about the site with a painful anecdote: during WWII, the barracks were mistakenly bombed by the Allies. This explains the strange mix of buildings on the site. The main building on General Jacqueslaan, the arena in the central training area and some other pavilions clearly date from 1906, the year the barracks were put into use as a training centre for the Gendarmerie. However, on either side of the arena and also to the left of the training area, blocks from the 1950s and 1970s replaced the destroyed buildings. The five-storey block from the 1970s on the north side stands out like a sore thumb. The impressive wall around the barracks has also been replaced here by heavy railings. This is where the national emergency call centre 101 was located. Right next door, in the north-east corner of the site, the *Clos des mariés* was preserved intact. This enclave within the barracks is where married recruits used to live. The walls kept their wives separate from rest of the barracks. After all, the barracks were forbidden to women in 1906.

When the Federal Police, which took over the buildings from the Gendarmerie in 2001, announced in 2015 that it was moving out, both the VUB and ULB immediately saw the site's potential to house student accommodation as well as research spaces, fab labs and more. After all, both universities

have their headquarters nearby, on the former training area of the Etterbeek barracks. The rectors Paul De Knop (VUB) and Yvon Englert (ULB) saw this as an excellent opportunity to strengthen their strategic and spatial position together. When the late Caroline Pauwels became rector in 2016, she endorsed the project with no less enthusiasm. 'That was a good thing', notes Rodesch, 'because that way both communities were immediately represented in the operation'.

However, the region was not standing idly by, either. It commissioned a study from MSA and Origin Architecture & Engineering in 2016. These examined, on the basis of (historical) plan material and some visits (the barracks being, after all, still in use), the possibilities of the site and the buildings. They concluded that the heritage lent itself to a mixed programme, with university buildings as well as housing and neighbourhood facilities. That convinced the Region to buy the complex from the Government Buildings Agency for the relatively modest sum of €30 million. Not quite a bargain: €750 per m<sup>2</sup> of land is in line with current land prices in the 'better' parts of the Region. But the buildings were a serious bonus. Still, targeted investment was the message. MSI took the lead. 'A wonderful process', Rodesch assures us. 'All parties were perfectly attuned to each other and still are.'

That is remarkable, because MSI did not carry out the development all at once, but step by step, with each time dif- →



Architect  
BC architects & studios  
evr-architecten  
Callebaut Architecten  
Website  
architects.bc-as.org  
evr-architecten.be  
callebaut-architecten.be/

Project name  
Usquare  
Location  
Elsene/Ixelles  
(Brussels)  
Programme  
Conversion of the former  
Gendarmerie barracks into  
an open, mixed and multi-  
functional district

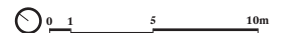
Procedure  
Competition with  
Brussels Government  
Architect (BMA)  
Client  
VUB – ULB  
SAU/MSI  
Structural and services engineering  
VK architects+engineers

Building physics  
VK architects+engineers  
Lead contractor  
BPC group  
Completion  
December 2023  
Total floor area  
9,035 m<sup>2</sup>  
Budget  
€ 106,700,000  
(excl. VAT and fees)





Floor 0



→  
Kempe Thill –  
Kaderstudio,  
conversion of the  
*Clos des mariés* into 31  
social housing units

←  
The first phase of the  
project by evr – BC  
– Callebaut includes  
the renovation and  
redevelopment of 7  
historic buildings  
for universities  
and community  
facilities including  
a research centre,  
an international  
reception centre  
and a sustainable  
food market for the  
neighbourhood.

## Architect

Atelier Kempe Thill  
Kaderstudio

## Website

atelierkempehill.com  
kaderstudio.eu

## Project name

*Clos des mariés*

## Location

Elsene/Ixelles  
(Brussels)

## Programme

Renovation of former  
barracks with heritage  
value into thirty-one  
social housing units  
and collective areas,  
exemplary in terms of  
circularity

## Procedure

Competition with  
Brussels Government  
Architect (BMA)

## Client

SLRB/BGHM

## Restoration architect

Olivier Graeven

## Landscape architect

Latitude

## Structural engineering

Ney & Partners

## Building physics

Studiel0

## Total floor area

4,642 m<sup>2</sup>

## Budget

€ 8,368,000  
(excl. VAT and fees)



ferent parties and a different approach for each programme component. The basis was a Guiding Development Plan (PAD/RPA). This is a recent policy instrument available to the Region. It is similar to the RUP (Spatial Implementation Plan) in Flanders: it defines in a single design a strategic vision and strict provisions for constructions, land development and so on. Such an instrument was necessary here in any case because of the repurposing of the site, but also useful to provide a framework that ensured preservation of the coherence of the site. The urban planning agency BUUR elaborated this plan. It was ready in early 2021.

Meanwhile, both universities developed plans for the front building on their own initiative by means of an architecture competition. According to Rodesch, they could do so because their project was not up for discussion anyway. 'Moreover, they had secured ERDF funds. These have to be spent within a short period of time.'

However, MSI did draw inspiration from the circular approach of evr and BC Architects, the winners of the competition. Although the competition provides for the demolition of a building on Kroonlaan to make possible a wider access to the enclosed site, the demolition material will still be reused on site as much as possible. And yet the PAD/RPA did not require circularity. Rodesch: 'We found that a valid approach. We also wanted to impose it for the

construction of student accommodation. In this regard we opted for a Design, Build, Finance & Maintain (DBFM) approach, because neither we nor the universities have sufficient resources. But we did impose the condition that bidders had to recover at least 60 per cent of the material in three buildings. The fourth building, however, could be torn down. This was not random: we examined the stability of the buildings and commissioned an inventory of materials from Rotor. They presented it in the form of a BIM model. This was very useful, as it gave us a detailed view of what was available. Moreover, some bids recover more than required.'

For the housing along the north and west sides of the site, on the other hand, MSI is working with two social housing corporations and with Citydev. The renovation of the *Clos des mariés* will start soon: Kempe Thill and Kaderstudio won the competition for this first project. Rodesch: 'We are tackling this bit by bit, because we find that we are also learning something each time. For example, the PAD/RPA provided for community facilities in the north-east corner but left open whether that should be new construction or renovation, the only condition being that the wall surrounding the complex was preserved. A centre for people with autism spectrum disorder appeared to be a suitable use for the purpose, but research also taught us that the existing buildings are very suitable for that purpose.'

→

↘  
For the housing along the north and west sides of the terrain, the client worked with a social housing agency. The *Clos des mariés* will be the first to be converted by Kempe

Thill and Kaderstudio into social housing units, all according to the principles of circular construction. They will also be fitted with collective green spaces.



© Kempe Thill – Kaderstudio, Clos des Mariés





Anyoji Beltrando won the competition for the new layout of the public space on the site. This Paris-based office also focuses on

circularity and the greening of the space. The buildings around the training area will be given a backdrop.



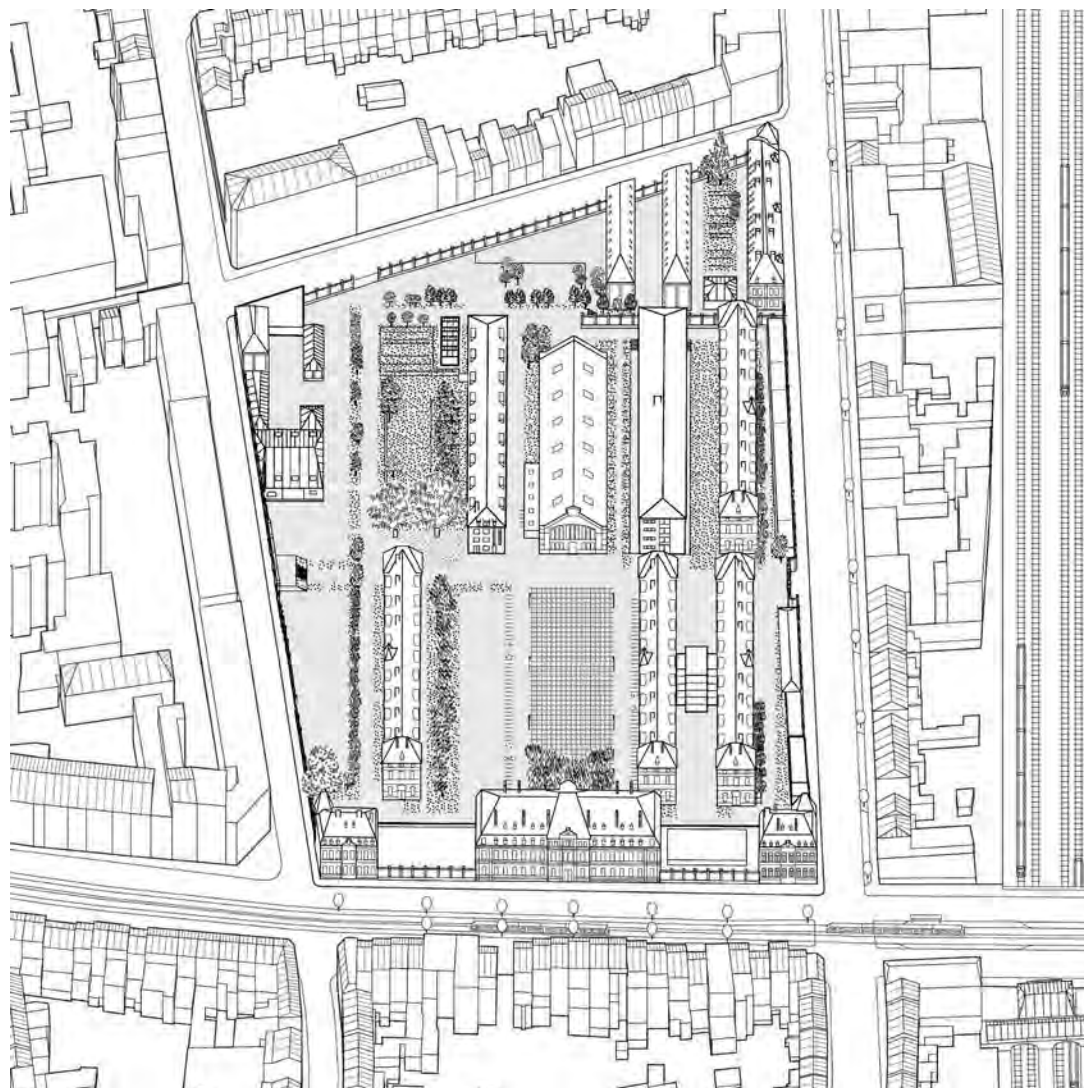


The layout of the public domain, however, is in MSI's own hands. Rodesch: 'Back in 2018, we were already worried about the neighbourhood's reaction to all that was about to happen here. No one had ever set foot here. We wanted to know what questions people had. Temporary use could provide insight into that, but we didn't want to admit everyone at random. We therefore commissioned an organization that would manage the temporary use and also communicate about it. This all had to be done very quickly, as we had no more than a year and a half, from the approval of the PAD/RPA in 2021 to the start of works in mid 2022. To our relief, we received very valid proposals. This is how SeeU came into being. The eye-catcher was the velodrome at the training area.'

From SeeU came the insight that the buildings along the training area (fab labs, student accommodation and the food hall) were essential to bring the square to life. Rodesch: 'We insisted that the student accommodation and fab labs

have all kinds of public facilities on the ground floor so that the activities on the square and in the buildings flow into each other. This was also in line with the views of the group around French landscape designer Anyoji Beltrando who won the competition for the public space. The group fully embraces the concept of circularity. They reclaim as much as possible the existing cobbles, but green the space by processing it differently. Through SeeU, the group also noticed that the buildings around the training area should provide a backdrop for life on the square. Their design is an expression of that.'

This shows that the way MSI approached the development of Usquare.brussels worked out very well: not designing and tendering everything at once, but drawing lessons from each step and linking further research to it. This gave that method a meaning in itself, which transcends the actual project. ▲●



© Anyoji - Beltrando

Architect	Anyoji Beltrando (Paris)	Programme	Public space design (17,000 m <sup>2</sup> ) and urban orientation for the construction lots (50,000 m <sup>2</sup> )	Client	SAU/MSI	Completion	2025
Website	anyojibeltrando.com			Landscape architect	OLM	Total floor area	17,004 m <sup>2</sup>
Project name	Usquare			Services engineering	ON éclairage (Paris) MK Engineering (Brussels) Studie Bureau Joret (Sint-Niklaas)	Budget	€ 4,700,000 (excl. VAT and fees)
Location	Elsene/Ixelles (Brussels)	Procedure	Competition with Brussels Government Architect (BMA)				



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# Three pavilions

*Jean-Michel Leclercq*

Assisted by the Cellule architecture of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, the Stations de plein air Madeleine Melot in Namur were able to organize a competition to transform their main building. Under the leadership of the Générale – Elmēs association, the L-shaped building from the 1970s will be transformed into three pavilions: a response adapted to the needs of this organization devoted to child welfare that takes the form of a nod to its history.



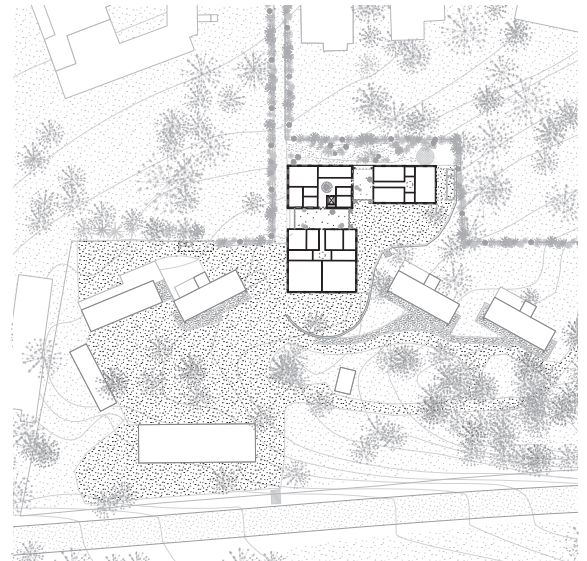


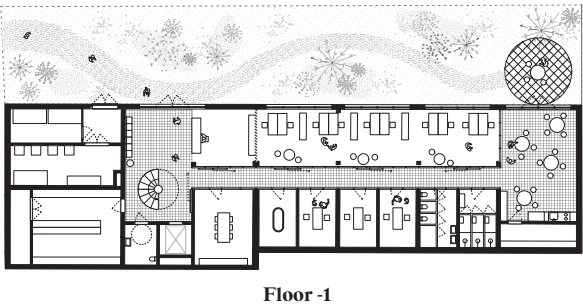
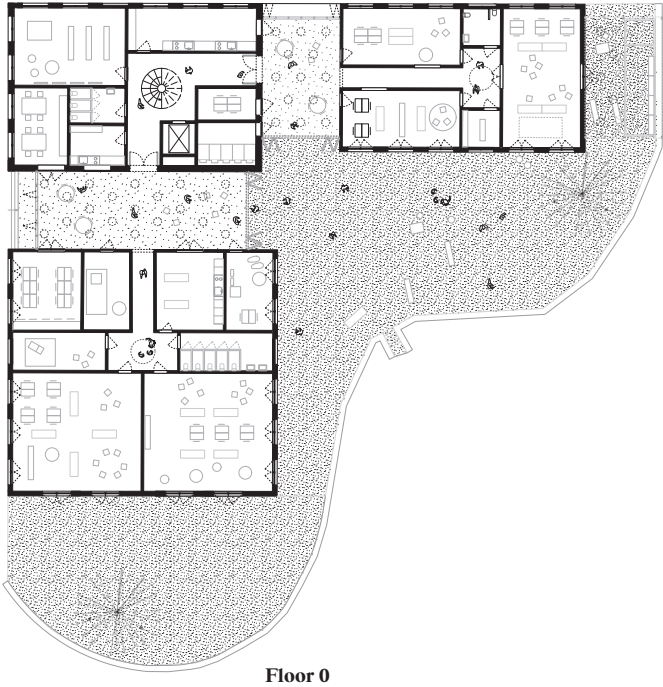
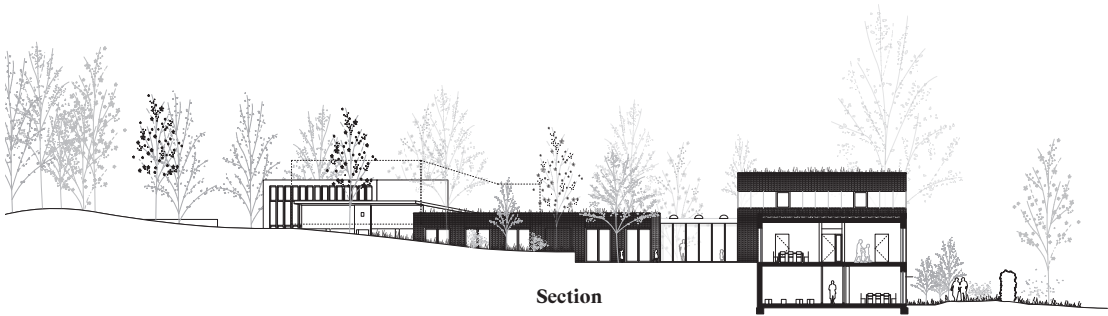
Dating back to the 1930s, when its founder began getting involved in the working-class neighbourhoods of Namur, the history of Stations de plein air Madeleine Melot (SDPA) is defined by ever-evolving person-oriented assistance and support. Today the association seeks to successfully help children facing various challenges integrate in school, society and family. It also assists adults with disabilities. It offers all its beneficiaries a multidisciplinary, tailor-made approach. The lack of specific structure for children with

autism spectrum disorders led the association to consider founding a CRF (Centre for functional rehabilitation) dedicated to this specific group. This is where the architectural journey began.

Creating this new department would have been impossible in the current premises. For some time now, the 1970s building that houses the administration and SAS'J (Centre specialized in children aged 1 to 14) had been showing grave limitations. A disaster in thermal terms, with wasted space (an unused 100 m<sup>2</sup> kitchen in the basement), a lack of storage space and often very poorly laid out, it was in need of serious renovation. 'If we wanted to realize this new CRF project, we had to see it in the overall context of our activities', explains Martine Poelvoorde, administrative director. 'Hence the desire to be able to offer infrastructure suitable for all the children, of both the SAS'J and the CRF.' With its therapeutic expertise, the SDPA team quickly became aware of the complexity of its objective. 'For children affected by autism, details such as the colour of a floor or the fact of having to climb stairs can be a real hurdle. We wanted innovative architecture that could integrate such parameters', adds Martine Poelvoorde.

→





Architect  
**Générale – Elmès**  
Website  
**generale.la  
elmes.agency**  
Project name  
**Open Air Campus**  
Location  
**Namur, Belgium**

Programme  
**Day centre for children  
with mental and autism  
spectrum disorders**  
Procedure  
**Selection procedure of  
the Cellule architecture  
of the Wallonia-Brussels  
Federation (FWB)**

Client  
**Stations de plein air  
Madeleine Melot**  
Landscape architect  
**Atelier Jean Chevalier**  
Structural engineering  
**Servais Engineering  
Architectural**  
Acoustics  
**Daidalos Peutz**

Sustainability  
**Détang Engineering**  
Total floor area  
**1,550 m<sup>2</sup>**  
Budget  
**€ 1,500,000  
(excl. VAT and fees)**  
Product/Supplier  
**Reynaers (window frames),  
Wienerberger  
(façade bricks)**



Initial contacts were then made with Central, which had already designed ACTE (see A+283), the research centre dedicated to ASD at ULB. 'We did some of the work together. This allowed us to sharpen our thinking and to evaluate the renovation.' Nevertheless, a public works contract was necessary. 'An association like ours has few administrative resources and is not at all trained to set up such a contract. We know our specificities but we are not architects.' So they turned to the portal of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. 'We explained our project and who we were. The Cellule architecture of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation decided to assist the organization. 'We had to get to know each other. We were focused on our vision of care and they helped us to project ourselves into something innovative. Above all, with their support, we were able to draw up the specifications, set up a jury and handle the administrative and legal aspects. On our own, we wouldn't have succeeded.'

Twenty-one offices responded to the tender notice with a note of intent and a portfolio. 'The jury's choice was guided by their suitability with our project: an understanding of disability and of the non-market sector and the fact that interaction between all these things had to be apparent', Martine Poelvoorde adds. In February 2022, three applications were selected for the next phase: those of the agencies Label and Atelier 4D as well as the temporary association Générale - Elmès. This was followed by a meeting with the architects lasting only a few hours. 'Here too, the role of the Cellule architecture was essential because they had pushed

us to be very precise in the specifications. Each function, each need had to be detailed, including in terms of surface area. It was laborious, but the fact is that, during this meeting, not a single question was raised about the specifications and the architects only asked us about our activities. At the end of the visit, we were able to give them a precise list of the children's needs. It was also an opportunity to guess at the creativity that would be implemented.'

'We received the first panels in mid May and we were immediately impressed', recalls Thomas Verschoore, financial manager, who followed the project with Martine Poelvoorde. In June 2022, both participated in the jury with a consultative vote as technical advisers. 'The oral defence of the files allowed us to better understand the long-term vision of each office. The three projects put forward were very different, but each was very well argued. They had all done good work.' The debates, still steered by the Cellule architecture, ultimately led to the unanimous selection of the proposal by Générale - Elmès, which consisted in making two incisions in the building in order to create two covered courtyards, but above all to transform this L-shaped building into three separate pavilions. →

↓  
The winning proposal by Générale - Elmès consists in making 2 incisions in the building in order to create 2 covered courtyards, but above all to transform this

L-shaped building into 3 separate pavilions. This pavilion-based vision is a way of building the future by evoking the past.





'This pavilion-based vision', Martine Poelvoorde continues, 'is a way of building the future by evoking our past. Indeed, when Madeleine Melot received this plot of land as a gift in the 1940s, she first put trailers on it. Then, little by little, the first pavilions were built. They're still here today.' Transforming this large building (1,500 m<sup>2</sup>) into three pavilions is a way of reconnecting with the past, but also of responding to the very specific needs of the children for privacy, of ensuring better fluidity between the different spaces and of offering conditions conducive to the exercise of each profession. Curious to see this proposal refined and put into practice, Martine Poelvoorde and Thomas Verschoore conclude: 'We are proud to have been able to

carry out this procedure from start to finish, but we would never have achieved such quality without this professional assistance. Certainly, some of the advice was more difficult to accept than other advice, especially when we were assured that allocating 16 per cent of the budget to architecture was a way of motivating good offices to deliver good work. But we now understand that this was a good decision.'

↓  
The desire to offer infrastructure suitable for children affected by autism or various other challenges led to innovative architecture

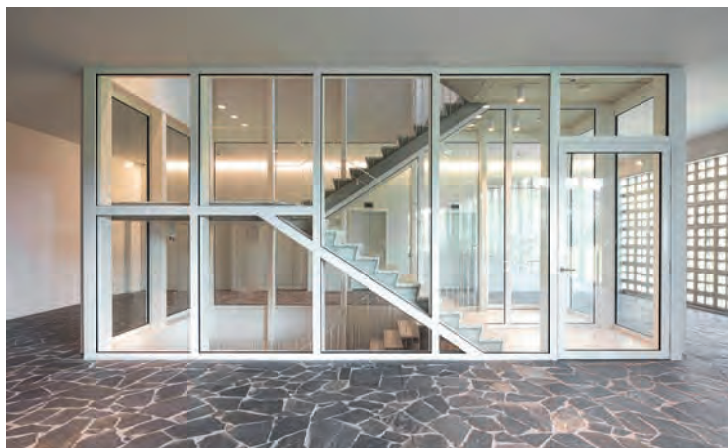
that integrates parameters such as the omission of details like a coloured floor or stairs, which can be a real hurdle for them.





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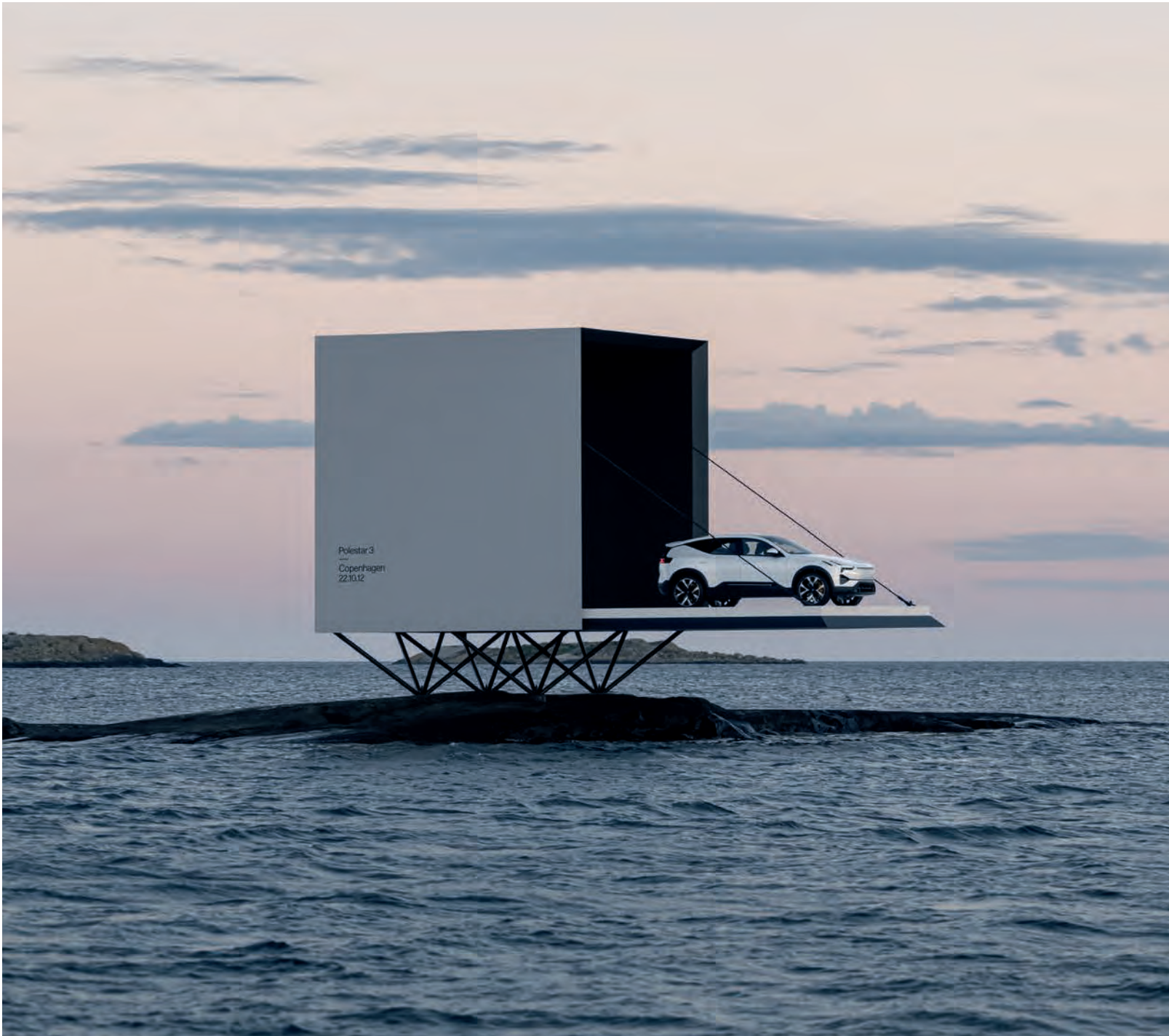
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# Building the city

*Lisa De Visscher*

**Architectural policy may be a regional matter, but the most concrete decisions are made locally. After speaking to the architects Peter Vanden Abeele, Christian Rapp and Georgios Maïllis, the City Architects of Ghent, Antwerp and Charleroi, respectively, A+ maps out the means each of them uses to build their city.**

↓  
**Architecten Jan De  
Vylder Inge Vinck –  
AgwA, Grand Palais,  
Charleroi**



‘A City or Government Architect can develop policy instruments, but is primarily a policy instrument himself.’ So says Georgios Maïllis, Charleroi City Architect since 2013 who started his third and final four-year mandate on 1 October of this year. ‘A City or Government Architect must serve the political project of the mayor and aldermen and therefore, indirectly, the citizens. My team and I work with the administration, but we are not part of it. It is important that we maintain our independence from the administration at all times, otherwise we cannot perform our duties properly.’ Christan Rapp, Antwerp City Architect since 2016 and on his second five-year mandate, agrees. ‘As City Architect, you live by the grace of the trust the political administration has in you’, he says. He does not see himself as a policymaker, for that matter. ‘Part of my core mission is to form a bridge between the administration I coach and the policy I advise. Sometimes I disagree with that policy, but then I discuss that internally, I don’t shout it from the rooftops.’ The relation with the (urban planning) administration and the various city departments is not always unambiguous. These departments have often been functioning for several decades before the position of City Architect was created. Peter Vanden Abeele became the first Ghent City Architect in 2017 for a six-year mandate and paved the way in recent years for more discussion on architectural quality. ‘I see my role not only as a bridge-builder between administration and politics, but also as a transversal player who brings the different city departments together around the table.’

The quality of a project depends on many factors, such as an ambitious client, a well-considered project definition and an intelligent selection procedure for the design team. The City Architects have developed several tools for that procedure. ‘We drafted an “appointment guide” (*Aanstelling-*

*sleidraad*) which explains clearly how which project will be awarded and a “cheat sheet” (*Spiekbrief*) with ten tips for designers who want to submit an offer’, explains Vanden Abeele. ‘In it, we formulate the ambitions of the procedure and the way we operate. One explicit ambition is to offer opportunities to young promising designers. So that they can realize a first government assignment and thus finally break through the brick ceiling of the many required references. Major projects in Flanders often occur in collaboration with the Flemish Government Architect via the Open Call procedure. For smaller assignments, we work with “pools” for which architects can apply and which they then sit in for four years after being selected.’ This pool system is based on the work method in Antwerp. Rapp: ‘We made a guide to procedures for all city partners and to inform or support private partners if they wish. In it, besides very large projects of general interest that happen through an Open Call procedure, we distinguish three pools, each with a four-year mandate.’ The first is the ‘large pool’ of eight architects for large projects such as schools or sports halls. For new assignments, the architects are invited in threes to take part in a competition, after which the winner is designated together with the client and the awarded project. The ‘small pool’ includes ten architects, small-scale projects being assigned directly to one of the architects. Finally, there is the ‘restoration pool’ with twelve architects for restoration assignments, also with direct assignment. Rapp: ‘Unfortunately, the particularly strict and laborious European procurement legislation makes competitions difficult to access for young architects. They are often eliminated due to a lack of references. I would like to change this, but that is currently not possible.’

Georgios Maïllis did not develop his own selection system for Charleroi but relies on →



the existing procedures and legislation for competitions and calls for tenders. More important, he believes, is the agenda setting at territorial level preceding the issuing of tenders. This is why he and his team developed a map for the entire territory of Charleroi and thirty surrounding municipalities, the '*bassin de vie*'. Maïllis: 'This plan provides one coherent vision for the entire area on the urban planning and landscape scale, whether it concerns infrastructure axes, open space, existing buildings or buildings yet to be built. Every project we launch is a product of this plan and contributes to the image of Charleroi across the entire Belgian territory.'



7  
The map of the Ring City shows the existing and new urban edges of the Ring zone, the delimitation of the

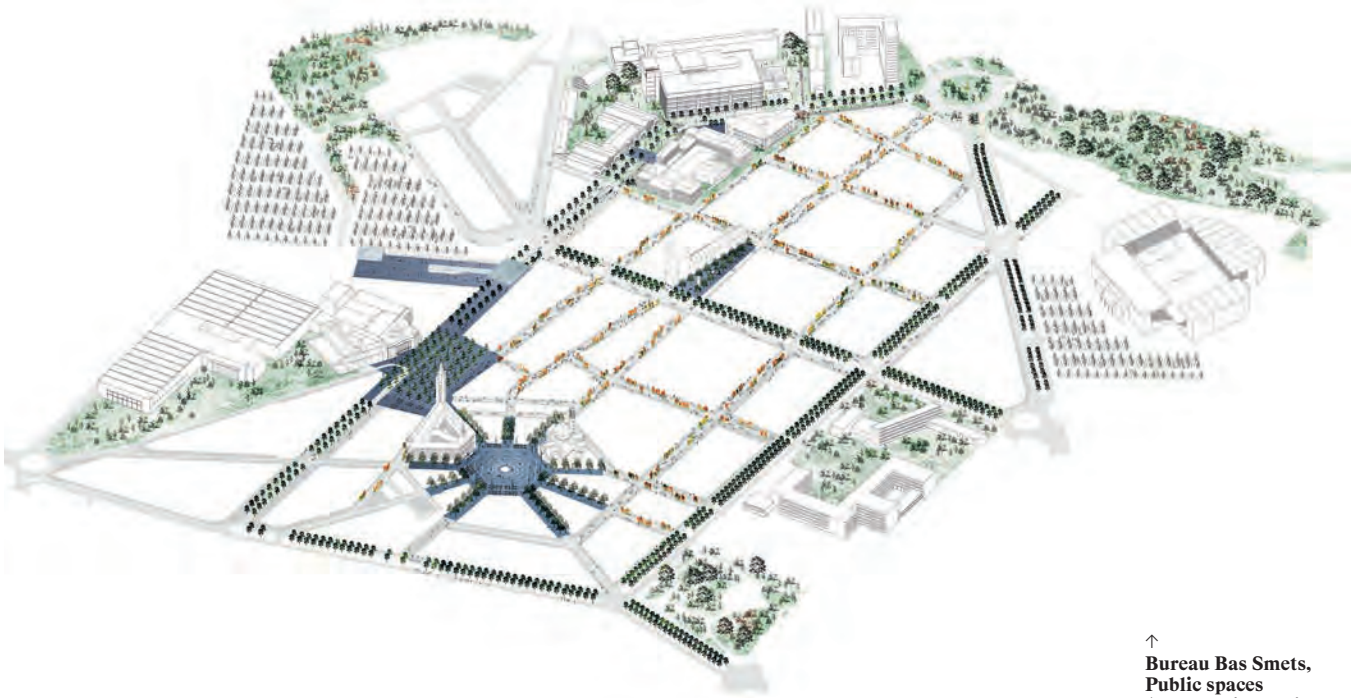
development areas and the area provided for connections, squares and local public space.

© Stad Antwerpen

The Ghent City Architect too wants to drive policy rather than react to it. On the one hand, this is done for concrete sites via the Design Research tool, but also in the form of the 'City essay' (*Stadsessay*). Vanden Abeele: 'A City or Government Architect has to set the agenda. That is why every year the team writes several texts, "City essays", on an urgent local urban

development theme such as "Brokkelbrug" (on the future of the motorway viaduct near Ledeberg), but also on more general themes such as depaving, urban living or high-rises. An exhibition on the latter theme is now running at the Stam Museum in Ghent. In this way, we want to have an impact on the concrete elaboration and design of future projects.' In Antwerp, this takes the form of themed lectures where the City Architect can put themes openly on the table. This happened with '*Stad Maken*' (Making the city), where the vision was formulated for the city's new urban fringe along the major infrastructure project 'Over the Ring'. This resulted in the Ringstad document, which has now been approved.

All three City Architects are aware that this impact on the built space will not happen if you only look at public commissions. Vanden Abeele: 'The golden age of public contracts is over. Ninety-five per cent of the market is made up of private clients, of which promoters make up the largest part. That is what we have to focus on.' Charleroi and Antwerp also collaborate a lot with property developers on sites such as Nieuw Zuid or for various projects within the Charleroi ring road. Rapp: 'You can't impose specific procedures on private players, but if the projects exceed a certain size, they are discussed by the integral Quality Chamber in any case.' This chamber is one of the instruments that provides a place for discussion on the quality of concrete projects in each of the above cities. Not all projects are discussed, only those that are visually prominent, in strategic locations or of a certain size. The advice is not binding for planning permission. 'A Quality Chamber is not a beauty police that only debates the aesthetics of the façade, as in the Netherlands', says Rapp. 'We develop a solid opinion on the quality and impact of the entire project. For example, if the mayor and aldermen want to →



↑  
**Bureau Bas Smets,  
 Public spaces  
 (Charleroi Creative  
 District)**

↓  
**Felt, Watersportbaan  
 competition tower,  
 Ghent**





deviate from this advice afterwards, they must substantiate their decision. Besides, today it is no longer just about the architectural quality of the object in itself. We approach advice integrally with discussions on urban planning, architecture, landscape and heritage, as the complexity of the projects transcends the purely architectural. The level of detail is discussed per discipline in the distinct Quality Chambers.’ Although the criteria for the projects to be discussed in the Quality Chamber are largely similar in the three cities, the composition differs completely. In Charleroi, the Quality Chamber consists of a representative of the cabinet of the alderman for urban development and representatives of the urban planning department, chaired by the City Architect who also represents the mayor. In Antwerp and Ghent, the projects are only discussed in the Quality Chamber by external experts, with a four-year mandate. These are assisted ad hoc by the director(s) of the relevant department(s) and chaired by the City Architect. Indeed, the composition determines the content of the advice, and the more external experts there are in the Quality Chamber, the more independently it can operate with regard to the administration.

The discussion on architectural quality is not always straightforward. Maillis: ‘The notion of “architectural quality” is sometimes a hollow concept. If you discuss it with other architects, everyone seems to know what you’re talking about, but clients, developers and politicians often don’t understand it at all, it’s not their language. Often, discussions about quality are also very object-oriented and fail to consider the impact of architecture on a larger territorial scale. For me, that is where the challenge of the City Architect lies.’

The territorial scale of the city is obviously limited. As soon as you look beyond the city walls, you enter the domain of a regional Government Architect. Or do you? Rapp: ‘The work of the Flemish Government Ar-

chitect and that of a City Architect is very complementary. The Flemish Government Architect develops instruments that sharpen procedures and stimulate research. A City Architect is directly involved in every visually prominent and influential project on his or her territory, so it is much more hands-on.’

In Wallonia, where there is currently no Government Architect, how do you address the territorial scale? Maillis: ‘There will be no Walloon Government Architect any time soon, since there is no political will and the necessary political agreements between the Walloon Region and the French-speaking Community are lacking today. That is why I advocate a comprehensive system of City Architects who, for each major city in Wallonia, conduct a territorial policy within their own “*bassin de vie*”, the metropolitan zone around their city.’ ▲■●



## Realty – A Highlight in Architects' Annual Calendar

Realty 2022 welcomed 1860 influential public and private players and decision makers in real estate (**architects, real estate agents, project developers, investors, politicians, experts and academics**), an increase of 10% compared to 2021. They made a total of 2550 visits (up 20% compared to 2021) over the two-day event.

This high level of interest is not an overnight success but the result of community -building over many months through regular communication, including a newsletter sharing the latest news on the Belgian real estate scene.

### A content programme focused on architects and master builders

The Realty Summit had set itself the goal of raising the bar for the exchange of ideas in the context of current events, which are forcing us to review work habits, and other things we take for granted, quickly and sustainably. It featured **109 speakers in 22 conferences** covering a range of topics. Also topics addressing the current and long-term concerns of **architects and master builders**. For example **Eric Wieërs, Kristiaan Borret, Nathalie de Vries and Peter Vanden Abeele** discussed the changing role of city architects, master builders and urban planners.



Maarten Van Acker, Nathalie de Vries,  
Peter Vanden Abeele, Kristiaan Borret,  
Eric Wieërs

Maarten Van Acker, Nathalie de Vries

Maarten Van Acker, Nathalie de Vries,  
Peter Vanden Abeele, Kristiaan Borret,  
Eric Wieërs

Prominent architectural firms presented their models. Contemporary artists exhibited sculptural works. Visitors took the opportunity to enjoy features such as the "Co-Living Room" designed by Gert Voorjans, pitches from the PropTech Lab and case studies given by the next generation of architects and real estate professionals from the KU Leuven.



Archi2000

B2Ai Architects

Jasper-Eyers Architects

Co-Living Room

Art work by Caroline Van den Eynden

### Realty 2023

Partners have already been signing up for the next edition, which will take place once again beneath the roof of the Gare Maritime, **19-20 September 2023**.

**Relive some of the highlights of Realty 2022! You can find the after movie, a gallery of photos and the possibility to subscribe for free on the monthly Realty newsletter on [www.realty-belgium.be](http://www.realty-belgium.be)**



# Quality *in camera*

*Maarten Van Acker*

From Torhout to Peer, from West Flanders to Limburg. Besides the familiar Government and City Architects and the building aesthetics committees, more and more so-called Quality Chambers (i.e. design review boards or panels) have emerged in recent years. These committees are meant to support cities and municipalities in assessing new building projects. However, the composition, role and functioning of these Quality Chambers still vary widely.

↓  
In October 2021 the Festival of Architecture came to Ostend. The local Quality Chamber (*Stadsatelier*) and the

Flanders Architecture Institute teamed up to organize a colloquium on the activities of Quality Chambers in Flanders and Brussels.



In October 2021 the Festival of Architecture came to Ostend. The local Quality Chamber (StadsAtelier) and the Flanders Architecture Institute (VAi) joined forces to organize a conference on the functioning of Quality Chambers in Flanders and Brussels. In 2019 the VAI had already organized a first 'States General' on this topic with the Ghent City Architect. The session in Ostend took the form of a workshop, in which some thirty members of Quality Chambers exchanged their experiences and knowledge, under the moderation of Lisa De Visscher (A+) and the members of the Stadsatelier. The discussions were organized around five thematic tables on the issues of composition, input, conversation, positioning and output. Students from the University of Antwerp master's programme in Urban and Spatial Planning drew up reports on these conversations. These reports served as the basis for this article.

### Shapes and sizes

It was soon clear that there is no standard recipe for organizing Quality Chambers. There are provincial Quality Chambers, intermunicipal chambers (IKRO, Ad hoK, Winvorm, Vakwerk) and, at the local scale level, we find them in both cities (Antwerp, Ghent, Brussels, Aalst, Geel, etc.) and municipalities (Beringen, Duffel, Mortsel, etc.).

There is little uniformity either about when and what projects are submitted to these committees. The Quality Chambers in the big cities, for example, are firmly embedded in the activities of a City Architect and have clear protocols regarding which projects are submitted to the Quality Chamber. From a certain surface area, programme or location, projects are required to go through that committee. In the absence of such clear guidelines and agreements, several participants complained in frustration that they sometimes did not actually get to see important projects on their territory.

After all, in most local Quality Chambers, projects are rather put forward by the city government or the administration. In the case of the intermunicipal societies, a file is only put on the agenda when a municipality comes knocking on the door and submits a project for a lump sum. Most Quality Chambers operate on an area-wide basis, but others only deal with projects within well-defined strategic areas.

The frequency with which the chambers meet also varies widely, from ad hoc to regular meetings, from fortnightly or monthly to just a few times a year. The calendars of some Quality Chambers are laid out in advance on an annual basis while others assemble rather on demand.

### Multidisciplinary: a must?

The Quality Chamber includes, on the one hand, experts as external members and, on the other, delegates from the administration. The great majority of the members have a background in architecture and urban planning and at least five years' experience. Some Quality Chambers rely on just two or three experts, while others recruit from a pool of six to ten experts. Most chambers call up the same constellation every time; only one exception puts together a committee of experts tailored to the relevant project.

Some Quality Chambers reinforce themselves with additional expertise: a sociologist, landscape architect or lawyer, for instance, or else a mobility, real-estate or sustainability expert. Yet several participants claimed that it is not obvious to get this group of experts to commit over a long period of time, since the principal part of the discussions is about architectural and urban planning parameters. That is why some chambers choose to engage these additional expertises rather on demand. In Antwerp, this is overcome by complementing the integral Quality Chamber with small- →



er, more specific chambers per domain, i.e. heritage, architecture, urban planning and landscape.

The chair is usually an external member, except in the big cities, where the City Architect fulfils this role. The chair is the first point of contact, sets the agenda and in some cases provides feedback to the city authorities. In exceptional cases, someone from the city government or the administration holds that position. But most members prefer an external chair to ensure the institute's independence.

For the same reason, some Quality Chambers choose to include administration members in the Quality Chamber, but not to grant them voting rights. Nevertheless, local representation is considered a necessity in all Quality Chambers, both to provide the right information and (policy) context and to enable proper coordination between the different departments involved. The best-oiled chambers have an administrative project manager who, together with the chair, sets the agenda and ensures the necessary follow-up.

### **Independence vs impact**

Quality Chambers do not have prescribed representation from such social bodies as the municipal planning committees (GEC-OROs), and all interviewees mention this as a quality that enables efficient and independent project discussions. All participants unanimously attach great value to this independence. The advisory body must be able to operate without interference from the private sector or political sphere. Several members also unofficially testified that the origin of the Quality Chamber sometimes lies in the deliberate creation of an official buffer between the politically elected representatives and the clients. Almost all Quality Chambers also have their members undersign a code of ethics that addresses, among other things, the issue of conflicts of interest.

There are two very different tendencies in the way Quality Chambers position themselves vis-à-vis the political sphere. In Ghent, for example, the city authorities are deliberately not represented in the Quality Chamber and the municipal executive does not even get to review the opinions in the interim. At the other end of the spectrum is a city like Ostend, where the chair of the Quality Chamber was, until recently, the alderman for Spatial Planning. The Kempen Quality Chamber, on the other hand, systematically holds preliminary discussions and reviews with both the administrations involved and the competent aldermen and mayor. In-between are Quality Chambers where the city authorities are sporadically invited to attend sessions as an observer, as in Brussels, or where the chair briefs the aldermen involved in complex dossiers.

In any case, almost all members at the debate table acknowledge that there is still much to be done as regards social transparency. All too often, it is still too unclear to the general public exactly what role the Quality Chambers play, what the impact of their work is, or what projects they have produced. There is still a lot to do here also to move the quality debate *extra camera* as well. Why could a Quality Chamber not be used to feed a broad public debate on spatial quality? If only by inspiring and demonstrating how urgent spatial and social issues can be successfully addressed in concrete projects.

### **A good conversation**

For submitters to receive optimal constructive feedback, the submitted project needs to be sufficiently detailed. All too often, members receive files in which the drawings are limited to their own plot contours, without being embedded in the urbanistic or policy context, or else no insight is given into the conceptual framework or the design research. Quality Chambers such as those in Ghent and the

Kempen therefore use model documents, including a clear checklist of elements a file must contain to be admissible.

An additional requirement for a good conversation is also that both client and architect are physically present. If either party is absent from the session, the flow of information often stalls or the sessions lack efficiency, several members noted. Many further lament that, instead of their designer, project developers increasingly bring a lawyer, which often bogs down the discussion in procedural and technical issues, leaving hardly any time to address the spatial quality of the project.

Although some Quality Chambers have a very strict work method and others a rather spontaneous approach, most sessions follow a similar pattern. In principle, they start with a preliminary discussion of the dossier among the members, followed by a presentation of the project by the client or architect, possibly supplemented by an explanation by the environmental officer, before moving on to the questions and discussions. In some cases, this is followed by an internal discussion among the experts, after which the advice is formulated.

### **Timing**

Emergency committee, fire alarm, lifebuoy ... Many a metaphor for the Quality Chambers were evoked at the debate table. The terms mainly illustrate the frustration felt by many experts that they often get to see projects too late, not infrequently when the file is already 'waiting for approval'. Especially among the regional Quality Chambers, this seems to be an old sore. Dealing with a project that is too detailed never turns out to be productive, leaving everyone frustrated. Any criticism from the chamber then understandably comes too late in the eyes of the client and architect concerned, and any suggestion implies time-consuming extra work and a delay in the planning procedure. In the experience of most

members, the files that achieve the highest quality and have the fastest processing time in terms of the granting of permits are projects that were submitted to the Quality Chamber as early as the first concept sketches and the setting of the programme. Several members also indicated that more and more developers are therefore proactively asking whether they can submit their files faster.

### **Thumbs up, thumbs down**

A recurrent preconception is that Quality Chambers are a kind of jury, with members pointing out a project's flaws to their colleagues with an authoritarian air. Members indicate that they don't want to be an assessment committee that gives the thumbs up or thumbs down to a project. On the contrary, many consider the Quality Chamber as a service to the client and architect. A good Quality Chamber not only provides advice to the administration or city government, but also hands designers tools to improve a project. A well-run chamber coaches, stimulates and inspires with innovative and feasible references. A consultation between equals, which can take place in a constructive workshop atmosphere.

### **To draw or not to draw?**

The debaters could not agree unanimously as to whether a Quality Chamber itself should be allowed to draw or make suggestions on the sketches. The big cities were mainly convinced that committee members would thereby risk encroaching on the designer's territory and some even feared legal liability if a sketch from the Quality Chamber were to be seen as an acquired building right.

In contrast, the Kempen Quality Chamber works with so-called quick sketches, in which the committee sketches a possible scenario, experiencing it as a productive tool for concrete communication with the client and architects. Moreover, the same Quality Chamber also →



provides best practices from the region for inspiration via their website, 'Atelier Ruimte Kempen'. The regional ad hoc Quality Chamber also produces sketches and sends reference images to illustrate the oral message. In Mechelen, actual design labs are even being set up between the clients, their architects and members of the Quality Chamber, in which intensive design sessions are held to find a quality alternative.

### Advice

A final element in the efficient functioning of a Quality Chamber is the report of the sitting that is communicated to the client, the administration and, in most cases, also to the city authorities. The most successful format of such advice appears to distinguish two parts. The first comprises a synthesis of the main arguments of the discussion, followed by concrete recommendations about the project and agreements about the further process. In most Quality Chambers, the secretary prepares the report and the committee approves it. Others work on a rotating basis or assign one of the experts to a project as the person ultimately responsible and then also thoroughly follow up on the accompanying reports. Several members believe that such independent advice should be addressed not only to the client and architect, but also to the administration and city authorities.

### Passive or proactive?

Most Quality Chambers respond to files put forward by the administration or city authorities. However, some chambers are also called in for policy-preparation work such as initiating architectural competitions or contributing to the formation of a spatial vision. In Ostend, Hasselt and Aalst, for instance, the chambers themselves may initiate studies. Most members recognize the added value of such a proactive attitude, which can contribute by

formulating a spatial vision or policy framework, but they note that they usually lack the resources to do so.

### Future

Demographic growth, scarcity of space, the proclaimed construction shift and rising prices for land, services and building materials alike indicate that there will be increasing quality pressure on projects. In addition, more and more complex and mixed projects are likely to emerge. Local capacity will thus have to be strengthened at the administration, while municipalities often already face staff shortages. So there is certainly an opportunity here for the Quality Chambers to support local administrations as well as clients and their designers.

At times, there was something therapeutic about the discussions between members at the table. There was clearly a desire to organize such knowledge-sharing more frequently and an awareness of the need to do so. No longer to keep the discussion about spatial quality *in camera*, but to share methods, solutions and best practices *extra camera*, far beyond municipal and official boundaries. ▲●

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## Storm-proof sun protection for the penthouses at The Yard in Berlin

The Yard is an eight-storey residential building in Kreuzberg, Berlin. The penthouses on the top two storeys have been fitted with storm-proof Fixscreens from Renson as sun protection. Large, sleek and vanishingly slim, this high-performance sun protection system gives the penthouses an exceptional allure of elegance. The high wind resistance on the 8th floor is, of course, also a great added value in terms of sustainability.

### Wind-proof sun protection

Külby's architects set demanding requirements for the penthouses' sun protection. Not only did it have to be sleek and the right colour, it had to be stripe-free. Above all, the vertical screens had to be storm-proof. Above all, the fabric awnings must also be storm-proof, especially if they are to cover large window surfaces at a height of seven or eight floors. Renson's Fixscreens met all these requirements. Architect David Külby: "We selected the most suitable sun protection for each window. For the penthouses on the seventh and eighth floors, these are undoubtedly sunshades, while the large balconies on the lower floors were better off with exterior curtains."

### Guided and transparent

The colour of the fabrics, matches the colour of the exterior curtains on the floors below. And that is not just because of the architect's desire for a uniform look. "Because we also wanted a relatively transparent fabric, while the technical characteristics still had to meet the prescribed energy performance requirements. This is why we decided on a fabric that is coated on both sides," says David Külby. The great advantage of external blinds is that the view to the outside is always retained. Even with the awning lowered, sufficient daylight is still available inside on warm days and there is no feeling of being locked up. Especially in apartments with large window surfaces, this is an added value that should not be underestimated.

### Sleek, high and over-corner

Renson's storm-proof screens are available up to a maximum size of 22 m<sup>2</sup> and up to a height of 6 metres. This allows a single piece of storm-proof fabric to span two storeys. Just such an awning was installed on a two-storey window in one of these exclusive penthouses.

But there is more, because in the Berlin building project fabric awnings were also chosen for the glass-on-glass corner windows, without annoying guiding rails at the corner. With the development of the Panovista Max, Renson has succeeded in protecting corner glazing from the sun without having to sacrifice the panoramic view of the outside when the fabric sunblind is lowered. The Panovista Max owes its wind resistance to the fact that the two fabrics from two separate cabinets zip together at the corner when lowered. This creates a completely 'closed' corner awning, without profiles at the corner that would only obstruct the view to the outside.

[www.renson.eu](http://www.renson.eu)





# A common language

*Elodie Degavre – Photos Johnny Umans*

It's a fact of life in our profession: it's when the architects leave the stage that the buildings come to life. This morning at the Théâtre du Rideau, a meeting is taking place in the bar, the office staff is at work, and the sound of hammering is coming from backstage. Later in the week, after the premiere of the upcoming show, a school group will visit one morning, the outreach staff will go out into the neighbourhood. Then the dressing rooms will be tidied up and the costumes will be sent for cleaning. A busy schedule where no two days are the same and one that is punctuated by the temporalities of theatrical creation. A meeting with a theatre that sees itself as 'a reminder of home' and that itself seems to feel right at home.



→ The theatre's embeddedness in a dense and lively neighbourhood is the backbone of an artistic project that includes many concrete interactions with the neighbourhood.



A humane, serene and joyful atmosphere reigns at the Rideau, and throughout my visit I tell myself, There's a good vibe to this place. Raymond Delepierre, the theatre's technical director, is my guide. When he tells the story of the Rideau, from its emergence in 1943 to its establishment on Rue Goffart, one cannot help but be struck by the benevolence that has marked this long journey made up of artistic reinventions and moves – and meetings, too: the theatres that hosted the Rideau during its nomadic period, the municipality of Elsenne/Ixelles that welcomed the theatre on its territory in 2014, the Wallonia-Brussels Federation with the financial support of its Cultural Infrastructures department, and the involvement of its Cellule architecture, which monitored the architectural competition in the same breath ... All these partners have not only provided support, but have also remained faithful to the theatre. This is a theatre that knows how to make itself loved. There is nothing ironic about this statement: it is a reality, an obvious quality, which was not built in a day.

The history of the theatre began at the Centre for Fine Arts, where the 'Rideau de Bruxelles' occupied the 'Petit Théâtre'. The demolition of this theatre in 2011 ushered in a period of uncertain nomadism. Meanwhile, in Rue Goffart, an old carcass was awaiting its next occupants. This former post house, which later became a charcoal factory and then a body shop, had already seen its destiny transformed when, in the 1980s, it was home to an experimental theatre that was succeeded by the XL Théâtre du Grand Midi, before the Rideau moved in in 2014.

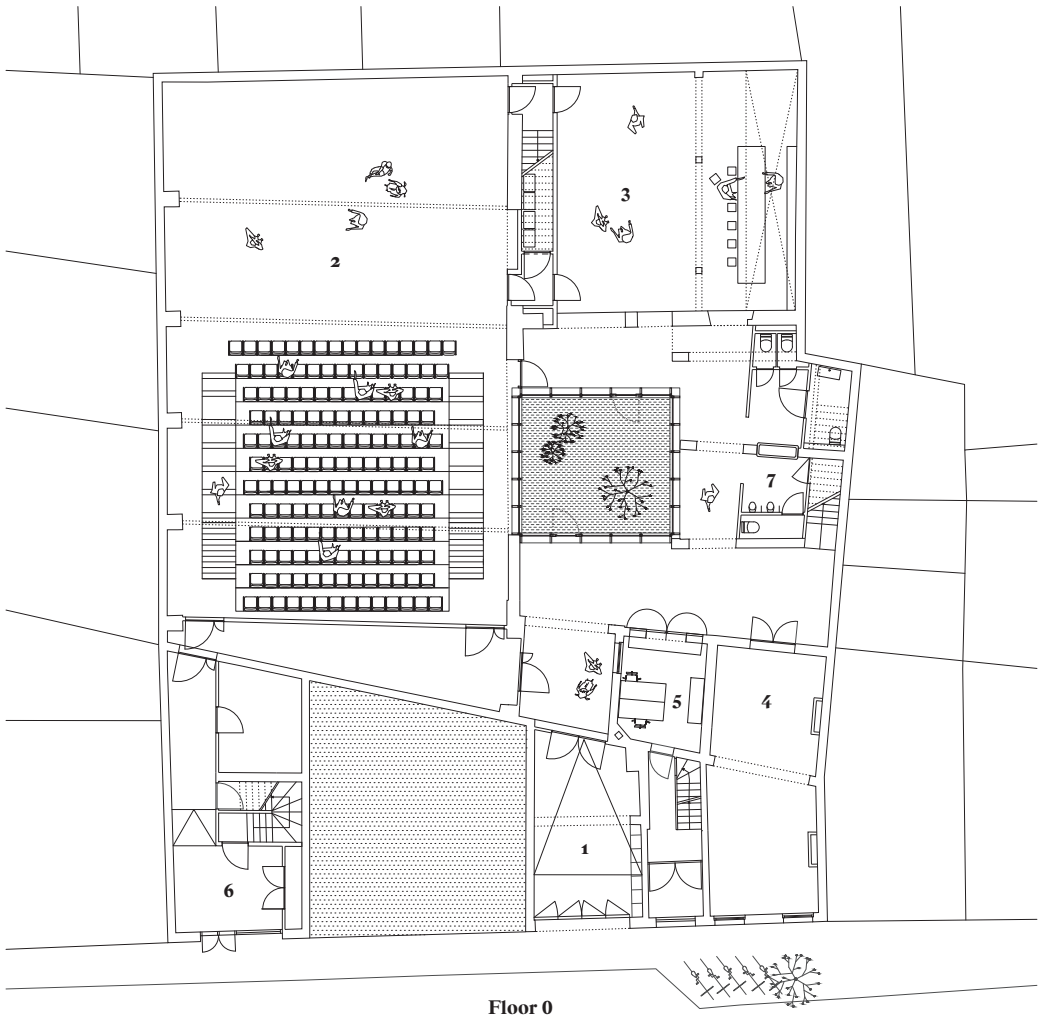
At the time, the theatre had to make do with these disconnected buildings that force one to move between inside and outside. But the situation was hardly tenable in the long term. With the support of the municipality of Elsenne/Ixelles, which undertook to buy an adjoining house, and thanks to the inventive financial arrangements and close monitoring of the Cellule architecture, an architectural competition was launched. Crucially, the theatre, in keeping with its future renewal, had this requirement: young teams of architects, no →





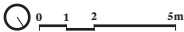


Section



Floor 0

- |                |           |           |             |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| 1 entrance     | 3 foyer   | 5 tickets | 7 logistics |
| 2 theatre hall | 4 atelier | 6 WC      |             |



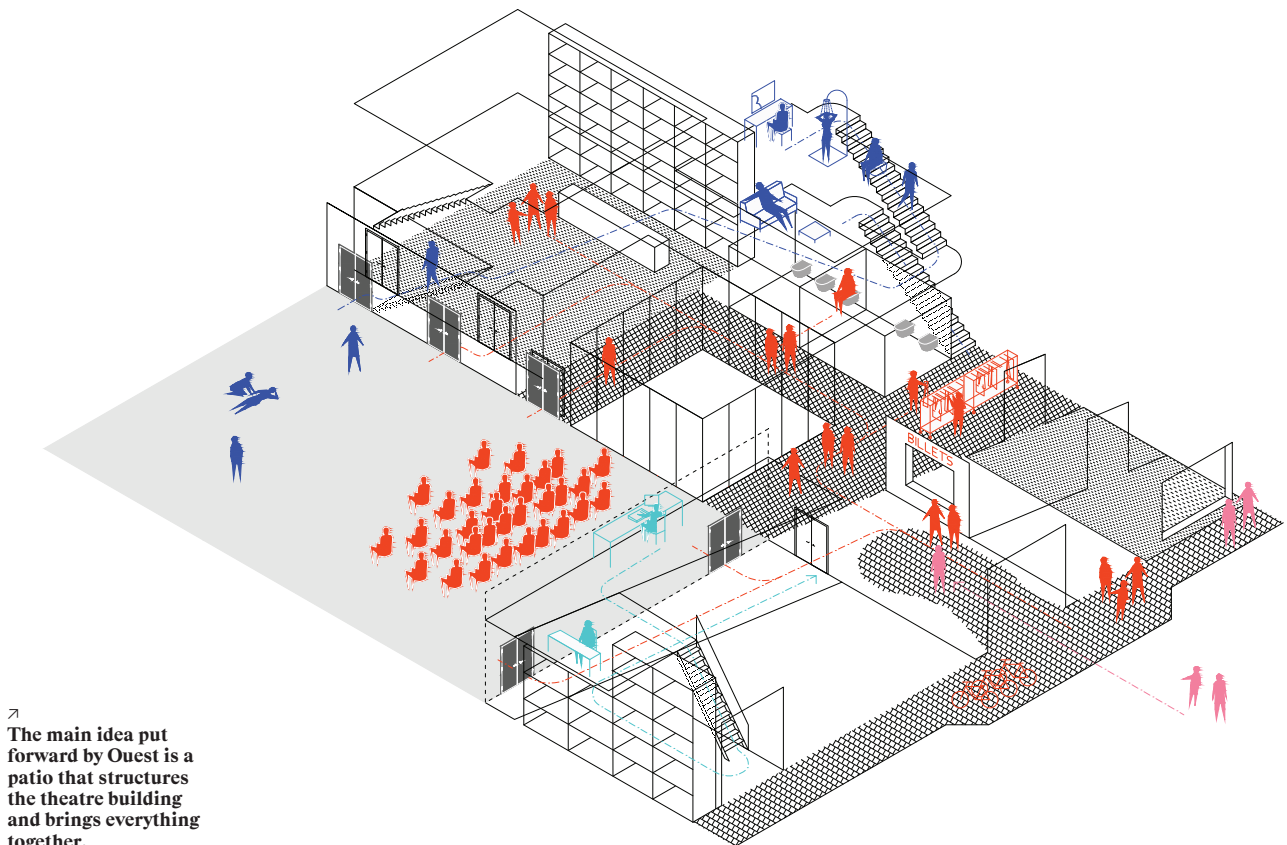
Architect	Programme	Client	Acoustics
Ouest	Renovation of a theatre (formerly a charcoal factory, then a body shop, then a theatre from the 1980s)	Le Rideau de Bruxelles	Kahle
Website		Lead contractor	Completion
ouest.be		Thomas & Piron	June 2019
Official project name		Structural engineering	Total floor area
Théâtre Le Rideau de Bruxelles		JZH & Partners	950 m <sup>2</sup>
Location	Procedure	Services engineering	Budget
Elsene/Ixelles (Brussels)	Selection procedure of the Cellule architecture of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (FWB)	Aveolis	€ 850,000 (excl. VAT and fees)



famous names. The Rideau as a whole experienced the jury, this 'day of joy and doubts', as an exhilarating leap into the void, which ended with an obvious conclusion: the idea put forward by Ouest, a patio that brings everything together and gives it structure, was unanimously approved. This patio was 'a leap forward', Raymond Delepierre tells me. The promise that, in terms of space, the cards were being completely reshuffled. It was time for the building site.

If the theatre's artistic ambition is to set up 'humane adventures', the construction site seems to have followed the same destiny. First of all, it represented an upheaval in the professional life of Raymond Delepierre, who was replaced for two years in his duties at the theatre so that he could devote himself entirely to the site. A virtually permanent, expert and unusual presence for the contractor Thomas & Piron Rénovation, which nevertheless chose to go with the flow and give its best. On this 'positive and constructive' site, where the future occupant puts himself in a position to share knowledge, bonds of friendship grafted themselves onto professional bonds in a 'powerful exchange'. The rest of the story has been documented extensively (see A+284) and the critical fortune of the 'sublime bricolage' set up by Ouest was decided.

Today, the success of this architectural operation is coupled with user satisfaction. Cathy Min Jung, the artistic director appointed in 2020, discovered and appreciated this place with new eyes, which she sees as 'a house' made 'not to intimidate'. This intimate scale is nevertheless a daily challenge: 'doing theatre requires a lot of space', as Raymond Delepierre reminds us, and as a result the Rideau, →



↗  
The main idea put forward by Ouest is a patio that structures the theatre building and brings everything together.











equipped with a single auditorium, has to outsource storage, rehearsals and residencies. But this is the flip side of a situation that is cherished by the whole team: not only does the domesticity of the premises enrich their exchanges, but the theatre's embeddedness in this dense and lively neighbourhood is the backbone of an artistic project that includes many concrete interactions with the neighbourhood. If anything is lacking, it is in the area of energy performance. The theatre is suffering the consequences of the limited budget imposed during the competition: less than €1000/m², which speaks for itself. But isn't this a political issue rather than an architectural one, as Cathy Min Jung suggests?

Happy users, a construction site that went well, friendships made along the way ... I continue my visit and ponder the secrets of this success. For Raymond, on the building site, it is a 'question of language': it is important to 'speak the same language, to engage with the tradesmen with precision' while not forgetting to be 'the guarantor of the architectural design'. Raymond Delepierre's mastery of this common language is not only due to his functions at the Rideau: as a technical consultant for the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, he works with many architects on French-speaking cultural sites. In terms of drawing up specifications, we should obviously also mention the closeness of the Rideau to the architect Olivier Bastin, who, as chair of the theatre's board of directors, was well placed to help articulate its needs. But success is also based on good local practices. Long before these preparatory reflections, Raymond Delepierre began collecting equipment that 'could be used later'. He has built up an impressive network of reuse based on the data he

gleaned from the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. Wherever theatres are dismantled, the technical director of the Rideau is there. Tiers, chairs, grills, projectors, etc. have gradually been added to the Rideau's treasure trove, a precise inventory of which is given to the architects at the start of the building work. The least we can say is that the Rideau remarkably prepared the ground for its architectural adventure.

The meeting with Raymond, the well-networked man with many resources, leaves me totally ecstatic: what architect wouldn't dream of such a context? I leave the theatre and imagine a large map stretching out in time and space. A network made up of resourceful people, dismantled venues, transported materials, clever financial arrangements, ties of friendship and relationships of trust: a great web meticulously deployed, with humanity and cunning, and which, in return for the energy invested, converges on this exemplary little theatre. I remember a television report from the 1970s. Aldo Van Eyck was asked what he thought made good architecture possible. With his characteristic good nature, he replied that the prerequisite for a good building is a very good client.<sup>2</sup>▲●

1 Olivier Bastin in *Architectura*, 13 September 2019.

2 'First of all the architect must be very good! But the client must be very good, intelligent, both must have humanity and both must respect each other ... The prerogative for a very good building: a very good client.' From the series *Mon quartier c'est ma vie: 3 chroniques des maisons et des rues*, episode 3 'Les étoiles de Renaudie', directed by Hubert Knapp, TF1, 1979.

→ Today, the success of the architectural operation is coupled with user satisfaction. The domesticity of the theatre is crucial, it is 'a house' made 'not to intimidate'.







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# The stepped story of a community school

Arnaud De Sutter – Photos Franziska Kriek

Faced with a municipal school housed in unsuitable infrastructure, the authorities of Melle decided to relocate it. To that end they bought newly vacant land, a former school site in the heart of a allotment a bit further on. The ambitious council aimed to build a compact but future-oriented school in a park there. The result, the Park School by Petillon Ceuppens Architecten and Schenk Hattori Architecture Atelier, embraces the interior area and steers its use in the right direction. It is in line with the inconstant rhythm of allotment Flanders but also goes against it.





In the context of its commitment, the municipality contacted the Team Flemish Government Architect. When it appeared that Melle's administration didn't have sufficient expertise in terms of project management and the drafting of a project definition (both management and definition being required within the Open Call), the regional intermunicipal organization Veneco entered the process. This organization assists twenty-one municipalities around Ghent in various spatial areas. Rien Gellynck, coordinator within its Spatial Planning department, praises the initiative of the municipal council: 'Subdividing the plots the traditional way was not an option. We wanted to house a park and a community school on it, with space for a music school and a local gym club.'

Gellynck supervised the process up to the building permit application. There was about a year between Veneco's appointment and the publication of the competition in 2017. This period of time was used to conduct extensive preliminary research. With input from the municipal and school administration and the stakeholders, Veneco prepared a thorough project definition. It focused on the envisioned functioning of the community school and how that could translate into spatial schemes. Optimal organization of the park was sought in consultation with local residents. For

Gellynck, this was a successful work method. 'The preliminary study and the project definition established a framework the architects could operate in. Discussions with the neighbourhood and the board had already taken place when the competition started, so that thorny issues had been resolved and the architects could focus fully on the design.'

The winning design, by the young team around Petillon Ceuppens and Schenk Hattori, was selected unanimously. It consists of a compact school that efficiently separates the public park from the playground. The concept of the school building proved highly innovative. By placing the escape routes from the classrooms along the façade, above via a circular walkway, the halls inside can be used as a central area for meeting and collaboration, but can also be opened up to outsiders without disturbing the classrooms. The design thus goes against rigid thinking in education.

After the selection, it turned out that the initially requested renovation of the former sports hall on the site was unfeasible. On top of the competition question, the architects were asked to design a new hall. This did not happen within the framework of the Open Call but was overseen by Veneco. The role of the intermunicipal association changed throughout the process. After the selection it acted mainly →

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The use of the rooms is not permanent but can evolve over time.      The design is about the presence of the hard programme.









as an adviser on budgetary issues and served to monitor timing, programme and quality. Once the project was granted a permit, Dieter Van Acker, project coordinator in the Project Development and Management Department, took over from his colleague. For him, the role of project manager is essentially that of a mediator. 'Sitting down with the architect, client and contractor, my goal was to obtain the best possible compromise between the different visions', he says. 'Besides representing the client's interests, Rien and I acted as neutral referees in the interest of the project.' As both coordinators have a background in architecture, they were able to fulfil both duties expertly.

Due to several lockdowns, the school was finished around the turn of 2022, not on time but within budget. The Park School consists of two large and several smaller volumes in Elsdries Park. Within the amalgam of the allotment, the gymnasium is no exception, standing next to a barn and alluding to its scale and formal idiom. The multifaceted building of the school stands out immediately and shows itself in different ways. From one street it appears as a slender profile, as if it were a detached house; from the gymnasium it appears as a wide strip that borders the park, a backdrop against which to play.

In plan, the school is a stepped figure, between park and playground. It consists of a square grid of columns, concrete bricks stacked in a cruciform shape, with a wide-slab floor. Free walls create classrooms between them. The arrange- →

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The Park School consists of 2 compact volumes in Elsdries Park: the school building and – a bit further on, across from it – the new sports

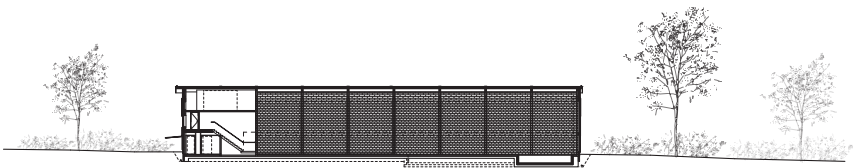
hall. In plan, the school is a stepped figure, between park and playground. In architectural terms, the sports hall looks like a neighbouring barn.



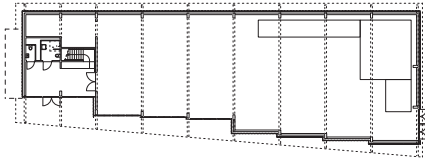
1 school building  
2 sports hall



↙ Sports hall



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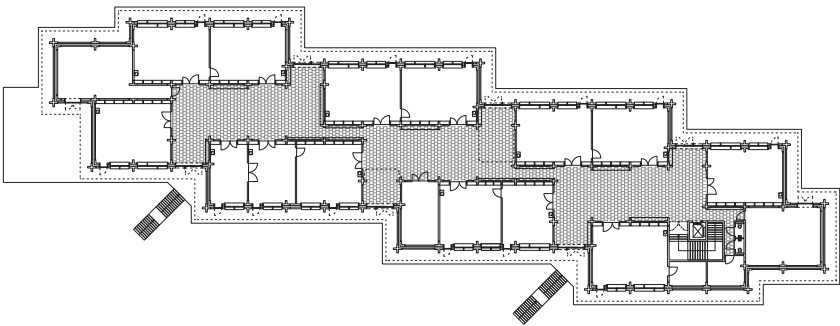


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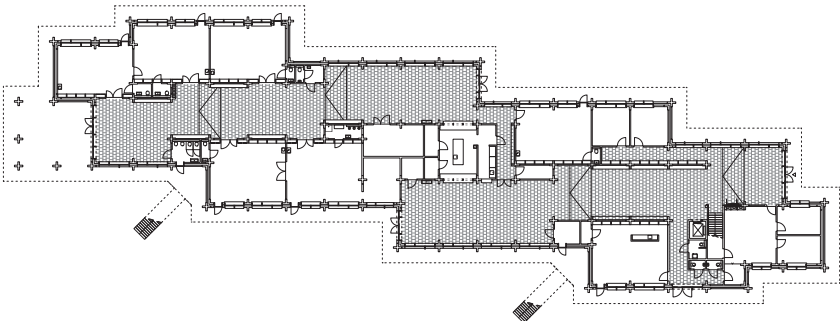
↙ School building



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Floor 1



Floor 0



Architect  
Petillon Ceuppens –  
Schenk Hattori  
Website  
petillonceuppens.be  
schenkhattori.com  
Project name  
Park School  
Location  
Melle, Belgium

Programme  
A new kindergarten and pri-  
mary school with sports hall  
and public park  
Procedure  
Open Call  
(Team Flemish Government  
Architect)  
Client  
Municipality of Melle

Landscape architect  
Veneco  
Structural engineering  
Tandem ingenieurs  
Services engineering  
NVTs engineering  
Lead contractor  
Strabag Belgium  
Completion  
August 2021

Total floor area  
4,500 m<sup>2</sup>  
Budget  
€ 6,900,000  
(excl. VAT and fees)  
Product/Supplier  
Firestone/Elevate  
(EPDM roof),  
Soprema (membranes),  
Geberit (sanitary facilities),  
Bega (outdoor lighting)



ment is not fixed and the spaces can be put to different uses over time. The design is about the spaces in-between, the absence of any well-defined programme. This in-between space flows diagonally through the building as a public space in two places, guided by the columns. A refectory during school hours but above all a multipurpose hall, it can be used outside school hours for external initiatives. The two in-between spaces are connected by the kitchen, which acts as a hinge between kindergarten and primary school.

Because the ground floor slopes with the terrain, while the first floor remains flat, the spaces become lower the further away one moves from the main entrance. This lends the entrance and offices greater openness while giving the kindergarten more security, tailored to the pupils. On the first floor, the classrooms are arranged by grade around a hall. This hall runs from façade to façade and is connected to the adjacent hall by a short corridor. A walkway extends on the outside of the building. Each classroom opens onto it, as do the common halls, as well as two staircases leading to the playground. The walkway acts as an escape route, so the halls do not have to. That is why they can be fitted with furniture and the corridor can be used for teaching or playing.

As a translation of the programme, the gymnasium is a juxtaposition of three spaces under one roof. A small volume for the entrance hall and sanitary facilities stands next to a slightly larger sports hall for the school, followed by an even larger hall for the club. The spaces form a whole but are also recognizably present through the articulation of the building.

Within the allotment, the park is a welcome change, as it creates contact between people and provides a clear resting point. Valuable trees were preserved, parking spaces kept out. The Elsdries Park accommodates areas for sports and play, sunbathing areas with space for the neighbourhood fair and cycle paths. It connects with the surrounding area and local residents. Thanks to its neutral presence in a lively context, the Park School exerts a strong attraction on the community. It combines its welcoming spaciousness with a uniform and warm materiality. The designers thus managed to create an environment in which education can take place uncompromisingly, a building ready for juvenile action, to the benefit of the pupils. ▲ ■ ●

↓  
Within the amalgam of the allotment, the building of the sports hall is no exception. It stands next to a barn and alludes to its scale and formal idiom.







## Storm-proof sun protection for the penthouses at The Yard in Berlin

The Yard is an eight-storey residential building in Kreuzberg, Berlin. The penthouses on the top two storeys have been fitted with storm-proof Fixscreens from Renson as sun protection. Large, sleek and vanishingly slim, this high-performance sun protection system gives the penthouses an exceptional allure of elegance. The high wind resistance on the 8th floor is, of course, also a great added value in terms of sustainability.

### Wind-proof sun protection

Külby's architects set demanding requirements for the penthouses' sun protection. Not only did it have to be sleek and the right colour, it had to be stripe-free. Above all, the vertical screens had to be storm-proof. Above all, the fabric awnings must also be storm-proof, especially if they are to cover large window surfaces at a height of seven or eight floors. Renson's Fixscreens met all these requirements. Architect David Külby: "We selected the most suitable sun protection for each window. For the penthouses on the seventh and eighth floors, these are undoubtedly sunshades, while the large balconies on the lower floors were better off with exterior curtains."

### Guided and transparent

The colour of the fabrics, matches the colour of the exterior curtains on the floors below. And that is not just because of the architect's desire for a uniform look. "Because we also wanted a relatively transparent fabric, while the technical characteristics still had to meet the prescribed energy performance requirements. This is why we decided on a fabric that is coated on both sides," says David Külby. The great advantage of external blinds is that the view to the outside is always retained. Even with the awning lowered, sufficient daylight is still available inside on warm days and there is no feeling of being locked up. Especially in apartments with large window surfaces, this is an added value that should not be underestimated.

### Sleek, high and over-corner

Renson's storm-proof screens are available up to a maximum size of 22 m<sup>2</sup> and up to a height of 6 metres. This allows a single piece of storm-proof fabric to span two storeys. Just such an awning was installed on a two-storey window in one of these exclusive penthouses.

But there is more, because in the Berlin building project fabric awnings were also chosen for the glass-on-glass corner windows, without annoying guiding rails at the corner. With the development of the Panovista Max, Renson has succeeded in protecting corner glazing from the sun without having to sacrifice the panoramic view of the outside when the fabric sunblind is lowered. The Panovista Max owes its wind resistance to the fact that the two fabrics from two separate cabinets zip together at the corner when lowered. This creates a completely 'closed' corner awning, without profiles at the corner that would only obstruct the view to the outside.

[www.renson.eu](http://www.renson.eu)





# Sharp edges, soft power

*Sven Sterken*

The Brussels Northern Quarter is the product of two generations of government-guaranteed property speculation in the 1970s and 1990s (see *A+295*). Today, several important tenants have reached the end of their contracts and the vacancy rate is peaking. In the absence of any long-term vision for the area, eight major real-estate owners founded Up4North in 2016 already, with the aim of forcing a transformation of the area through a co-creation process with local actors. In the meantime, the government of the Brussels-Capital Region sold its share in the central CCN building (a major transit hub next to the Brussels North Station), thus carelessly giving away a key element in the area's regeneration. As a result, the Brussels Government Architect (BMA) had to work hard to safeguard the urban qualities precisely of the future project, leading to one more a posteriori compromise between private and public interests.



By contrast, the transformation of the former neighbouring WTC Towers showed that the BMA can play a more productive role (see A+ 295). Although initially tasked with advising public clients, the BMA assisted the private developer in his search for an architect able to transform the planned monofunctional office tower into a multifunctional complex by means of an open competition. In the meantime, one tower was leased by Lab North (a partnership between Up4North and a number of local cultural actors) to a wide range of tenants from the creative and educational sectors, thus attracting a critical mass that helped to draw attention to the problems and the potential of the area – a combination of thinking and doing *in situ* that led to a lively public debate that planning studies do not normally engender. The BMA played a part in this bottom-up dynamic by organizing, with Perspective (the planning agency of the Brussels-Capital Region) and Lab North, a two-day symposium with foreign experts and a series of workshops with the three municipal administrations involved.

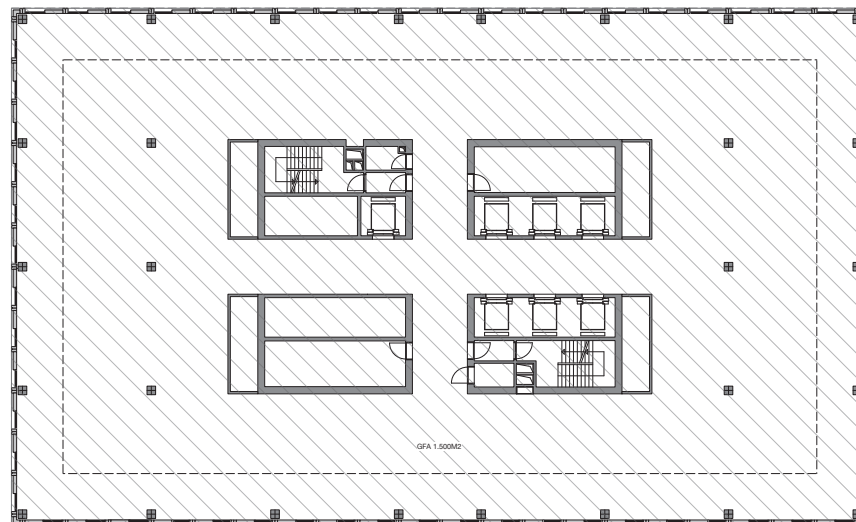
In order to be able to act not merely as a moderator but as a full-fledged active interlocutor with a distinctly personal vision and expertise, a design-research unit had already been set up within the BMA. It formulated ten principles to

boost the urban qualities of the Northern Quarter. One such principle was 'upside down': strengthening the east-west connections in the district (which is now structured almost exclusively north-south). Other principles included enhancing the liveability of the open spaces and activating the plinths of the buildings with smaller shops instead of large single-door shopping arcades. The 'double skyline' concept stated that an office tower may well offer maximum light and visibility for its users but should also entertain a meaningful relation with the street. Furthermore, it was agreed that not every building has to be multifunctional. Rather, a diversity of users and rhythms of use must be achieved at the neighbourhood level. Maximum reuse of existing structures was also recommended as a way to recreate memory after the *tabula rasa* of the 1960s. Lastly, there should be no delay: temporary use could become a first step towards Northern Quarter 3.0.

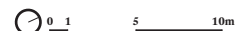
Rather than wait for these principles to be corroborated by official planning studies or policy documents, the BMA smuggled them into the public debate and its behind-the-scenes consultations. This persistence strategy paid off: 33 per cent of housing is now provided in the redevelopment of the two Proximus Towers and it is hoped that future projects →



Project developer  
Immobel and  
architects Neutelings  
Riedijk – Jaspers-Eyers  
are responsible for the  
redevelopment of the  
Proximus Towers  
in Brussels. The glass  
office towers near the  
Brussels-North station  
will house 393 housing  
units and different  
other functions.



Typical T-Tower floor plan



Architect  
Neutelings Riedijk  
Jaspers-Eyers  
Website  
neutelings-riedijk.com  
jaspers-eyers.eu

Project name  
Proximus  
Location  
Brussels

Programme  
Mixed-used project with  
offices (mainly Proximus)  
housing, facilities for  
collective use, a hotel  
and shops)

Procedure  
Real estate operation  
Client  
Immobel  
Budget  
N/a



↳ The overall concept of Zin, a design by 51N4E – Jaspers-Eyers – l’AUC, is a multipurpose tower with office floors, apartments and hotel floors.



Floor 19

Architect  
51N4E – Jaspers-Eyers –  
l’AUC  
Website  
51N4E.com  
laucparis.com  
jaspers-eyers.eu  
Project name  
Zin  
Location  
Brussels

Programme  
Mixed use: apartments,  
offices, hotel, retail,  
sports infrastructure,  
public (green) space  
Client  
Befimmo  
Landscape architect  
Plant en Houtgoed

Structural engineering  
Bureau Greisch  
Services engineering  
VK Engineering  
Building physics  
VS-a (façade)  
Acoustics  
De Fonseca  
Sustainability  
Drees & Sommer

Completion  
2023  
Total floor area  
115,000 m<sup>2</sup>  
Budget  
N/a  
Product/Supplier  
Modulyss (carpets)



may even commit to including 20 per cent of social housing. It is important to note here that the independent position of the BMA enabled it to intervene not only in the selection of the designers but also in the formulation of the assignment, based on the conviction that a good question leads to a better answer. To avoid vague promises, so-called project lines were also drawn up, an 'ambition memorandum' with agreements that is not legally binding but that is made public, thereby cleverly capitalizing on the corporate responsibility of developers.

A new, productive balance seems to be arising here between the dynamics of bottom-up initiatives by citizens or private actors and the longer-term perspective of government top-down planning. Indeed, rather than remedy after the fact, the BMA increasingly succeeds in mediating proactively. Its authority in this type of inclusive governance results from a clever use of soft power within a framework with sharp edges. It shows that more is achieved when people cooperate voluntarily than when they are forced to. While many of the BMA's interventions have so far been the result of coinci-

dences, personal connections and voluntarism, it is now a question of making this position essential. For the above modus operandi is not without risk: the current vision of the Northern Quarter has arisen implicitly from a process- and project-based approach within an ever-changing and often informal constellation of actors. This may prove to be a vulnerable model in times of crisis and is at odds with the inertia of the real-estate development sector. For developers prefer to do what they do well, i.e. realize a large building for one large customer, preferably without too many prying eyes.

However, the fate of the 4th WTC Tower (which never materialized) seems to prove that the sector also understands that this model has had its day: although granted a building permit in 2017 based on offices only, it will now include housing, a rooftop terrace, and cafés and shops at street level. The policy framework, too, is gradually evolving, along with these 'voluntary' commitments: the most recent coalition agreement includes a 'Real-estate charter' between government and developers, and at the beginning of this year the regional and municipal authorities jointly proposed a →

↓  
From July to September 2020, LabNorth installed, together with Plant en Houtgoed, a mobile forest on the sidewalk in front of the WTC4

building. It is an intervention travelling around the Northern Quarter that creates a green space for the neighbourhood.





'shared' vision for the Northern Quarter, symbolic of the idea that it can no longer be 'imposed' by just one official actor. In the meantime, a task force for the 'Northern territory' is also active within SAU/MSI (the Region's Urban Development Corporation), supervising the almost forty public and private projects that are in the pipeline in the area. There is thus a growing awareness that high-quality architecture and a sustainable urban environment create

added value for all stakeholders involved. However, where the latter dimension is concerned, the issue of public space remains open: planning taxes may well generate financial resources for the municipality, but they do not necessarily engender urban quality. Will the soft power of the BMA also be sufficient in this context, where there is much less to be gained? Or will the public sector eventually have to carry the load? ▲ ■ ●



© Tim Van de Velde

↗  
Conversation with Innovation Platforms, one of the workshops that took place in the WTCi Tower prior to renovation. (Temporary use with office spaces and the exhibition *You Are Here*, IABR – Architecture Workroom Brussels, 2018.)

→  
North Beach: Pool is Cool converted the large rotunda in the office district into a bathing spot for one day (1 June 2018). This fun-filled form of activism was a way to lament the lack of open-air swimming pools in the Capital of Europe.



© Tim Van de Velde





Architectural fireplaces  
Made in Belgium  
[metalfire.eu](http://metalfire.eu)  

*Metalfire*



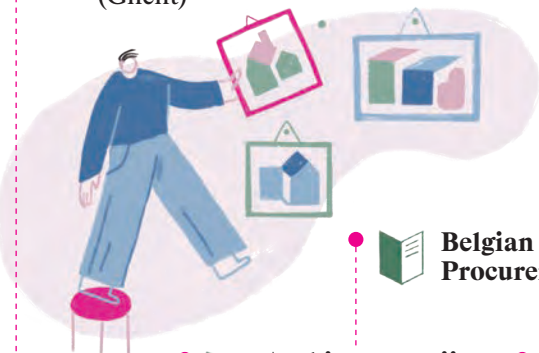
# Timeline & Map

 Foundation  
 Publication  
 Prize

 1  
 Start /  
 First...

  
 Appointed  
 as...

 **Stichting Architectuurmuseum**  
*Architecture Museum Foundation*  
 (Ghent)



 **Belgian Public  
 Procurement Act**

 **Architectuurwijzer**  
 (Hasselt)

 **Yearbook  
 Architecture  
 Flanders**

1983

1991

1993


1994

1996


1997

1998

1999

 1  
 Participation of the  
 Wallonia-Brussels  
 Federation in the  
**Venice  
 Architecture  
 Biennale**



 1  
 Participation of the Flanders  
 Community in the **Venice  
 Architecture Biennale**

 **CIVA Centre  
 International pour  
 la Ville, l'Architec-  
 ture et le Paysage**  
 (Brussels)

 **bOb Van Reeth:**  
 1st Flemish  
 Government  
 architect

 **Spatial Structure  
 Plan for Flanders**

 1  
**Meesterproef**  
 → Flemish  
 Government  
 Architect

 **Stad en  
 Architectuur**  
*City and Architecture*  
 (Leuven)

 **René Daniels:**  
 1st Antwerp City  
 Architect

2009

2010


2011

2012

2013

2014

2015

 **Peter Swinnen:**  
 Flemish Govern-  
 ment Architect

 **Architectures Wallonie-  
 Bruxelles Inventaires  
 #0 Inventories 2005-2010**  
 → Cellule architecture

 **Wallonia Brussels  
 Architecture  
 (WBA)**

 **Architecture  
 Workroom  
 Brussels (AWB)**



 1  
**Pilot Projects**  
 starts with Invisible  
 Care, other projects  
 will follow  
 → Flemish Govern-  
 ment Architect

 **Practical Guide  
 to Architecture  
 Markets** → Cellule  
 architecture


 **Kristiaan Borret:**  
 Antwerp City  
 Architect (2)

 1  **MOP Prize (Public  
 procurement award)**  
 → Cellule architecture

 **Labo Ruimte**  
 → Flemish  
 Government  
 Architect


 **Georgios Maïllis:**  
 1st Charlerloi  
 City Architect (1)



 **Stefan Devoldere:**  
 acting Flemish  
 Government  
 Architect

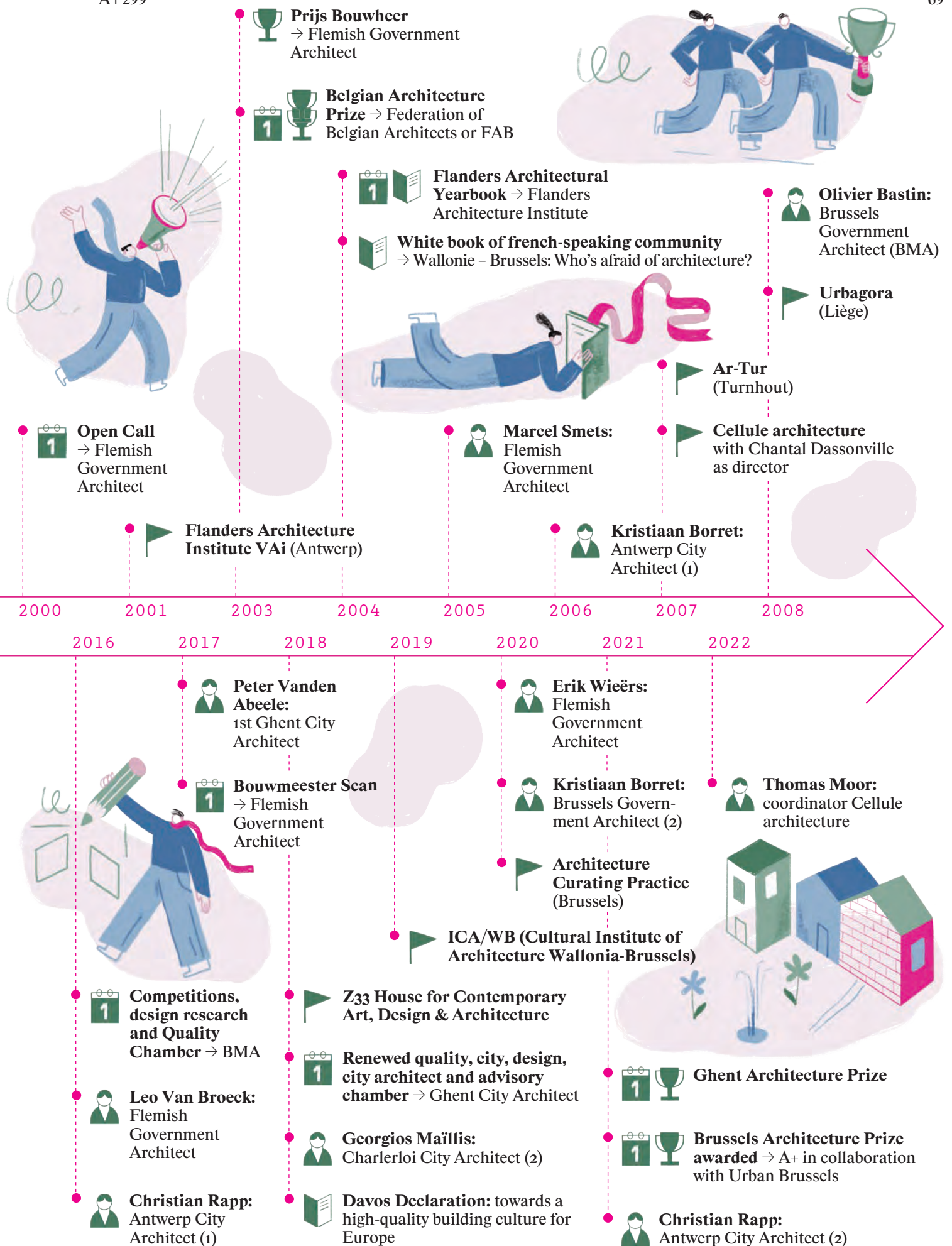
 **Kristiaan Borret:**  
 Brussels Govern-  
 ment Architect



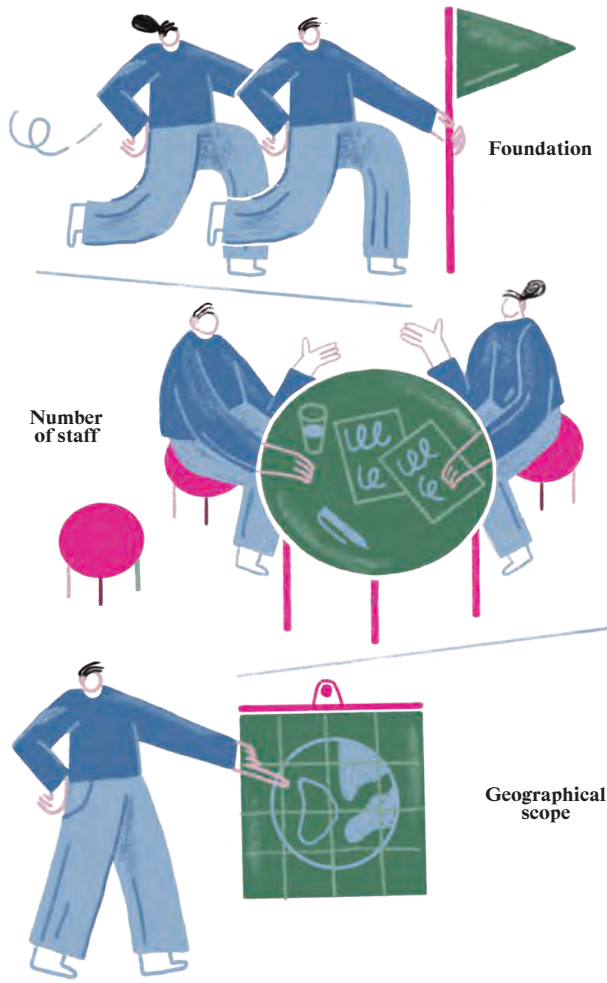
 **Wivina Demeester Prize** for inspiring  
 commissioning → Flemish Government  
 Architect

 **bOb Van Reeth and Christoph Grafe:**  
 temporary chairs of, respectively, the  
 building committee and the new A  
 committee pending the appointment of  
 a new Antwerp City Architect

 1  **Guides to modern and  
 contemporary architecture**  
 (Liège) → Cellule architecture







### Flanders Architecture Institute

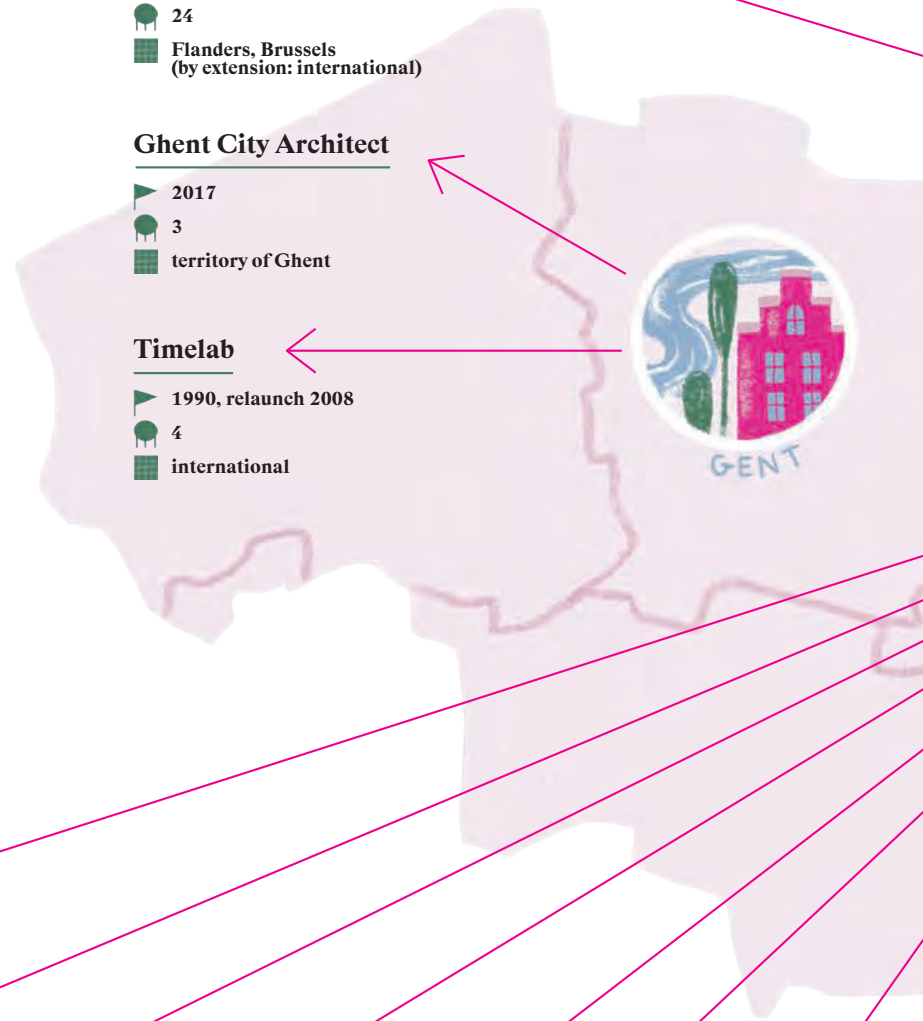
- 2001
- 24
- Flanders, Brussels (by extension: international)

### Ghent City Architect

- 2017
- 3
- territory of Ghent

### Timelab

- 1990, relaunch 2008
- 4
- international



### A+ Architecture in Belgium

- 1973
- 7
- Belgium (by extension: international)

### ACP Architecture Curating Practice

- 2020
- 2
- Brussels

### Architecture Workroom Brussels

- 2009
- 20
- Brussels (by extension: international)

### Bozar Architecture

- 2006
- Brussels, Belgium, international

### Brussels Government Architect

- 2008
- 17
- Brussels (by extension: international)

### Cellule Architecture

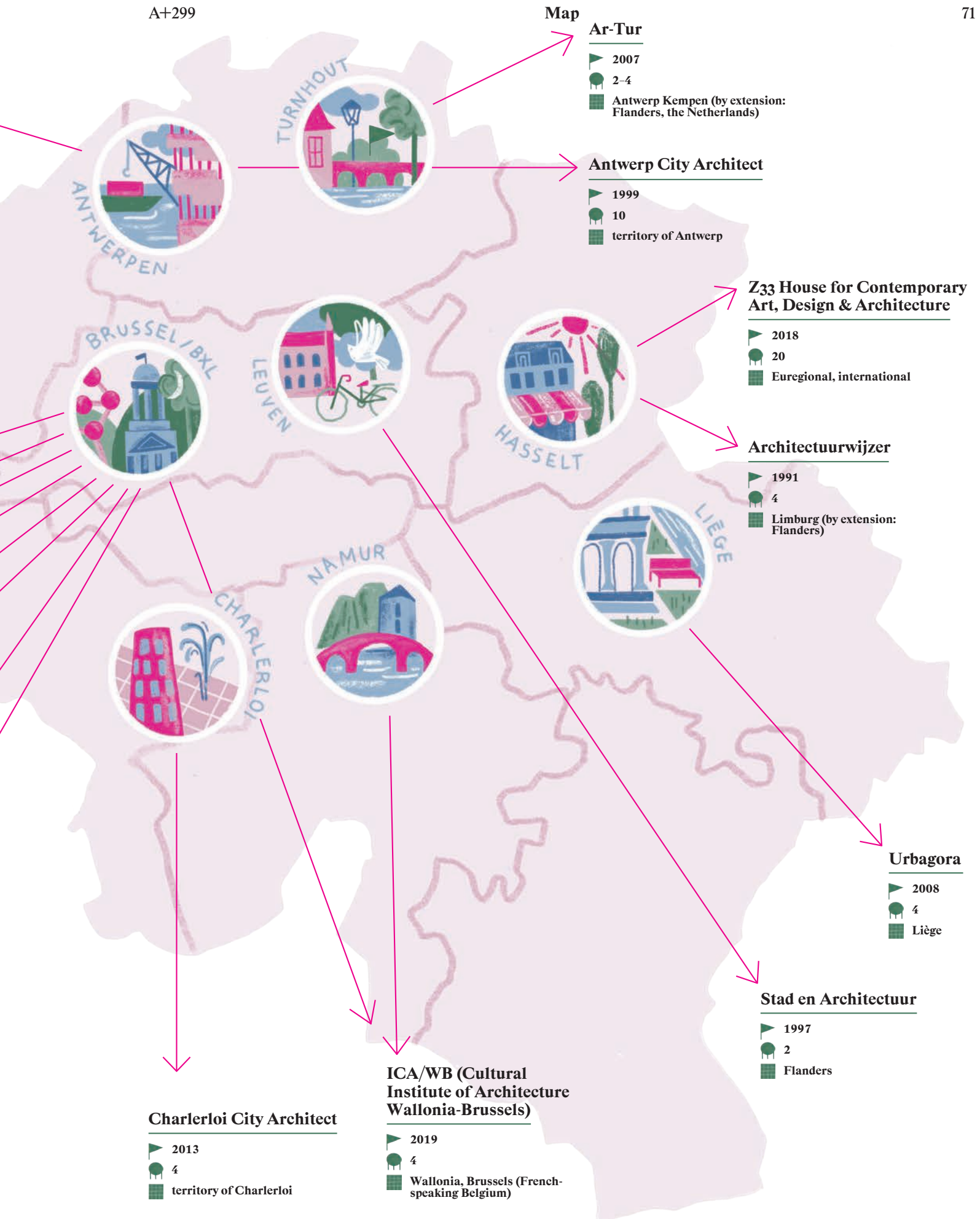
- 2007
- 9
- Wallonia, Brussels (by extension: international)

### Flemish Government Architect

- 1999
- 16
- Flanders, Brussels (by extension: international)

### CIVA

- 1999
- Brussels (by extension: international)

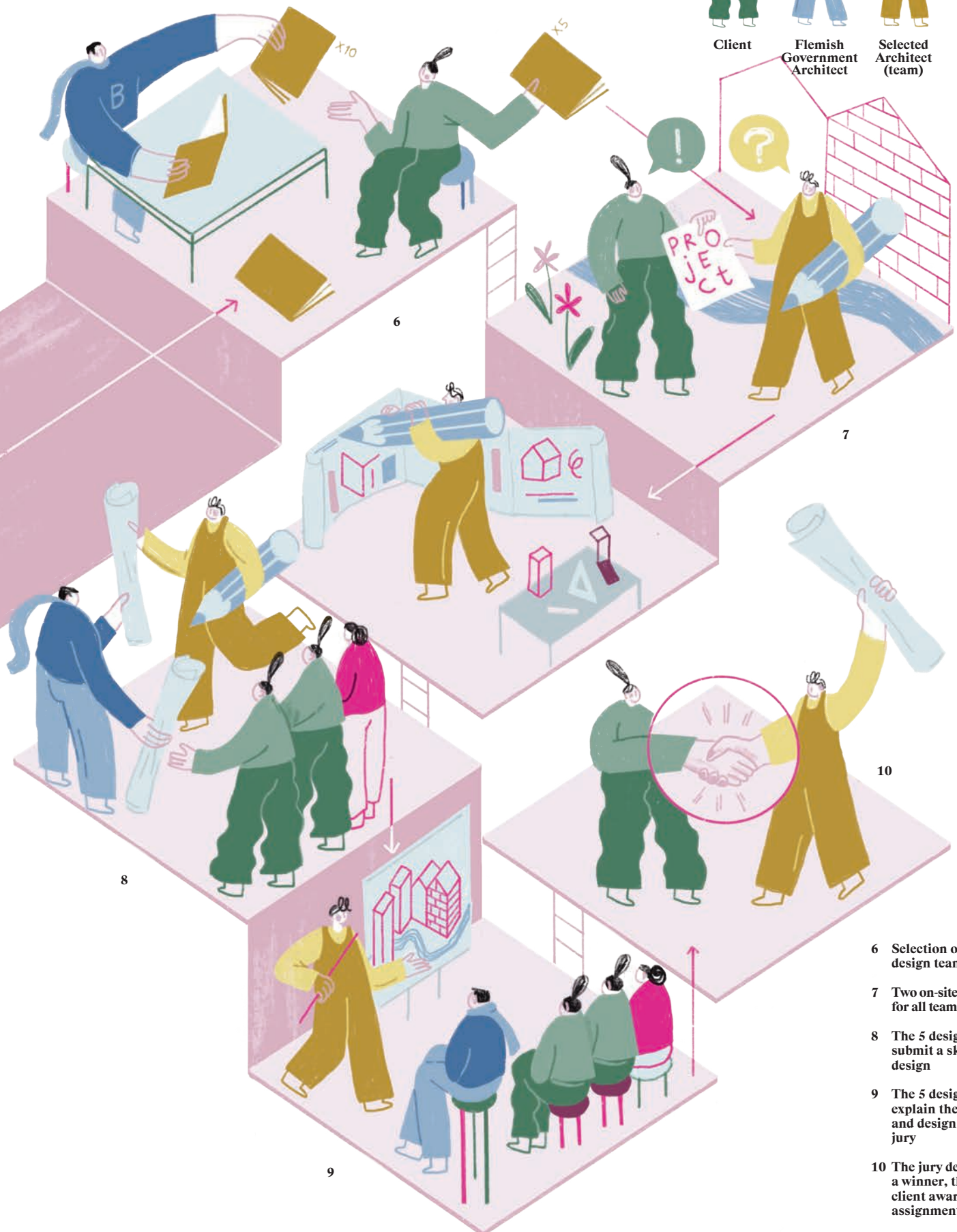
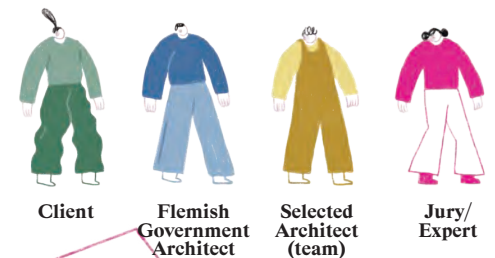




# Flemish Government Architect

Procedure Open Call, launched twice a year with new projects





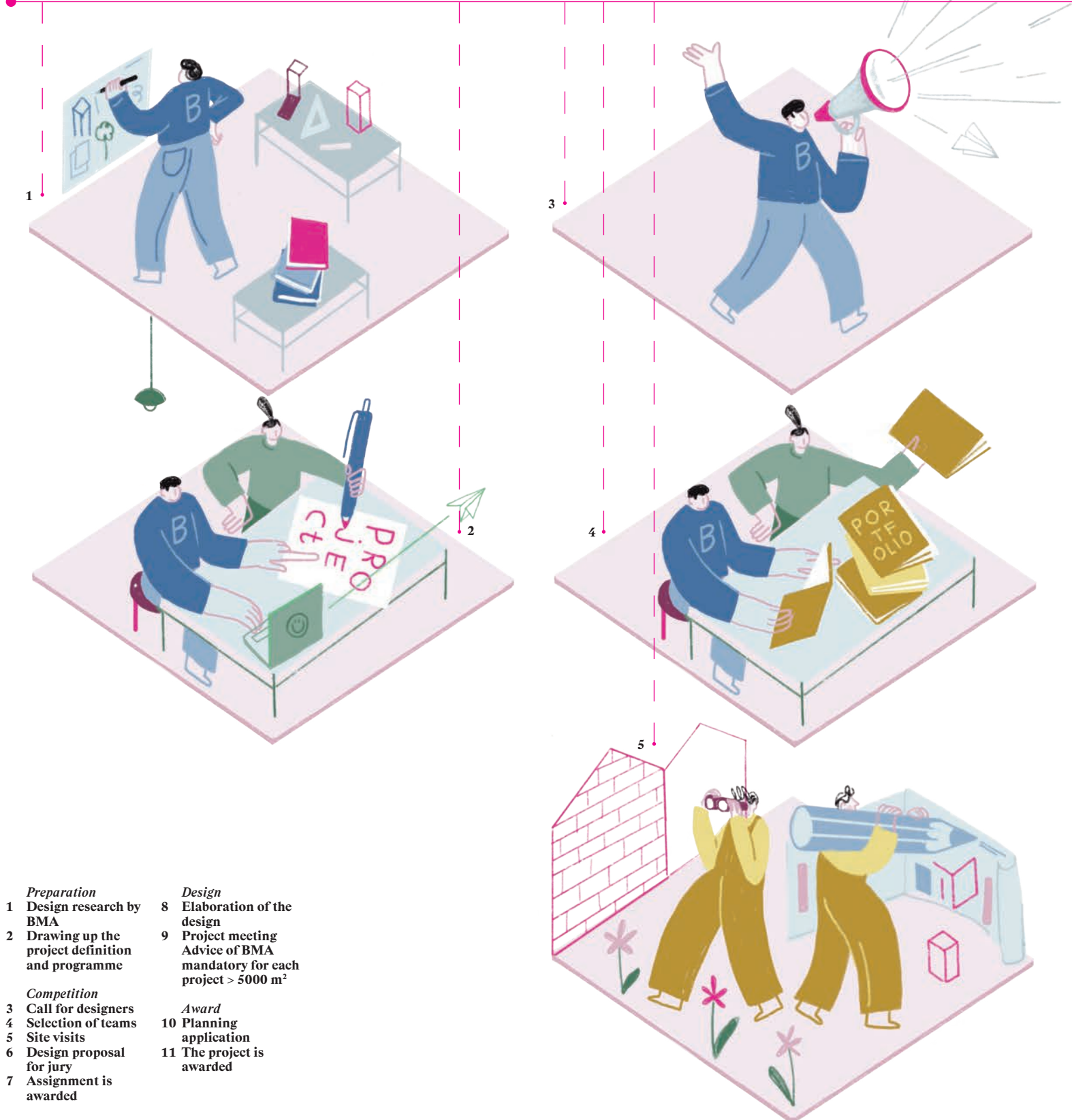
- 6 Selection of 5 design teams
- 7 Two on-site briefings for all teams
- 8 The 5 design teams submit a sketch design
- 9 The 5 design teams explain their vision and design for the jury
- 10 The jury designates a winner, the client awards the assignment



# Brussels Government Architect (BMA)

## Preparation

## Competition





Project initiator



Brussels Government architect



Selected Architect (team)



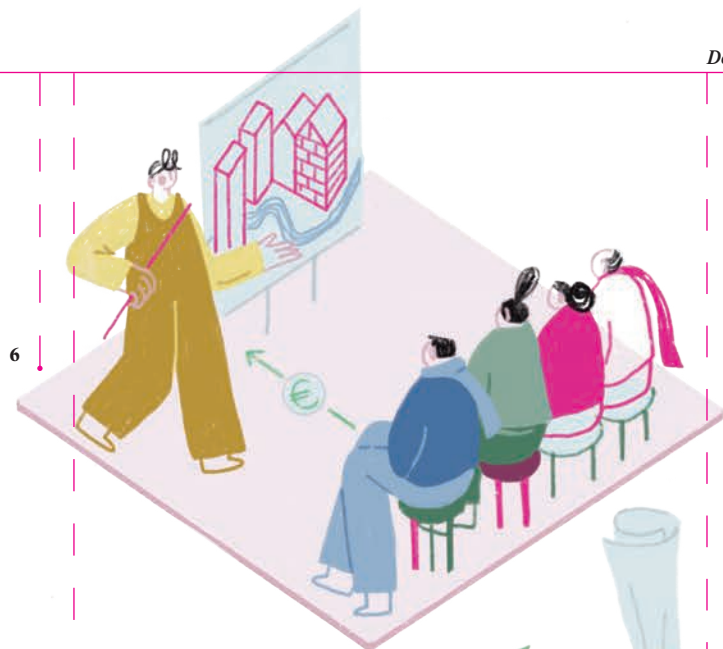
Jury/Expert



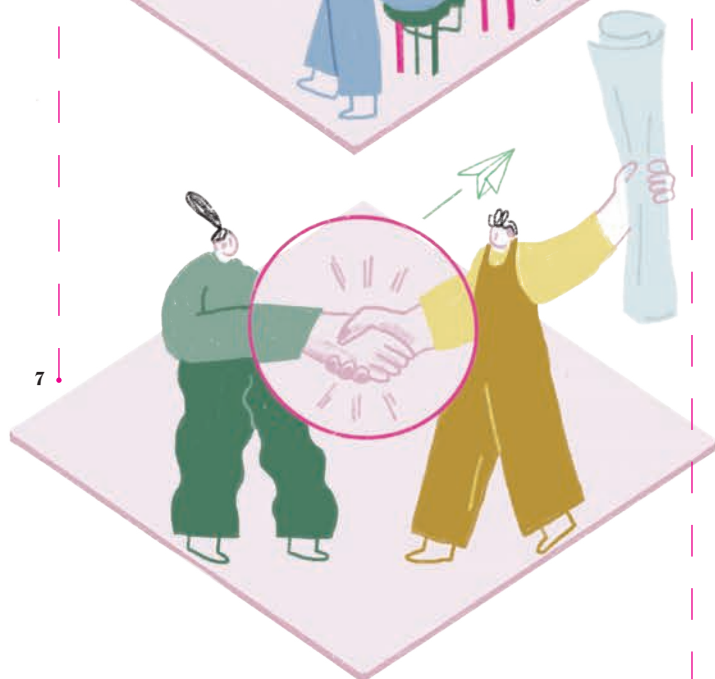
Project leader

Design

Award



6



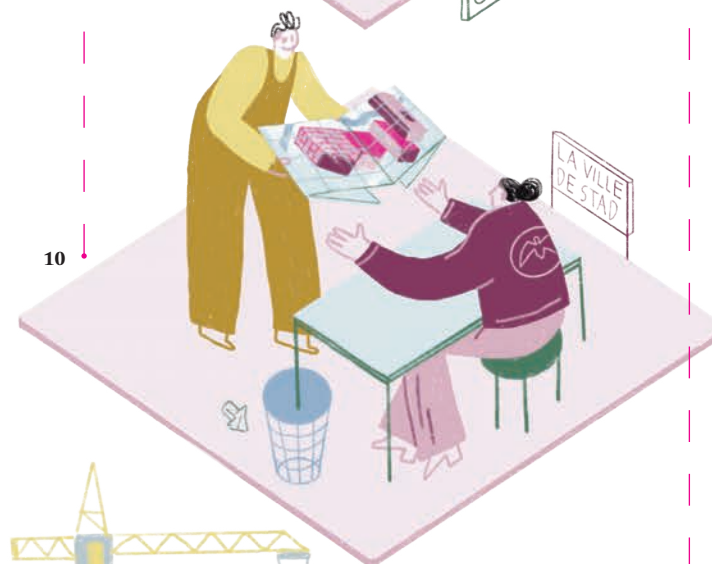
7



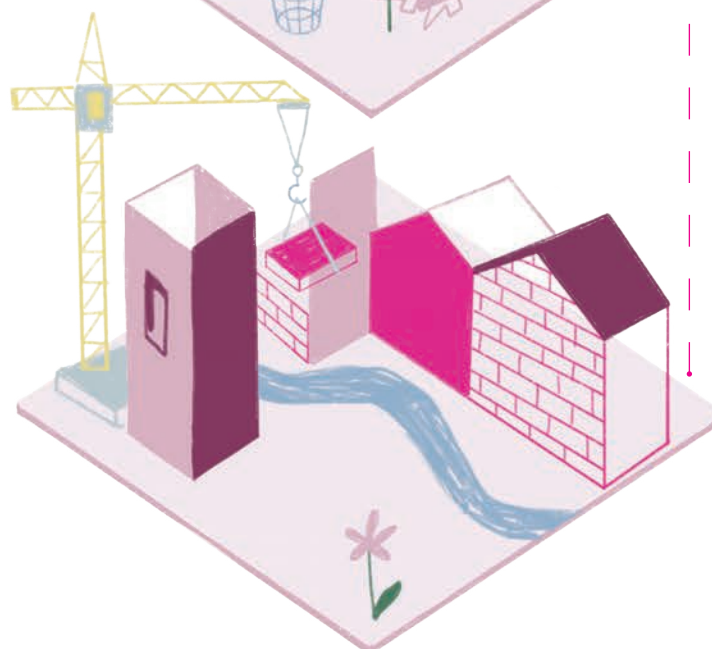
8



9



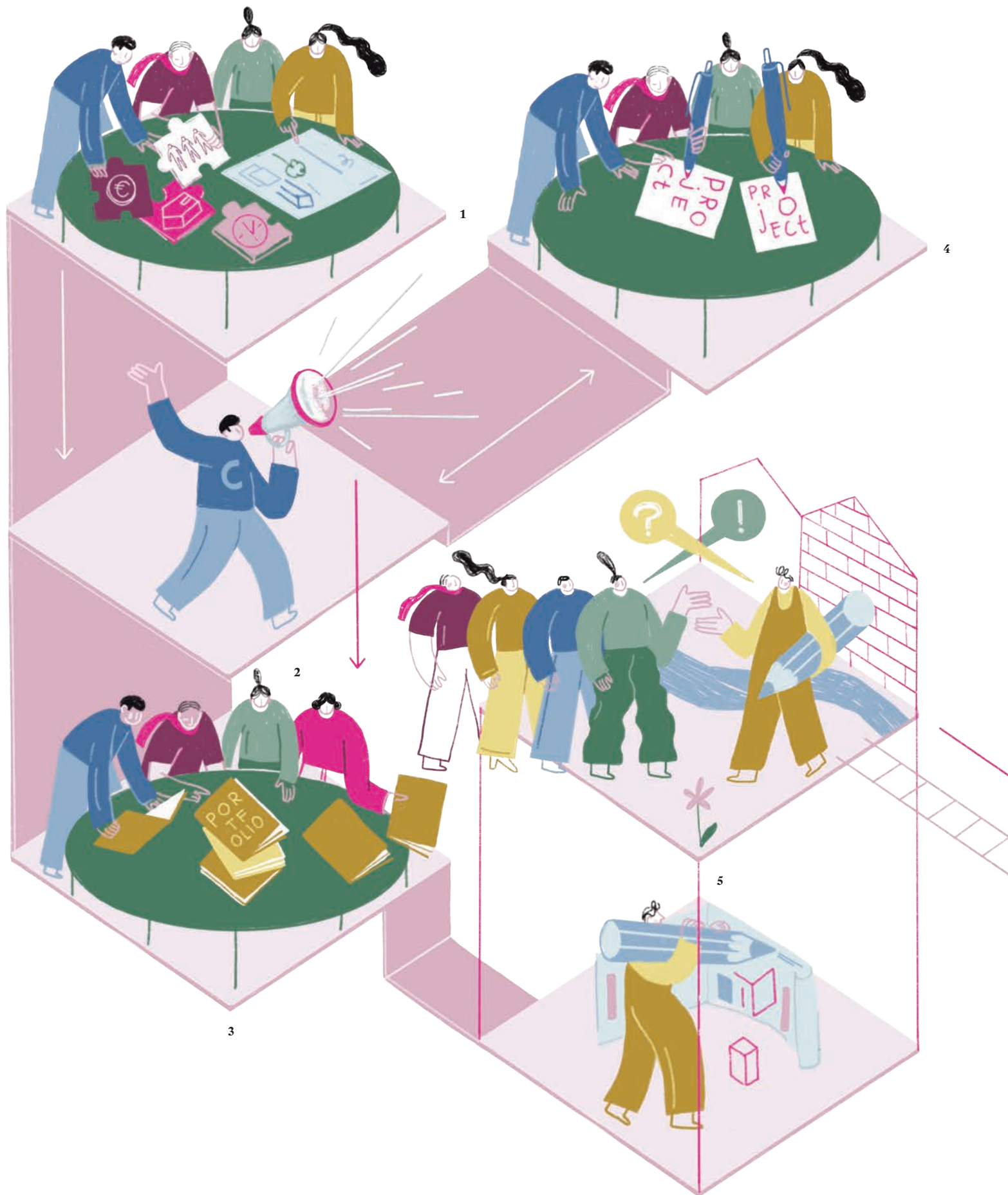
10

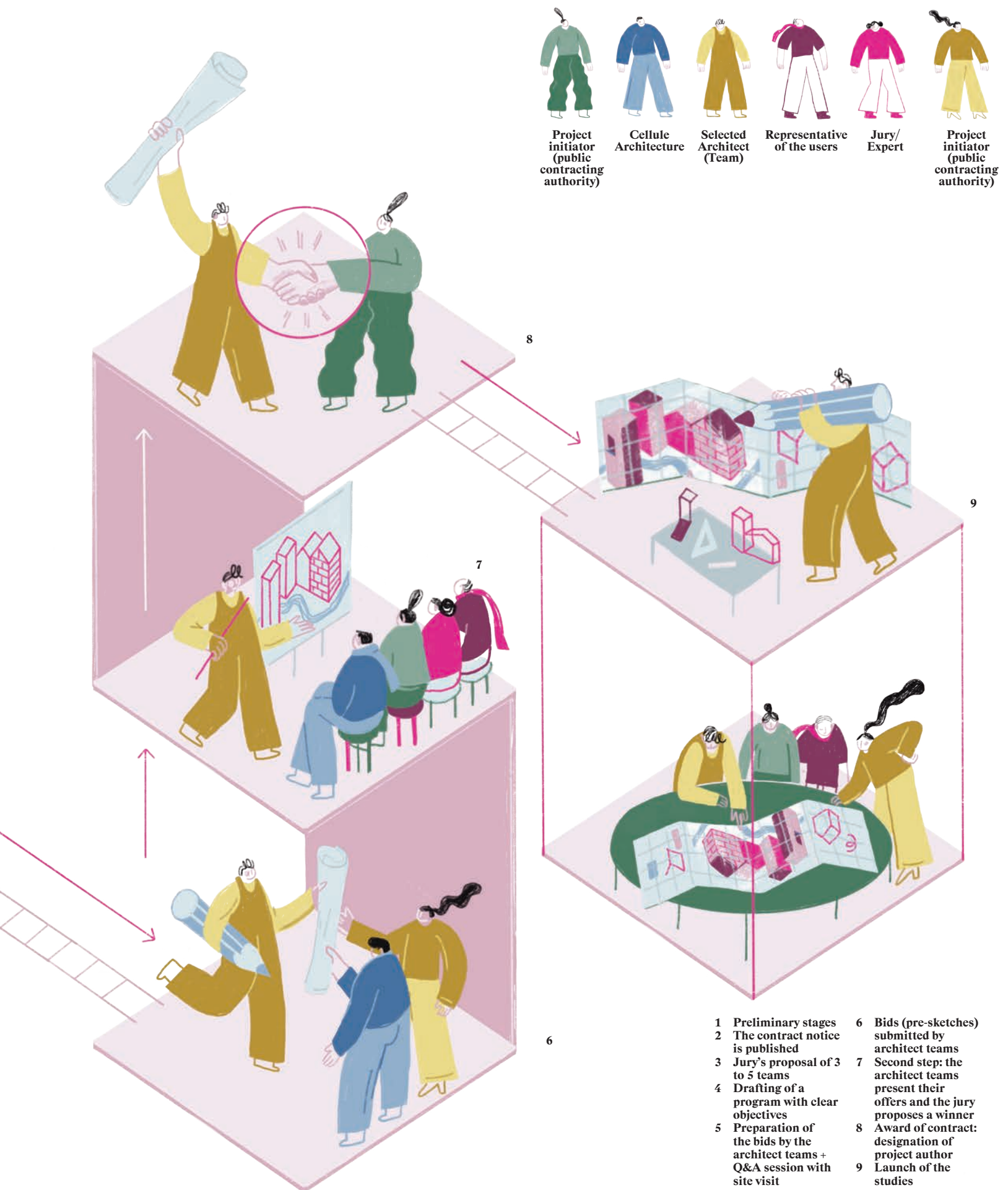


11



# Cellule Architecture







# Towards a built manifesto

*Eline Dehullu, Bart Tritsmans*

The Belgian architectural world has a thriving competition culture. Since the creation of the position of Flemish Government Architect in 1999, a range of procedures has developed to promote the quality of the built environment. It is almost a matter of course in Belgium that competition procedures stimulate strong commissioning and, among other things, offer opportunities for young offices to stand out in new design assignments. But how do foreign architectural firms view the selection procedures of the Flemish Government Architect, the Brussels Government Architect (BMA) and the Cellule architecture of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation? In this article, we give the floor to Mechthild Stuhlmacher of Korteknie Stuhlmacher (Rotterdam), Stephen Bates of Sergison Bates (London), Mathieu Berteloot of HBAAT (Lille), Hideyuki Nakayama (Tokyo), Ido Avisar of List (Paris) and Kjetil Thorsen of Snøhetta (Oslo).





In *More Than a Competition*, published on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Open Call, Maarten Liefoghe wrote that the Belgian competition context is viewed with admiration from abroad. Liefoghe quoted the magazine *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, which considers the interaction between the various actors (clients, Government or City Architects, designers) as an art that guarantees the quality of projects, from competition to site.<sup>1</sup> Existing competition formulas are nevertheless regularly criticized from different quarters. Current Flemish Government Architect Erik Wieërs also recently indicated that future-proofing instruments like the Open Call poses a challenge, both in legal terms (in weighing up the assessment criteria) and in creating public support.<sup>2</sup>

From the perspective of architects, participation in competitions has gone through an evolution. Competition designs are increasingly drawn up by multidisciplinary design teams, and the competitions of the Brussels and Flemish Government Architects and the Cellule architecture show numerous collaborations between Belgian and foreign designers. Liefoghe wrote in this context of 'the rise of Belgian-foreign collaborations' and points to the growing share of foreign participants in the Open Call.<sup>3</sup>

For this contribution, we asked the team of Erik Wieërs (Flemish Government Architect), Kristiaan Borret (BMA) and Thomas Moor (Cellule architecture) for an overview of foreign firms that won competitions. From these, we selected six diverse foreign architecture firms and asked them to reflect on their experience with architectural policy

in Belgium. Korteknie Stuhlmacher (NL) is behind, among other things, the Predikheren library in Mechelen (Open Call 2213) and it is now working on the Klein Eiland City-gate II housing project in Anderlecht (Call BMA); Sergison Bates (UK) has already built up a rich experience in the Belgian context with, among other things, the Performing Arts Site in Leuven (Open Call 3501) and Kanal Pompidou in Brussels (Call BMA); HBAAT (FR), which collaborates regularly with the Belgian offices Ouest and V+ on both sides of the border, was responsible for the construction of the crèche of Habay-la-Neuve in Martelange and is now working with Ledroit Pierret Polet and Pigeon Ochej on the Centre sportif La Sapinette in Mons (both through the public works contracts of the Cellule architecture); List (FR) and Hideyuki Nakayama Architecture (JP) jointly realized the Frans Masereel Centrum in Kasterlee (Open Call 2606) and the residential care centre De Wimilingen in Wommelgem (Open Call 3504); and Snøhetta (NO), as an internationally renowned firm, gained its first experience in the Belgian context with the renovation of the Muntcentrum/Centre Monnaie in Brussels, in collaboration with Binst Architects.

We sounded out their motivation for entering a competition in Belgium and asked them about the specific qualities of Belgian competition procedures. We were curious about the impact of winning the competition on their architecture practice and what they think makes the Belgian architecture world special. We also asked them to formulate suggestions that could strengthen the existing instruments. →

←  
List (FR) - Hideyuki Nakayama (JP), Frans Masereel Centrum, Kasterlee, 2019: newly built pavilion for a centre for contemporary art

Participations in competitions / selection procedures in Belgium

Hideyuki Nakayama Architecture (JP)  
hideyukina-kayama.com

- Frans Masereel Centrum, Kasterlee, 2019 - in collaboration with List (Open Call 2606)
- Local services and residential care centre De Wimilingen (Emmaüs), Wommelgem, in progress - in collaboration with List (Open Call 3504)





**A+ Why is it important for your office to enter foreign design competitions, specifically those in Belgium?**

**Stephen Bates** Although based in London, we feel like a European practice, and this is reflected not only in our outlook but also in staff composition, with twelve nationalities and thirteen languages! Belgium feels close physically (only two hours away on the Eurostar) and culturally, and we enjoy working there. We have always gone out to seek interesting work wherever it may be, enjoying our role as cultural observers, slightly on the margins of the situation.

**Mathieu Berteloot** The same goes for us. Located in Lille, on the border between France and Belgium, our office HBAAT feels like a neighbour. The building culture in the North of France is actually very comparable to the one in Belgium; we share knowledge of local materials as brick, building techniques and vernacular architecture. What is different, however, is the quality of the architectural competitions organized in Belgium. The programmes are more interesting, the conditions for reflection very high, and clients are particularly open to experimentation.

**Hideyuki Nakayama – Ido Avissar\*** For both our offices, taking part in Belgian competitions represents an opportunity to work on public facilities in a stimulating foreign context. Work outside our 'natural biotope' is crucial for us. The reason for that is intellectual stimulation and the discovery of new architectural and urban contexts rather than the search for 'new market opportunities'. Unlike France, the Flemish Open Call system is very much open to

experimentation, and unlike Japan, it is more open to young foreign practices.

**Mechthild Stuhlmacher** Our reasons for entering competitions in Belgium are simple: we are selected with some regularity, so we feel that we are understood there, that our work is appreciated in some way and that we therefore have a chance – a chance to win the competition, a chance to then make a good project out of it, and a chance to meet people and circumstances along the way that we want to collaborate with.

**A+ Can you explain what is special about the Belgian competition procedure you have taken part in?**

**Hideyuki Nakayama – Ido Avissar** Together we have won two Open Call competitions: the Frans Masereel Centrum in Kasterlee and the home for the elderly De Wimilingen in Wommelgem. Both competitions took place in a more or less open landscape context. We felt that almost everything was possible in formal terms. In these two competitions we were able to explore various organizations in relation to architectural form. In France, for example, 99 per cent of the architectural competitions take place in an urban context, leaving limited room for formal experimentation. Unlike in Flanders, the countryside is often left to private developers. In both competitions, the clients and juries were very open to our reinterpretation of the given programme. Architectural ideas and concepts were shared and debated, making it a very unusual and quality framework.

→

↓→

List (FR) – Hideyuki Nakayama (JP), Frans Masereel Centrum, Kasterlee, 2019





© Jeroen Verrecht

Participations in  
competitions / selection  
procedures in Belgium (selection)

#### List (FR)

- Frans Masereel  
Centrum,  
Kasterlee, 2019  
- in collab-  
oration with  
Hideyuki  
Nakayama  
Architecture  
(Open Call  
2606)
- Master plan,  
Moerbeke, in  
progress - in  
collabor-  
ation with Lola  
landscape (Open  
Call 3407)
- LDC and WZC  
De Wimilingen  
(Emmaüs),  
Wommelgem, in  
progress - in  
collaboration  
with Hideyuki  
Nakayama  
Architecture  
(Open Call  
3504)
- Kotmet,  
Brussels  
(Pilot project  
Students Make  
City 01 - not  
retained)



**Mechthild Stuhlmacher** For us, the competition for the restoration and repurposing of the Predikherenklooster in Mechelen (see A+287) was probably the most extraordinary experience. It was then a very unique design task, a project definition drafted in almost poetic terms, two impressive briefings on site, and a jury whose fascination and dedication were palpable during the jury session. Moreover, it was extraordinary that, while the selected architects had all worked on monumental buildings before, they had no experience designing a public library. There appeared to be a great willingness among the full jury to choose an ‘un-usual suspect’ with new and unexpected ideas. I understood afterwards that some of the jury members had been won over on the jury day itself by the complete opposite of what they had previously assumed.

**Stephen Bates** Our first encounters with the competition procedure in Belgium was via the Open Call. We have since won eight projects via this procedure and have competed for many more! Our first competition win was for the City Library in Blankenberge in 2004, when bOb van Reeth, the first Flemish Government Architect, presided (1998–2005). The latest was the Performing Arts Site in Leuven, which we won in 2019 during the tenure of Leo Van Broeck. More recently we have been involved in competitions organized by the Brussels Government Architect through which we recently won the Kanal Pompidou arts complex together with noAarchitecten and EM2N (see A+278 and A+285).

**Mathieu Berteloot** In 2015 we won the competition of the Cellule architecture to build a crèche with thirty cots in Habay-la-Neuve (see A+282). The organization of the competition went very well; besides the client (the municipality and Public Centre for Social Welfare of Habay, and the director of the Crèche La Ruche), there were also enthusiastic, critical architects on the jury, which was moreover chaired by Chantal Dassonville, at the time head of the Cellule architecture. Thierry Decuyper of V+ was then an external expert: his sharp analysis of the various projects certainly added value to the competition procedure. This was actually our first encounter with V+, a Belgian office with whom we collaborated later on many projects in France and Belgium.

**A+ What has your participation in the design competition or building process brought about within your architecture practice?**

**Stephen Bates** Working now for eighteen years in Belgium, we have developed much knowledge and experience to design, build and manage the construction process. As we are interested in building well and building carefully, we have had to invest a lot of time and energy to ensure that we can achieve the standards we set ourselves on sites away from home. It has led us to engage in many collaborations either with like-minded designers or technical support offices and this has fundamentally changed the way we work in detail. But our methodology remains constant. →







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↙  
Korteknie  
Stuhlmacher (NL),  
Predikherenklooster,  
Mechelen, 2019:  
restoration and  
repurposing of a  
monastery from the  
seventeenth century  
into a contemporary  
library

Participations in  
competitions / selection  
procedures in Belgium (selection)

Korteknie  
Stuhlmacher (NL)  
ksa.nl

- OCMW residential care centre, Mechelen, 2017 – in collaboration with Hild and K (Open Call 2104)
- Predikherenklooster Library, Mechelen, 2019 – in collaboration with Hild and K, Callebaut Architects (Open Call 2213)
- Mixed-use building Lebeau Sablon (Immobel), Brussels, in progress – in collaboration with Maccreanor Lavington (Call BMA)
- Klein Eiland Citygate II (Citydev), Anderlecht (Brussels), in progress – in collaboration with noA-architecten, Sergison Bates, Aurélie Hachez, Boom (Call BMA)



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**Mathieu Berteloot** Those kinds of collaborations are key. What our participation in design competitions in Belgium has brought to our practice is learning to work together with local architecture offices, sometimes with very different opinions or ways of working. We regularly respond to calls for projects in Brussels in association with offices such as Ouest and V+, but also 51N4E, Aslı Çiçek and Jan De Vylder Inge Vinck. Conversely, we respond with these same partners to competitions in France. With V+ we recently realized a small but very successful multi-cultural municipal facility in Marcq-en-Barœul in the Lille metropolitan area (see A+291). In the design process, we aptly combined the programmatic intelligence of V+ and the constructive precision of our own office to meet the shared aim of intensifying uses and saving resources. Collaborations like these mean that we can exchange particular skills, which is why they are so enriching to us.

**Kjetil Thorsen** Engaging in international projects, we too work closely with local partners and rely heavily on their insights in relevant instruments and institutions to ensure that we fully comply with and utilize the right 'toolbox' in each country. In the project of the Muntcentrum/Centre Monnaie, we enjoyed working with Binst Architects and closely collaborated along the process. But the most unique aspect of our experience with the Muntcentrum/Centre Monnaie is that the project as such has been grounded in sustainability since its inception. The city of Brussels, by requiring the reuse of building in its redevelopment, took the first sustainable decision of the project that later efforts such as controlling carbon footprint or using circular material can amplify. The Muntcentrum/Centre Monnaie in Brussels is to date one of the largest stand-alone buildings in a city centre we've helped to rehabilitate, with ambitious goals from the start, courtesy of the developer and other partners in Belgium. It has truly been a particular challenge. →



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Participations in competitions / selection procedures in Belgium (selection)

**Sergison Bates**  
(UK)  
[sergisonbates.com](http://sergisonbates.com)

- Care campus Amphora, Wingene, 2016 (Open Call 2103)
- Performing Arts Site, Leuven, in progress – in collaboration with Charcoalblue, eld (Open Call 3501)
- Kanal Pompidou, (Fondation Stichting Kanal), Brussels, in progress – in collaboration with noA-architecten, EM2N (Call BMA)
- Klein Eiland Citygate II (Citydev), Anderlecht, in progress – in collaboration with noA-architecten, Korteknie Stuhlmacher, Aurélie Hachez, Boom (Call BMA)

←←

**Sergison Bates (UK),** in collaboration with noAarchitecten and EM2N (Atelier Kanal), Kanal, Brussels: transformation of the former Yser Citroën car factory into an arts and cultural centre.

←

**Sergison Bates (UK),** in collaboration with Eld and Charcoalblue, Performing Arts Site, Leuven: transformation of a 7 ha former hospital site into an 'open house' for performing arts and public spaces.



**Mechthild Stuhlmacher** The Predikheren project in Mechelen has been going on now more than ten years (a final phase is ongoing). It has gone through profound moments of crisis, but it has also ultimately delivered a project that has brought about a fundamental change in our office. So there is a time before the completion of the Predikheren, a time when we were regarded as experimental timber builders, and the time after, when we are regarded as a serious, mature agency capable of bringing complex transformation projects to a successful conclusion.

**Hideyuki Nakayama – Ido Avissar** The Open Calls formed a great opportunity to draw and build some experimental design principles that are very important for both our practices. Both designs are a little bit of a built manifesto for us. Only the first competition of the Frans Masereel Centrum has been built today, but we hope the home for the elderly in Wommelgem will be realized as well.

**A+ In your opinion, are there similar instruments or procedures in other (European) countries that aim to boost the quality of the built environment, and what are the differences with the region you mainly work in?**

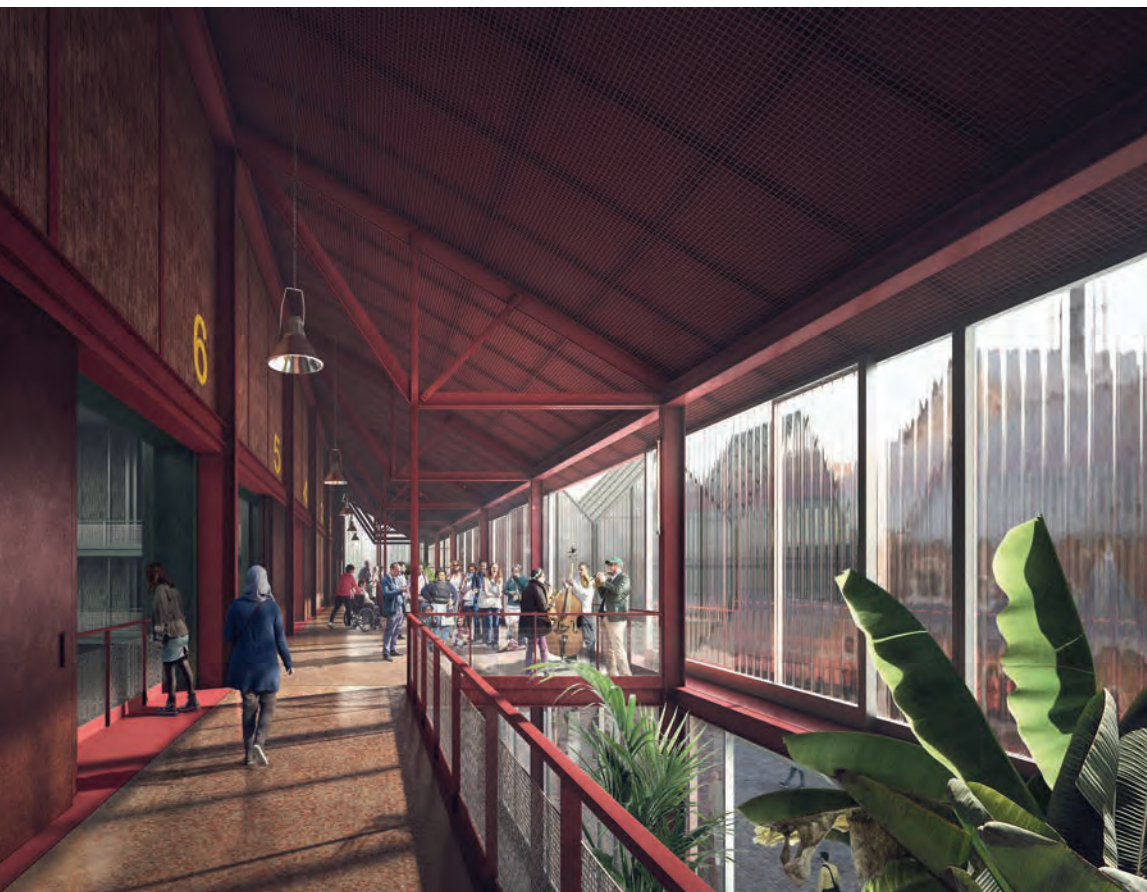
**Mathieu Berteloot** We particularly appreciate the competition procedures of the BMA and the Cellule architecture. They are well-organized procedures with juries made up of experts and not only (or mainly) of elected representatives, as is the case in France. In my opinion, no such well-organized procedures exist in France. We are very happy to participate in competitions that are transparent both in the application stage and after the selection of a project. In France,

by contrast, clients very rarely, if ever, communicate about unsuccessful projects. There is very little transparency on consultations in France.

**Ido Avissar** Indeed, in France there is unfortunately no parallel institution on a territorial level. The big cities have tools to stimulate architecture through local advisory institutions (e.g. Pavillon de l'Arsenal in Paris), but this is not the case elsewhere. In any case, we can only envy the relative independence and perpetual explorative DNA of the Flemish Government Architect.

**Hideyuki Nakayama** In Japan, the personal activity cycle of certain politicians is responsible for important social decisions and their cycles are very short. Cities and architecture, however, require long-term perspectives. If the cycle of personal activity is superimposed on the period of architecture and urban design, only superficial architecture that lacks deliberation is produced. The current situation in Japan is that such superficial architecture is commissioned intensively from a very limited number of architects against the backdrop of a performance-based system. I have great respect for a system where flexible thinking, not bound by performance-based principles, is put into practice over time.

**Stephen Bates** To be honest, the Flemish Open Call procedure is quite unique! Now we see local authorities copying the procedure and in many ways the Brussels Government Architect also follows a similar procedure. In the UK the so-called competitive interview still prevails in public sector projects where the team and its experience are assessed without a clear design proposal. In Germany and Switzerland, where →



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←  
**Sergison Bates (UK),**  
in collaboration with  
Eld and Charcoalblue,  
Performing Arts Site,  
Leuven



↓  
**HBAAT (FR),**  
 in collaboration with  
**V+ (BE),** Ponts des  
 Arts, Marcq-en-

**Barœul (FR):**  
 a newly built cinema  
 and theatre



© Cyrille Weiner

Participations in  
 competitions / selection proce-  
 dures in Belgium (selection)

**HBAAT (FR)**  
[hbaat.fr](http://hbaat.fr)

- Crèche d'Habay-la-Neuve, Martelange, 2018 (Cellule architecture, public architecture contracts)
- Centre sportif La Sapinette, Mons, ongoing project – in collaboration with Ledroit Pierret Polet, Pigeon Ochej Paysage (Cellule architecture, public architecture contracts)
- 22 participative housing units (CLTB), Brussels, ongoing project – in collaboration with V+ (Call BMA)
- Metropolitan park and urban farm (Brussels Environment), Brussels, ongoing project – in collaboration with Ouest, OLM (Call BMA)



we are working on a number of projects, the competition structure is very clear and well organized, but the number of shortlisted competitors is greater (and so the odds longer) and there are also many open anonymous design competitions. In Spain there are two-stage competitions carried out very fast with a limited amount of information required (restricted by allowing only two or three A3 pages, for example!).

**Mechthild Stuhlmacher** We are aware that several initiatives are under way in the Netherlands to organize more competitions that are more substantive in nature than the tenders commonly used in the Netherlands and which can also have surprising outcomes. For example, the current Dutch Chief Government Architect plans to award major architect selections for public commissions such as museums on the basis of competition formulas with a pre-selection. This approach is partly similar to the Open Call, with the difference that the preselection in the Netherlands is much tougher, with, for example, very strict reference requirements, and that much less architectural expertise is represented in the jury than in Belgium.

**Kjetil Thorsen** There is a large number of instruments in our home country, Norway, which aim to boost the quality of the built environment. The Norwegian Building Authority governs the technical requirements and local legislation, and there is FutureBuilt and the Green Building Council which aims to increase innovation and exploration for city development and architecture. In addition, there is a wide range of organizations and strategic partnership constella-

tions which aim to foster a climate-friendly development and ensure proper quality control. What we experience in both Norway and other countries is that development, innovation and what is actually doable sometimes develops much faster than the legislation itself, or what is even possible to expect from government or official bodies. Hence, we believe that our and other private practices can (and should) help to fill the void between current regulations and future demands for sustainable solutions.

**A+ Have you noticed an evolution in the course of the Open Call procedure or other selection procedures over time? Have they evolved for the better (or for worse)?**

**Mathieu Berteloot** The Cellule architecture has certainly improved and strengthened the expertise of architects in their juries over time, which is a very good thing.

**Stephen Bates** Of course, the Open Call procedure has evolved too, partly by the character and motivations of the individual Government Architect who presides over the process and sets a 'vision'. We tend not to judge the one Government Architect from the other, but we realize they often have their own agenda, which is usually interesting in its own way.

**Mechthild Stuhlmacher** The Open Call system is cherished among architects at home and abroad, but I sometimes have the feeling that it is in danger of collapsing under its own success. I see the Open Call as a way of giving young and proven talent from inside and outside Belgium the chance



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↔  
HBAAT (FR), Crèche  
du Châtelet, Habay-la-  
Neuve: nursery with  
30 cots and associated  
rooms

to realize exceptional projects. The formula has played an important role for the current flourishing Flemish architectural climate and for the development of its own specific cultural identity. From my own perspective, it is obviously good that clients are increasingly open to international teams, but it is important that the local connection remains and that international teams continue to sense what is desirable and customary in Belgium. The formula used in the past – according to which, each time in the final round of an Open Call, in addition to well-motivated and experienced indigenous architects, (at least) one young and (at least) one foreign firm may also participate – still seems relevant here, but I would, however, also put a ceiling on these groups of participants. After all, in my view, the formula should not lead to international (star) architects in particular dominating the procedures or to its experimental nature deterring builders. To convince more (local) clients of the usefulness and necessity of an Open Call, the procedure should (again) become accessible and affordable.

**A+ Based on your personal experience with selection procedures in Belgium, can you formulate some suggestions to improve them?**

**Mathieu Berteloot** In my opinion, nothing should be changed. On the contrary, the procedures in Belgium are exemplary and should serve as a model for countries like France both in the access to a commission they allow for young offices and in the models they use, often leading to outstanding architectural quality.

**Stephen Bates** This is indeed a difficult question as we are very impressed by the current procedures. They seem to suit us. The shortlist is small, we can meet the client and talk to them. These things are important and often rare elsewhere.

**Kjetil Thorsen** Defining specific improvements to today's procedures feels a bit presumptuous, as we do not have in-depth knowledge of these. Our experience with the building procedures in Brussels is quite limited. However, using the excellent Government Architect function as a starting point, we could propose a slight add-on that we would find really helpful, and that is having more predictability with regard to the timing of the decision-making process.

**Mechthild Stuhlmacher** Every project has its own stories, problems and idiosyncrasies. In general, I am also very pleased with the way competitions are prepared and organized in Belgium. Where there is definitely room for improvement is the follow-up after the design process has started. So I would like to advocate that the design and realization process should continue to be supervised by the relevant Government Architects even after the Open Call. This wish is motivated by my own experiences. After all, in almost all the projects our office has obtained through the Open Call procedure, there have been times during the design and realization phase when I would have wished for the support, intervention or advice of the person who voted in favour of the chosen plan during the jury and who therefore has an interest in ensuring that the intended quality is actually achieved. And I know that we are not alone →



© Frederic Delesalle



with our concerns and problems. Realizing architecture is a sometimes long and very often difficult process in which the Government Architect and their team could also play an important role in the interim. So far, in my view, this happens (too) little. This applies to the assistance of the clients as well as the architect.

**Hideyuki Nakayama – Ido Avissar** In recent years, the administrative selection procedure has become more complex than before and we believe this is a bit of a shame. Some years ago, application was easier and lighter, and we felt that there was no place for specialization (need to present previous relevant references to get selected to a competition). The Flemish Government Architect was simply looking for good and inventive practitioners. We understand that there is some necessity to 'objectify' the selection, but this also slightly immobilizes the architectural scene and risks enclosing architects within certain programmes.

**A+ To summarize, can you reflect on what makes the competition and construction process in Belgium so specific?**

**Kjetil Thorsen** Based on our work with the Muntcentrum/Centre Monnaie, our impression is that there is a solid framework in place to support the city in achieving its ambitious goals. The city-specific Government Architect function

for Brussels is one great example of how the process is organized really well, fostering high standards in the architectural and landscape quality of public projects. In addition, our impression is that there is a quite unique focus on ensuring high standards and quality for all the city's public spaces and neighbourhoods rather than limiting it to a few prominent areas. From our perspective, we have been impressed by the effect and strength that the Government Architect function has in Belgium and Brussels, and in our experience, this level of streamlining the application process is quite distinctive.

**Hideyuki Nakayama – Ido Avissar** In our view, the position of Flemish Government Architect is the most important institution. But it is accompanied by the Brussels and Walloon institutes, by an important lecture and debate scene (in architecture schools, Bozar, Flanders Architecture Institute, ICA/WB, Architecture Workroom Brussels, etc.). This constellation is very important to stimulate an architectural debate which is still quite specific today.

**Stephen Bates** It is always beneficial in the competition procedure, whether it is via the Open Call process, the Brussels Government Architect or even through private developers, when the relevant stakeholders are present at the competition stage. So, members of various environmental departments at the planning office, urban planning, heritage



← →

**Snøhetta (NO), in collaboration with Binst (BE), Muntcentrum/Centre Monnaie, Brussels: redesign of the iconic cross-shaped office building from the 1970s into an energy-efficient, mixed-use complex**

Participations in competitions / selection procedures in Belgium

**Snøhetta (NO)**  
snohetta.com

– **Muntcentrum/Centre Monnaie (Immobel – Whitewood), Brussels, in progress – in collaboration with Binst Architects (Call BMA)**

and sustainability advisers are always useful to have their view at an early stage. In some cases, we are introduced to sociologists, anthropologists or artists, which is always extremely interesting.

**Mechthild Stuhlmacher** We are by now well acquainted with the different competition formulas and Government Architects. Less well known and less widely discussed is the importance of the many people we meet after a competition has been awarded. We are particularly impressed by some clients who are highly competent in architectural terms and their representatives. We encounter such competent builders with great regularity at AG Vespa, but we have also had the opportunity to work for such knowledgeable and committed builders at AG Real Estate through Schools of Tomorrow. This is far from common abroad.

In my view, it is crucial and enormously valuable for Belgian architectural culture that there are not only well-trained architects with a heart for the matter and a lot of ambition on the architects' side, but also in all other places that are important within a design process: with the client, with the users (including school boards such as the autonomous municipal company for urban education AG SO), with the Flanders Heritage Agency, with various municipal services, with the fire brigade, with advisory bodies on accessibility, etc. To my knowledge, architectural expertise, ambition and

vision in other countries are mostly represented among the architects themselves and much less among the other parties who play an equally important role in the creation of good projects. And that is what makes the competition culture, and consequently architectural quality in Belgium, so special. ▲ ■ ●

\* Since Hideyuki Nakayama and Ido Avissar (List) are collaborating on the two projects they discuss here, they chose to answer the questions together.

- 1 Maarten Liefoghe, 'Model at a Crossroads: The Open Call in the Broadened Field of Government Architects and Architectural Practices', in *More Than a Competition: The Open Call in a Changing Building Culture*, eds. Maarten Liefoghe and Maarten Van Den Driessche (Antwerp and Brussels: Flanders Architecture Institute and Team Vlaams Bouwmeester, 2021), 106–27 (113).
- 2 Erik Wieërs, 'Foreword: Challenges for the Open Call', in *More Than a Competition*, 6–10.
- 3 Liefoghe, 'Model at a Crossroads', 120.





# Puzzle pieces that just don't fit

Maarten Liefoghe

What makes a well-designed spatial environment? One where the possibilities of design and building, of urban planning or infrastructural design are used convincingly for the realization of the polis and its public ideals, and where the collected architecture, landscape or infrastructure projects also demonstrate *bouwkunst*, 'the art of building'. Or, if that old word immediately provokes too much resistance, demonstrate a cultural practice of building. This cannot then be evaluated merely in relation to the public (and private) objectives it serves, but also requires weighing the how within a cultural field of ideals, benchmarks and appreciation patterns.

↓  
Future Places Forum,  
*Prefigurations:  
An Exhibition on  
Architecture and  
Transitions*. AWB,  
Brussels, 2022



Critical work, then, for fellow architects, you might think, or for other architecture experts, but fortunately it is not that simple. This has a lot to do, firstly, with the fact that architectural-cultural appreciation cannot be separated from public-political appreciation, and, secondly, with the fact that architecture, neither in the past nor today, ever fell entirely within a distinct discipline with clear contours. Ungers's Russian doll architecture for the Deutsches Architektur Museum in Frankfurt – with the archetypal white house inserted into the historic city palace, itself framed by a new base perimeter – could briefly suggest forty years ago that architecture could be captured by itself, but it is clear that this cannot be a thought model for architecture culture today.

Of course, architectural-cultural actors play an indispensable role in the institutional, discursive and sociological ecology without which the phenomenon of 'architecture' does not exist, and there would only be talk of building, living, investing, paving. These range from architecture schools, publishers (Public Space or Walter König, for instance) and the print and online media for architectural criticism

Architecture Curating Practice [ACP]), cultural-societal workshops (from Architecture Workroom Brussels [AWB] to the equally incomparable Decoratelier Jozef Wouters) and the custodians of architectural and urban heritage and memory (from city museums to Docomomo). It seems obvious that strong architectural projects thrive better in an environment in which all these actors unfold their work.

Some of the most important official actors in what has become known as 'architectural culture' combine several of the above roles and are thus institutional houses that shore the field. Three of the most important ones in our country are organized by language community (VAi and ICA/WB for Dutch- and French-speaking Belgium, respectively) or by region (CIVA for the Brussels-Capital Region) – in contrast to *A+* and Bozar – and each also wants to weigh in on architectural practice and policy in their regions. But above all, let's not think that Belgian architectural culture can still be grasped within Belgian or regional borders, nor that it is the mission of the assembled players in the architectural-cultural field to boost, jointly and efficiently, 'the quality' with a balanced interplay of their diverse resources. Their role is not to spread the 'good news' on architectural quality and demonstrate the 'good work', but to each interpret 'architecture' and 'quality' precisely and thus differently, to make them the subject of public conversation within other social contexts.

After all, quality, the French critic Pierre Chabard pointed out incisively a few years ago, is an all too hollow word, which began to emerge in architectural policy discourse at the very moment the welfare state began to abandon its role as builder. It was then that a management term from the market economy was brought in, which had not mattered until then in either political philosophy or architectural theory.<sup>1</sup> The generic positivity →



Accattone 7 (May 2021). A collection of references introduces this magazine issue on open-air domesticity and hospitality of land

and discourse (from *Accattone* to *Archined*), to programmers of lectures and exhibition curators (from *Stad en Architectuur* to



of 'quality', Chabard explained, can generate nothing but support. The word excludes the possible objection necessary for both the political and the aesthetic. The word also flattens any critical conversation because 'quality' amalgamates the countless different dimensions of commissioning and of dialogue with users or neighbours, of design and of construction. Chabard therefore concludes his short essay with a call to deconstruct the new public-management language of quality assurance and to once again employ a richer architectural vocabulary to name the many registers on which a building or other spatial project can be of value. And to make them the subject of public conversation.

In a similar way, an 'impure' architectural-cultural field is to be welcomed: a field of players, places and ways of speaking, all embedding and understanding architecture slightly differently, looking at different aspects and often setting different agendas. After all, like art, democracy or sustainability, architecture is what William Bryce Gallie would call an 'essentially contested concept'.<sup>2</sup> Among all those who utter the word, there are unresolvable but important disagreements about what exactly the word covers and what it should be about. It is important to recall this fundamental dissensus at the current moment when, on the one hand, quite a few architectural-cultural initiatives want to set a policy agenda while, on the other, policy actors are also increasingly developing architectural culture as a soft governance instrument. Or in practice: the exhibition-with-programme *Prefigurations* by AWB and partners, on the one hand, vs the establishment of an Architecture Platform Ghent on the initiative of the Ghent City Architect, on the other, or the Festival of the New European Bauhaus set up in June 2022 on Kunstberg/Mont des Arts in Brussels.



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↑  
New European  
Bauhaus Festival,  
Brussels, Kunstberg/  
Mont des Arts, 2022

Today, more than ever, there is a need to diffract 'quality' into a rainbow spectrum of (possibly contradictory) virtues, of perspectives on it and positions against it. Cultural spaces then function not only as a megaphone or showcase for designers or policymakers, but also as environments that each with different knowledge and concerns engage citizens and civil-society groups, but also designers, critics and policymakers to speak publicly, to share, to engage in conversation. Thus, not just spotlights on (exemplary and attractive) projects, but also sharp optical prisms and disco balls that facet architecture in a spectrum of different issues intertwined with the world, on which different discussion contexts and also dissensus are possible each time, and on which design and/or political choices have to be made again and again.



© Jacqueline Fuijkschot

↑  
*It's About Time: The  
Architecture of Change*,  
IABR Rotterdam, 2022



↗  
*It's About Time. The  
Architecture of Change,*  
IABR Rotterdam, 2022

The recently completed Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (IABR) exhibition *It's About Time: The Architecture of Change*, for example, diffracts the sustainability consensus and shows the aesthetics, the technique and, to a lesser extent, the politics of architects and projects that seek to approach the ecological crisis as *activist, accelerator or ancestor*.

Like the ubiquitous special issues of architecture journals, thematic exhibitions at architecture centres or biennales cannot always offer this faceting work with the necessary commitment. Indeed, there is a substantial difference when an organization, administration, person or architectural practice takes up an issue and formulates a concern around which they have been working intensely for years, taking pronounced positions on it that they also want to explain, defend, evaluate. The input from the (so-called) core areas as well as from the (apparent) peripheral areas of the architectural field patchwork are therefore important. For instance, some field players occasionally talk about architecture and urbanism from their work in design or visual arts, because they are engaged in ecological transition, experimenting with new interpretations for urban democracy or models for affordable and sustainable housing, or because they are working on a different culture of memory about colonial history than the one that the

scattered colonial monuments in our country continue to propagate, or from a feminist or queer angle such as the Brussels-based platform *L'architecture qui dégenre*.

Colliding with voices and work from the hidden pockets, folds and hems of architectural culture can thus have critical value in breaking up and concretizing architecture and quality, and relevant cross-connections can also emerge.



↑  
*Composite Presence,*  
Z33, Hasselt, 2022

Today, for instance, at Z33, Hasselt's House for Contemporary Art, Design & Architecture, the architecture exhibition *Composite Presence* is programmed simultaneously with, among others, the art, fashion and design exhibition *Fitting In* on increasingly fluid and layered identities in a pluriverse world. The latter exhibition includes, among other things, Marwan Bassiouni's photo series *New Dutch Views*, capturing Dutch landscapes from behind the windows of mosques. This portrait of Western Islamic culture in the Netherlands is shown alongside an installation by Brussels-based artist Nazanin Fakoor on putting on and taking off social masks. *Composite Presence* was the Belgian entry on behalf of the VAI for the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale. Bovenbouw Architectuur designed this urban landscape of large models of recent buildings from Flanders and Brussels, each selected for the dexterity with →



which they make both singular architecture and urban fabric on irregular plots and within weak urbanistic contexts. Bovenbouw's honest credo in architecture as compositional construction practice, and in architecture as urban *bouwkunst*, was temporarily elevated to an officially propagated architectural discourse. This was also due to the testimonials collected at the end of the catalogue from City Architects and other mediators who insist on precise interpretations of 'quality' in Quality Chambers on a case-by-case basis.<sup>3</sup>



↑  
*Composite Presence*,  
Z33, Hasselt, 2022

*Composite Presence*, however, seemed startled by its own *arrière-garde* radicality and by some paradoxical disciplinary alienation, once surrounded in Venice by everything else on show there in 2021 under the more-than-human title *How will we live together?* In Z33, next to Francesca Torzo's new wing, and on the edge of Hasselt's beguinage, much of this tension falls away. And yet, it is precisely the proximity of *Fitting In* that still holds under tension a dormant theme in Bovenbouw's exhibition: how exactly do creative architectural integration and diversity within the built urban landscape relate to the social inclusion issue? ▲■●



↑  
*Fitting In*, Z33, Hasselt,  
2022. With Marwan  
Bassiouni's photo  
series *New Dutch Views*  
(2021)

- 1 Pierre Chabard, 'En finir avec la qualité', in *Susciter l'architecture*, eds. Lisa De Visscher and Pavel Kunysz (Liège: urbAgora, 2018), 14–19.
- 2 I am borrowing the concept from Maarten Gielen, 'The Seven Lives of Sustainability', in *Behind the Green Door: A Critical Look at Sustainable Architecture through 600 Objects by Rotor*, ed. Lionel Devlieger (Oslo: Oslo Architecture Triennale, 2014), 14.
- 3 Maarten Van Den Driessche, André Loeckx, Leo Van Broeck, Christian Rapp, Kristiaan Borret, Peter Vanden Abeele, Stefan Devoldere, Edith Wouters, Katrien Embrechts and Paul Vermeulen, 'Building a Middle Ground, 9 Voices', in *Composite Presence*, eds. Sofie De Caigny, Dirk Somers and Maarten Van Den Driessche (Antwerp: Flanders Architecture Institute, 2021): 146–68.

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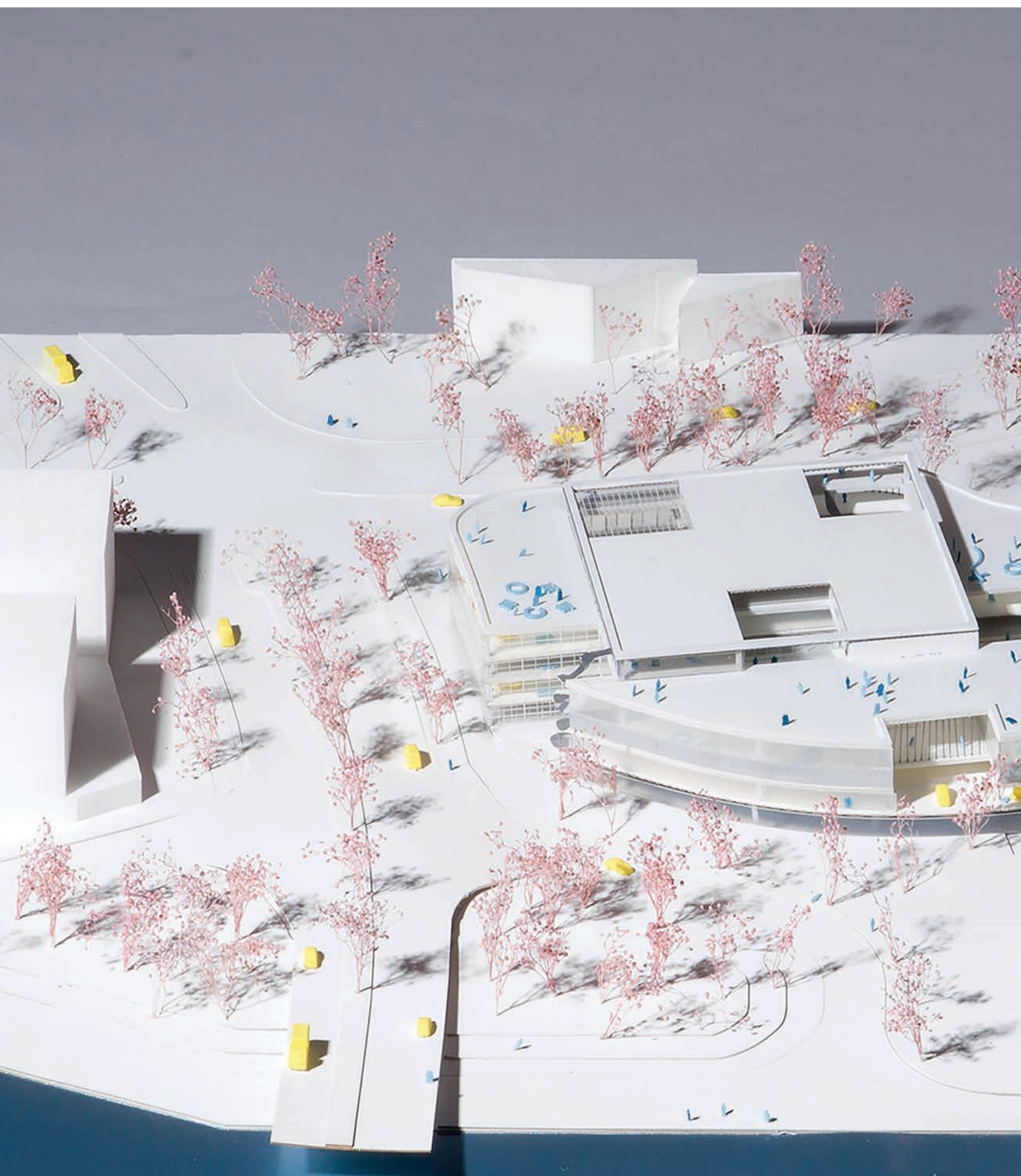
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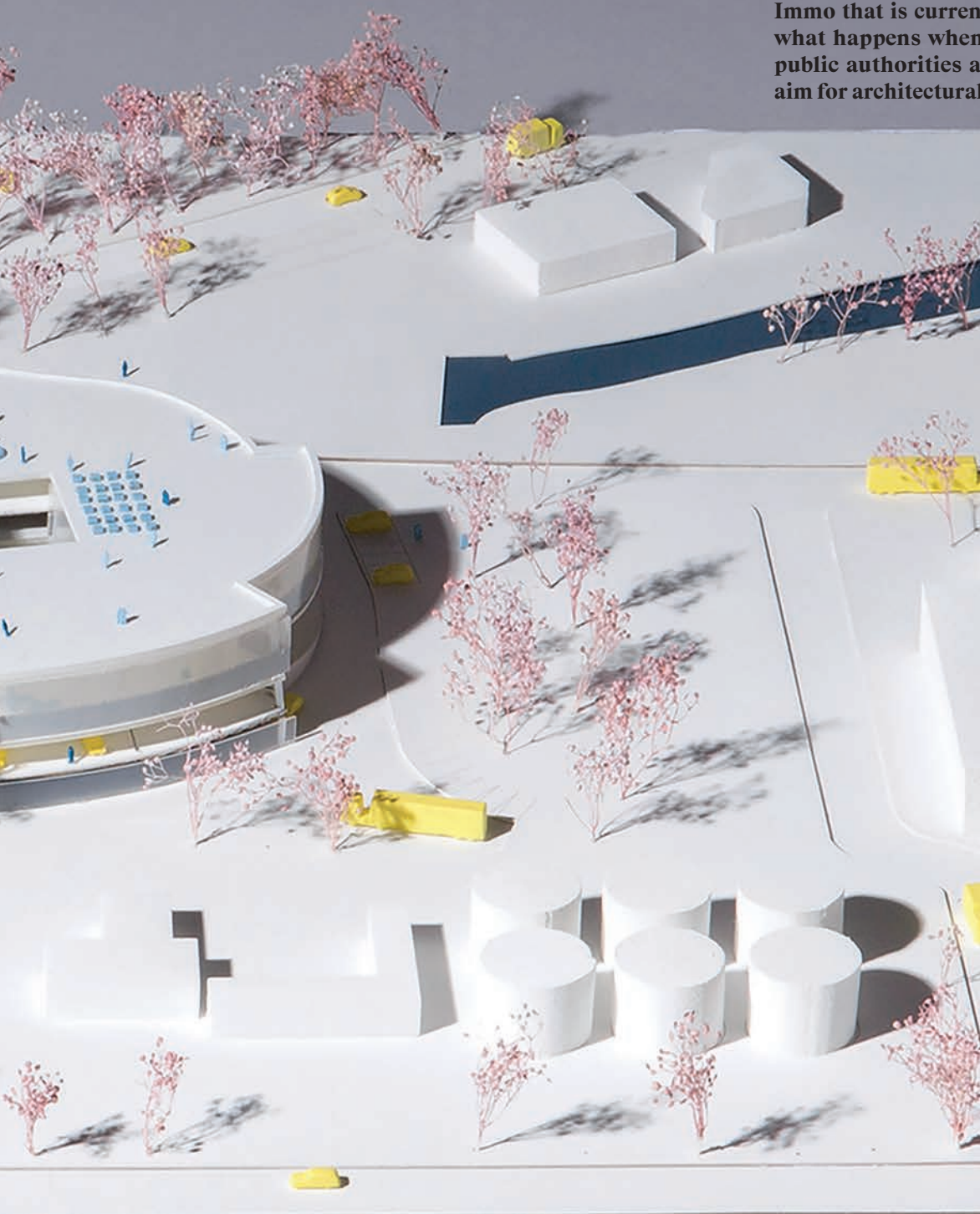




# The good ancestor in Anderlecht

*Véronique Patteeuw*

Good architecture begins with good commissioning. If we look at the work of Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and Gerrit Rietveld, for example, their clients – Baron Charles de Beistegui, Pierre Couturier, Grete Tugendhat, Phyllis Lambert and Truus Schröder-Schröder – are emphatically present in the background. Today is no different. The story behind the Mobilis project, a design by Xaveer De Geyter Architects for D'Ieteren Immo that is currently under construction, illustrates what happens when a visionary architect, ambitious public authorities and an enlightened commissioner aim for architectural quality in the twenty-first century.





About forty years ago, Roland D'Ieteren, a direct descendant of Jean-Joseph D'Ieteren, founder of the eponymous company, wrote a letter to the then mayor of the Brussels municipality of Anderlecht, Christian D'Hoogh. D'Ieteren had his eye on the land at the corner of Boulevard Industriel, Boulevard Paepsem and the Canal and, with the necessary entrepreneurial spirit, managed to convince the mayor to sell the land for the construction of an automobile garage. When, decades later, that garage needed renovation, a plan was conceived within D'Ieteren to build a new showroom on the property. The envisioned 'shoebox on a parking lot' fitted perfectly among the industrial sheds in the unregulated amalgam of this industrial part of the Brussels Canal Zone. However, the project was lacking in vision. 'We left the meeting with the authorities with the realization that we could shelve our project, but then also saw that there was a unique opportunity before us', recalls Greet Mertens, head of architecture at D'Ieteren Immo. The group had a plot of land on which it could adjust the initial 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> of garage and showroom to almost 35,000 m<sup>2</sup> of productive functions fitting within the Canal Plan, Alexandre Chemetoff's plan for the development of the Brussels Canal Zone.

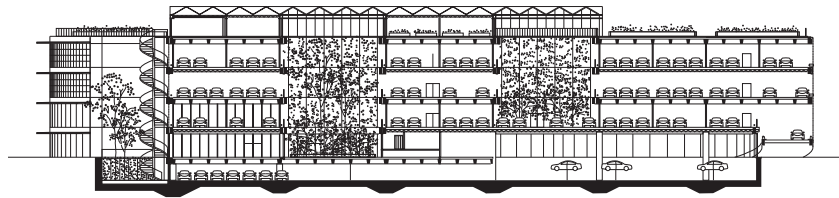
That opportunity crystallized at an important moment for the group. In 2016 D'Ieteren Immo, the group's real-estate division, had just been created with the mandate to invest the group's historic sites in Belgium. Indeed, the current transformation of the automotive sector threatened some thirty-five industrial buildings owned by the group with imminent vacancy. D'Ieteren's real-estate company not only authorized a certain diversification of business models, but also opened a path within the group to implement sustainability and long-term thinking within the management of its own patrimony. Its 'Invest and Hold' strategy perpetuates real-estate assets in the very long term, in an intergenerational perspective. The creation of value is done in a very slow but progressive way. If D'Ieteren Immo initiated a new direction for the group, Mobilis was a test case, a site where the economic feasibility of long-term thinking and adaptable architecture could be tested.

The many conversations between D'Ieteren Immo and the Brussels public authorities were crucial on the journey from idea to implementation. In a very early stage, work sessions were organized with the Canal Team, composed of public stakeholders, responsible for advising and guiding project →

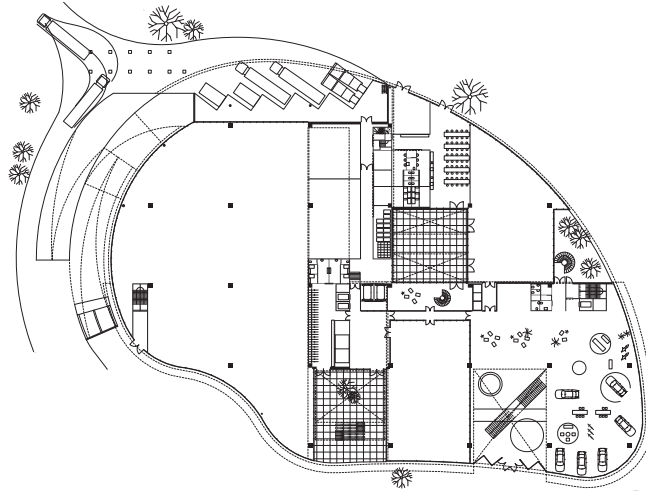
↓  
The building renders the productivity of its programme visible from every perspective: the stacking of cars in the showroom, the half-sunk atelier

spaces that, with a ceiling height of 7 m, catch daylight and lend visibility to the work, or the movement of driving into and out of the garage.

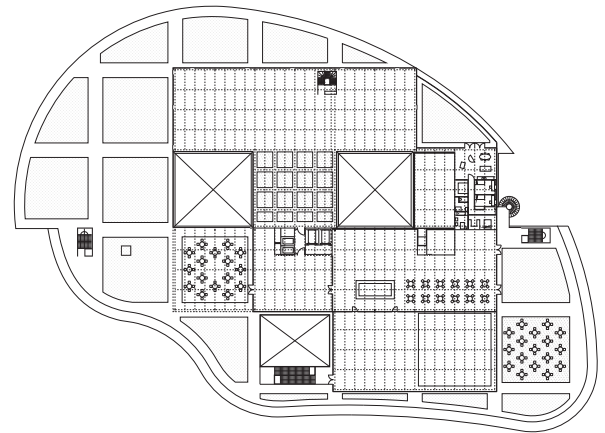




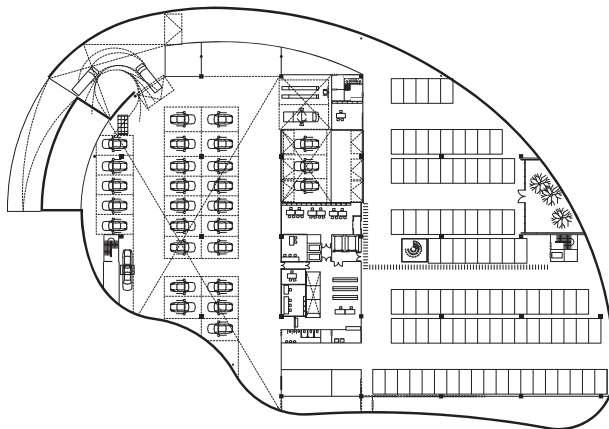
Section



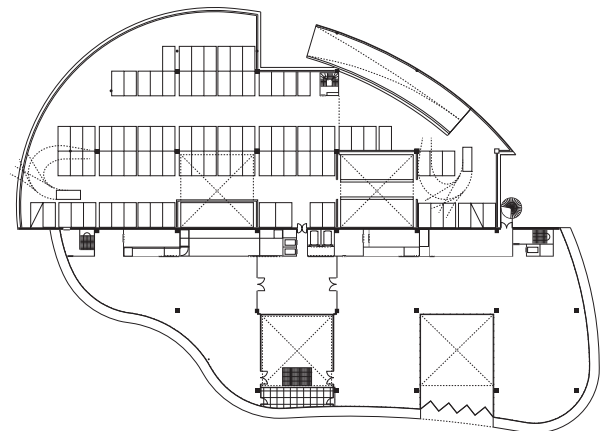
Floor 0



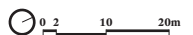
Floor 4



Floor -1



Floor 3



Architect  
XDGA Xaveer De Geyter  
Architects  
Website  
xdga.be  
Project name  
Mobilis  
Location  
Brussels

Programme  
Showroom, workplaces,  
offices, commercial  
spaces, production  
spaces, roof garden,  
hotel and catering  
industry  
Procedure  
Competition (Call BMA)

Client  
D'Ieteren Immo  
Structural engineering  
Util structuurstudies  
Building physics  
Studiebureau Boydens  
Acoustics  
Daidalos Peutz

Completion  
December 2023  
Total floor area  
27,821 m<sup>2</sup>  
Budget  
€ 32,000,000  
(excl. VAT and fees)







developers and architects, in the framework of the redevelopment of the Brussels Canal Zone. It is in collaboration with that team that the contours of the project were sketched. The 'shoebox' was replaced by a new building typology that proposed an urban guise for its productive functions through the stacking of its programme on multiple floors. It also sought an alignment of the building with the urban front on the boulevard and proposed transparency and visibility of the activities, creating an urban presence at this particular intersection in Anderlecht. In a second phase, the team of the Brussels Government Architect (BMA) opened the path to a design competition where preliminary design research would make it possible to test further some of the initial scenarios, and a public and transparent procedure proposed architects and designers new to D'Ieteren Immo.

The architectural ambitions were not minor. With a nod to Jules Verne's 'Mobilis in mobile' (the motto of the *Nautilus* submarine in *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*), the project's name echoed a leap forward: a renewed understanding of the building's programme and a challenging take on its architecture, both flexible and for the long-term. 'Today, as a company, we face a double temporality. On the one hand, today's sustainability requirements call for sturdier buildings; on the other hand, companies must be able to respond ever more quickly to the market's changing trends. Mobilis is an exercise in bringing the two together. The ambition from the start has been to realize a building that can stand for a hundred years, but can be adapted over time', recalls Greet Mertens.

Within the framework of the competition, five selected design teams were asked for a double design task: on the one hand, to take into account a known programme of requirements (15,000 m<sup>2</sup> of workspace, a showroom and offices); on the other hand, to make relevant programmatic proposals that can activate the car garage. With these additional functions (which were to cover an area of about 9,000 m<sup>2</sup>), D'Ieteren sought to capitalize on job creation while diversifying its own business model. The design by Xaveer De Geyter Architects (XDGA), which was named the winner, is certainly intelligent in that regard. The office designed a structure that offers 24,000 m<sup>2</sup> of tangible and intangible production and that can be adapted to other programmes over the coming decades.

Bordering the Canal and two major roads, the 10,000 m<sup>2</sup> site presented a unique opportunity to create a building with neither a front nor back, a building that makes the productivity of its programme visible from every perspective: the stacking of cars in the showrooms, the half-buried studio spaces which, with their 7 m floor height, catch daylight and lend visibility to the work, and even the dynamics of driving in and out of the car park. The curved façades suggest that the plan continues its whimsical design inside. But nothing could be further from the truth. XDGA designed a regular rational grid that spreads over the entire surface of the garage, interrupted only by five large patios and several vertical cores. The grid organizes logistics at all levels and translates the structure's design according to four scale levels with specific lifespans: S, M, L and XL. →



← The amorphous design of the building playfully follows the plot boundary. Bordering the Canal and located near two major access roads, the 10,000 m<sup>2</sup> site offers a unique opportunity to realize a building without a front or back.



The XL level, which includes the primary concrete structure and patios, has a life expectancy of one hundred years. Set at 16.2 m by 16.2 m, it allows for large spans in the atelier, showroom and parking garage. Its oversize is located both in its dimensions (7 m between slabs) and in its load-bearing capacity (16kN/m<sup>2</sup>). In the long term, horizontal and vertical divisions by means of a secondary suspended steel structure with a life expectancy of fifty years can be added and removed depending on the further completion and development of the project. A special feature is that the steel ramps are also adaptable without affecting the primary structure. The somewhat robust concrete columns have a certain prominence; the slender steel pulls, in turn, a certain elegance. The M level (which includes the techniques of the building) and the S level (comprising the interior and furnishings) are both flexible and planned to last between five and twenty years. Although flexibility and adaptability were paramount, Mobilis was designed on the basis of very concrete programme components. The design's oversize lies as much in its dimension as in the design of circulation and techniques. For instance, five large patios not only lend the building identity but also organize the vertical circulation, provide adequate daylight and bring techniques into the building without impeding future flexibility.

Circularity is a keyword in today's architectural discourse on sustainable architecture. Most often, however, it is invariably downsized to circular thinking with regard to materials and building components. But isn't the supreme form of circularity the permanence of the building itself? Wouldn't it become crucial to aim for adaptive reuse and structural resilience without having to dismantle the building completely? Forty years ago, Roland D'Ieteren managed to cash in on his vision of entrepreneurship by the Canal. Today, D'Ieteren Immo seems to tackle the permanence of its own patrimony with the same commitment. Their thirty-five sites will accommodate multiple assignments in the near future. The Heyvaert site was transformed into Circularium in 2020 with 51N4E. The headquarters in Elsene/Ixelles, some parts of which are 106 years old, are currently being tackled in partnership with British architect Amanda Levete. With Mobilis, the group is showing its willingness to invest with seriousness in sophisticated projects that combine sustainability and long-term economic viability. In an era in which both clients and architects are compelled to reflect on their roles and responsibilities, the crucial conversations between designers, enlightened commissioners and public authorities may open up a pathway to projects that combine design quality with ancestral thinking. ▲■●

↓

The basic idea is not to make a building that can be adapted endlessly to new activities, but to conceive a structure in which anything can happen.

XDGA designed a building that offers 24,000 m<sup>2</sup> as material and immaterial production without knowing or defining the specific use.







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# Tiles that tell stories

*Eloïse Perrillon*

In 2019 the team formed by archipelago and Atelier d'Architecture Daniel Delgoffe (AAdd) won the competition for the redevelopment of the secure psychiatric hospital (HPS) Les Marronniers in Tournai. While waiting for the project to rise from the ground, the artist Françoise Schein was appointed in the context of the decree for the integration of works of art. The purpose of this decree is not only to support artists by awarding them public commissions and by promoting their works, but also to improve the quality of the urban space and to take art out of museums and to familiarize the general public with artistic creations. Françoise Schein has now laid the first stones of a healing environment by going to meet the patients and listening to their stories.







The secure psychiatric hospital Les Marronniers is a place of committal. In Belgium, the justice system exempts individuals who have committed a crime or an offence from any criminal conviction if they were recognized as suffering from a mental disorder at the time of the crime. However, the medical treatment of the person is compulsory; the individual is then 'treated under constraint' in an HPS, like here in Tournai. Committal oscillates between a logic of care and a logic of 'sentence to be served' for an individual presenting a danger to society or, on the contrary, to protect that person. Located on the edge of the city, beyond the old fortifications that are now boulevards, the site is the geographical illustration of its programmatic paradox; between care and surveillance, Les Marronniers borders a hospital while overlooking a prison. Its dominant position on a plateau offers unobstructed views of the agricultural landscape on one side and the city on the other, making visitors forget for a moment the double enclosure that marks the physical border between the institution and the rest of the city. →

← Located on the edge of the city of Tournai, beyond the old fortifications that are now boulevards, the site is the geographical illustration of its programmatic paradox; between care and surveillance, Les Marronniers borders a hospital while overlooking a prison.



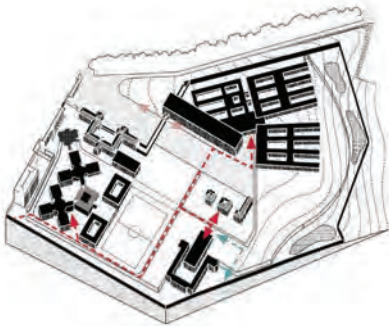


It was therefore behind closed doors that the reconditioning of the HPS had to be considered, involving the demolition of old pavilions and the construction of new care units. The project by archipelago and AAdd builds this interior landscape by adopting several strategies. By choosing to locate the new buildings on the northern part of the site (which was previously cultivated), the master plan maintains the existing infrastructure. Some pavilions, with a strong identity, form the link between the history of the site and the future site. After their redevelopment, they will host various artistic and manual activities. The sports esplanade, also preserved, is now at the centre of the master plan. By keeping shareable functions in the centre, the architects promise to include the patients of the 'long-stay' sector, which borders the sports fields. A euphemism for a population committed for life by default, any hope of recovery being of the order of the miraculous. The final point of contact between this vast island territory and the rest of society is the reception

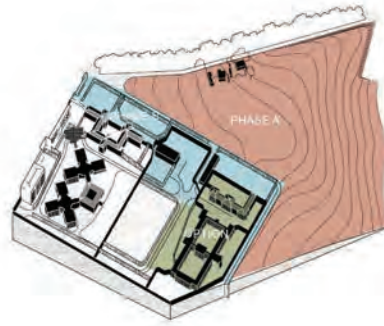
building. Special attention was paid to its design. Situated astride the double enclosure, it allows visiting families, and especially children, to be welcomed before the wall, in an environment that is more like a home than a prison.

The new care units are each made up of about thirty individual rooms arranged around patios. These units are linked to the rest of the institution via a 'kneecap' building housing the various common therapeutic activities. It is here that Françoise Schein chose to integrate her first work. At the crossroads of typologies and therapeutic times, the artist proposes to trace a compass in the form of alcoves placed according to the four cardinal points. In these alcoves, the walls are covered with ceramic tiles on which stories have been painted, the stories of the patients.

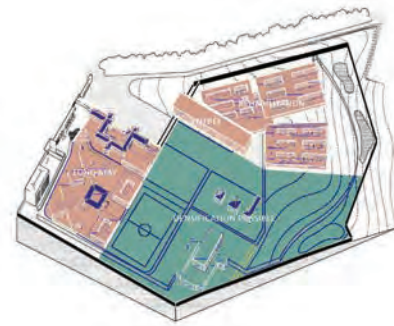
More than a finished object, each of these interventions demonstrates a process. Indeed, the project of integrating a work of art is in fact articulated around several workshops bringing together artists and patients. As a starting point, →



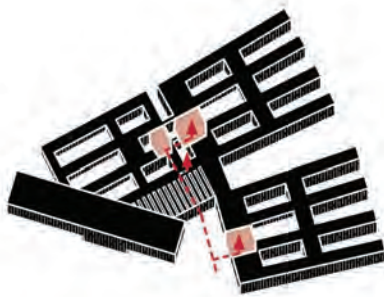
Logistical circulation



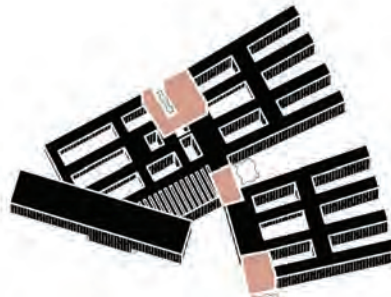
Optimized phase and clear perimeter



Evolutive possibility of the site



Logistical route



Staff areas



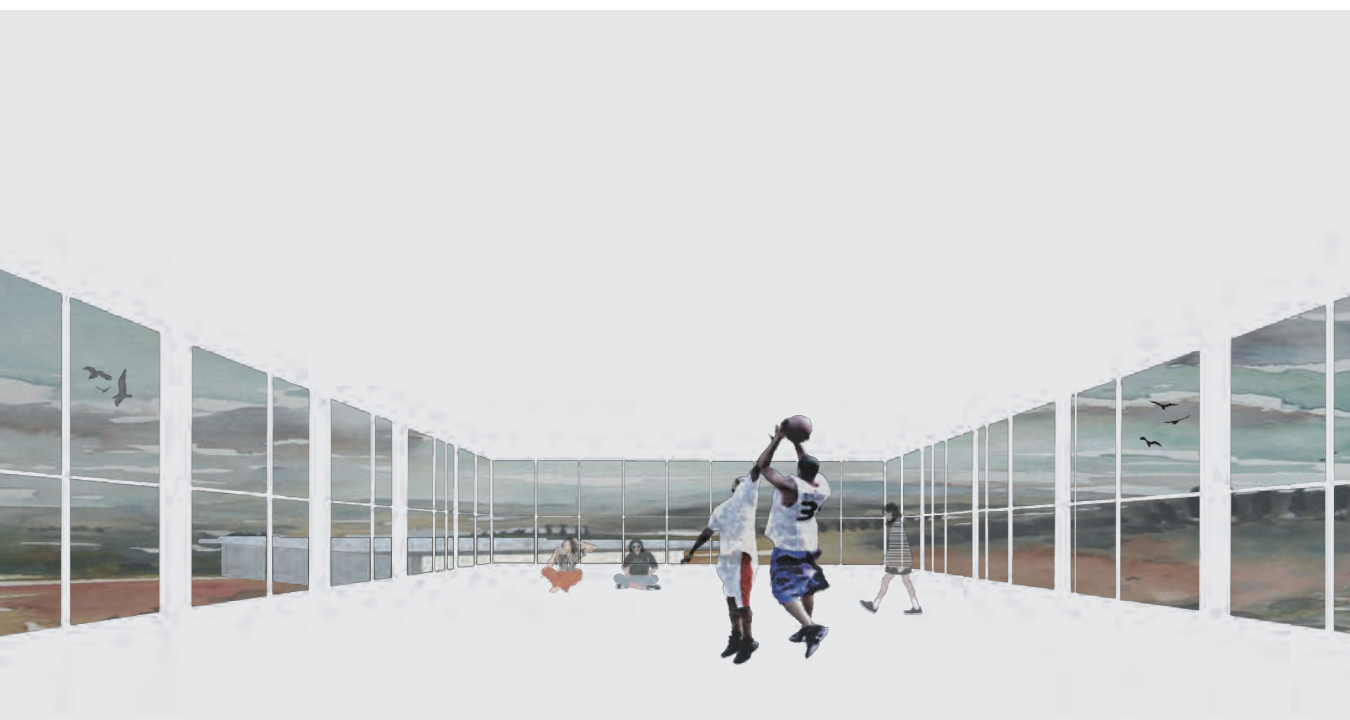
Possible autonomy of patients

Architect  
archipelago – Atelier  
d'Architecture Daniel  
Delgoffe (AAdd)  
Website  
archipelago.be –  
delgoffe-architecture.be  
Official project name  
CRP Les Marronniers  
Location  
Tournai, Belgium

Programme  
Construction of the new  
psychiatric hospital  
Les Marronniers: new  
infrastructure housing  
270 beds, reception  
area and common  
rooms. Restoration  
of old pavilions  
into infrastructure  
for the purpose of  
rehabilitation. Complete  
landscaping of the site

Procedure  
Selection procedure of  
the Cellule architecture  
of the Wallonia-Brussels  
Federation (FWB)  
Client  
Centre Régional de Soins  
Psychiatriques Les  
Marronniers  
Landscape architect  
Pigeon Ochej Paysage  
Structural engineering  
Lemaire  
Services engineering  
Ingenium

Building physics  
Ingenium  
Sustainability  
Cenergie  
Acoustics  
ATS  
Completion  
May 2025  
Total floor area  
22,914 m<sup>2</sup>  
Budget  
€ 52,401,344  
(excl. VAT and fees)

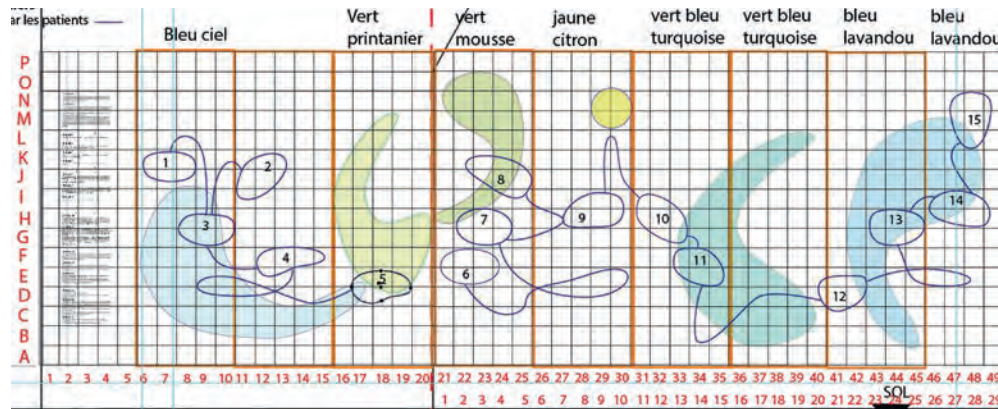




the patient chooses an article from the Declaration of Human Rights that echoes his or her personal story. Françoise Schein has been working for many years on this question of human rights. A question that makes all the more sense here with people who have been stripped of certain rights after they themselves had infringed on the rights of others. During the workshop the article becomes a support, a pretext to get people talking. The stories are then put down on paper and drawn on ceramic tiles by the patients. This technique is inspired by the tradition of azulejos, very present in Portugal, where the artist lived for several years. It is in fact in Portugal that she buys the tiles, in different colours and in a 15 cm by 15 cm format. The ceramic tile has the advantage of being an infinitely reproducible object, robust, easy to handle and therefore easily appropriated by all audiences. The paint applied with a brush glides over the surface of the tile and allows the painter to be totally absorbed in an almost meditative task. Once painted, the tiles are fired and

stored in the artist's studio. Each one is given a number and a precise place in the final frescoes composed in advance.

The tile format was chosen for its ability to fit easily into the architecture. From the very first sketches, a discussion with the architects based on the plans led to the creation of the alcoves. This is not the first time that Françoise Schein and Daniel Delgoffe (AAdd) have worked together. Already for the Public Institution for Youth Protection (IPPJ) in Fraipont, the links between art and citizenship had been questioned through the creation of a large collaborative fresco made with young people, a fresco that completes the façade of the old castle. In Tournai, the artist plans to make visible to a wider public the rights of the inmates – including the right to dream and to aspire to a future – by inscribing on the surrounding wall a series of wishes formulated by the patients. Placed on the outside of the wall, this fresco will make it possible to create this imperfect but necessary link between the psychiatric centre and the rest of the city. ▲●



↑  
Françoise Schein,  
design for a glazed  
ceramic wall  
composition of the  
ergotherapie space  
of the psychiatric  
hospital Les  
Marronniers

←  
Françoise Schein,  
*A City as a Tree for  
Human Rights*, Façade  
of the Municipal  
Theatre in Ramallah,  
Palestine, 2011

# Master's to Junior



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# Big master plan, small gestures

*Emmanuel van der Beek*

With the *Groen Lint* or Green Ribbon, Ostend is giving its green south side a new appearance. The master plan strings together the most diverse landscapes. Both for the master plan and its elaboration, the city turned to the Flemish Government Architect. 'The Green Ribbon should trigger a new urban culture', says Eli Devriendt, who is leading the project.

→ With the Green Ribbon, the city of Ostend is investing in its lesser-known green fringes to the south, away from the coastline in the north: this ambitious urban project will transform the area into a second front.

© Nick Deconinck









A green polder landscape as far as the eye can see. It's an image you don't immediately associate with Ostend. The Belgian coastal city is famous for its beaches and its compact city centre, with a park and galleries dating from the time of Leopold II. A modernist casino and a dyke lined with grey apartment buildings recall the dreams of the twentieth century.

With the Green Ribbon, the city is investing in its lesser-known south side. Residents and tourists could already discover the Green Ribbon as a 35 km cycle route, along the coastline in the north and the green fringes in the south. But the Green Ribbon is more than that. Under the Green Ribbon banner, the city has been working in recent years on a comprehensive urban planning project to transform the southern edge into a second front.

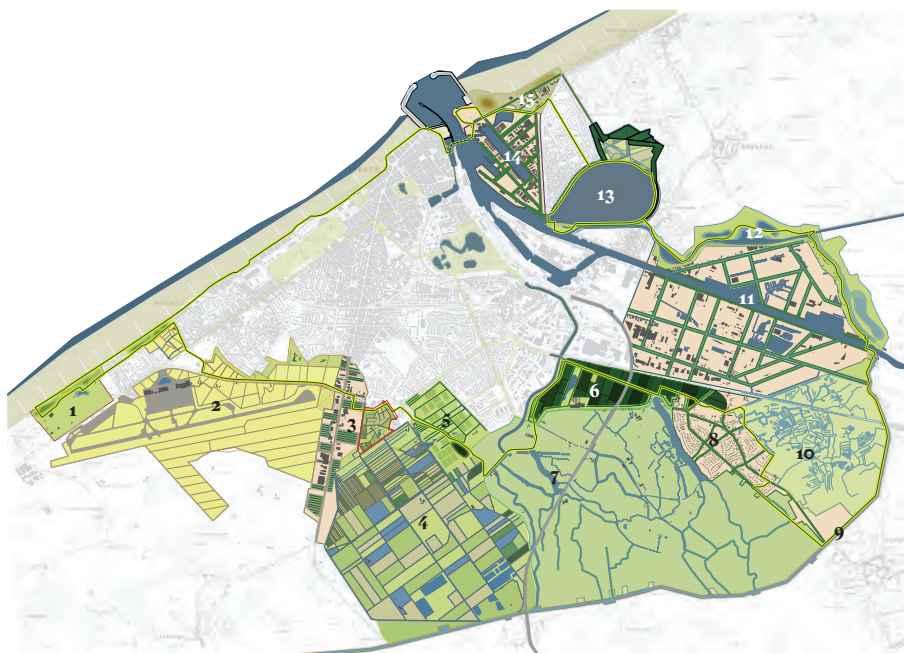
'The Green Ribbon will be a succession of contemporary parks, although that is not a good term', says Eli Devriendt, a landscape architect working for the city of Ostend. Devriendt has been at the helm of the project for years. 'The Green Ribbon consists of diverse green and blue spaces that do not immediately bring to mind a nineteenth-century park: polders, dunes, arable lands, woods and expanses of water. Yet we refer to them as parks because we consider their public function important. The Green Ribbon should trigger a new urban culture.'

The project is part of the European Interreg project 21st Century Parks. In 2011 the city started looking for a design team that could draw up a master plan. Ostend used the Open Call for this purpose, a competition supervised by the Flemish Government Architect. 'The city was looking for an innovative vision on questions concerning energy, water, mobility and nature development. Concrete programmes also had to be given a place, such as an observatory, a residential care centre and an events site.'

### The soul of the place

A consortium made up of Georges Descombes and Tractebel Engineering (at the time, Technum), with Bart Van Gassen as project manager, won the competition. Devriendt sat on the jury. 'The designers convinced us with a proposal that stood out thanks to its simplicity. For instance, they suggested building large terraces, platforms where you can enjoy the landscape. If it's good, it doesn't stand out: that was their starting point. Today, one of those terraces is close to a school. Pupils gather there for lunch and parents meet there too ... That kind of multiple use is what we were looking for. The Open Call allowed us to attract international expertise. We would never have been able to do that on our own.'

→



- |                      |                |                |                   |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|
| 1 Raversijde         | 5 sports park  | 9 Passendale - | 12 Noord-Ede      |
| 2 airport            | 6 De Schorre   | 10 Nieuwpoort  | 13 wetlands       |
| 3 landscape          | 7 Geuzenbos    | 11 Canal       | 14 Spuikom        |
| 4 retail landscape   | 8 Ostend       |                | 15 Oostoever      |
| 5 Les Hortillonnages | 9 Krekengebied |                | 16 Oostoever      |
| 6 Gardens of Stene   | 10 Zandvoorde  |                | 17 dune landscape |

Architect  
Tractebel – Georges  
Descombes – ADR – Maat –  
Jan Willem Van der Schans

Website  
tractebel-engie.be –  
maatontwerpers.be

Official project name  
Tuinen van Stene

Location  
Stene, Ostend

Programme  
Agricultural park (part  
of the Green Ribbon master  
plan), consisting of an  
organic pick-your-own  
garden, a meadow water  
landscape, farmlands and  
a food platform

Procedure  
Pilot Projects Productive  
Landscape (Flemish  
Government Architect)

Client  
City of Ostend

Lead contractor  
Mahieu nv

Engineering  
Tractebel

Completion  
November 2019

Total floor area  
35 ha

Budget  
€ 2,500,000  
(excl. VAT and fees)



© Stijn Bollaert



© Stijn Bollaert

→ Catherine Pyck, Park Nieuwe Koers: a public park connecting the new residential care centre, allotment garden, events meadow and observatory

Architect  
Catherine Pyck  
Project name  
Park Nieuwe Koers  
Location  
Ostend

Programme  
Public park  
Procedure  
Meesterproef  
(Flemish Government Architect)

Client  
City of Ostend –  
vzw Sint-Monica  
Execution architect  
Arcadis  
Lead contractor  
Verhelst

Completion  
2019  
Total floor area  
130,000 m²  
Budget  
€ 3,726,982  
(excl. VAT and fees)



Asked about the importance of the Open Call, Devriendt also points to the beginning of the process. 'The Team Flemish Government Architect helped us to formulate the project definition more sharply. The importance of that first step is often underestimated, including by architects. Only when you ask a good question can you get a good answer. While writing the assignment, we noticed that we needed a sparring partner.'

It was also decided to elaborate an art commission, also under the guidance of the Government Architect. 'The fifteen sub-areas of the Green Ribbon have their own character. We didn't want the architects to do their own thing there, because the landscapes were particularly powerful in themselves already. To include the soul of the places in the design assignment, we asked Katrien Vermeire to take a photo of each place and Peter Verhelst to write a text. The images and texts then also played an important role in the communication with regard to the general public.'

### Rammstein

A crucial link in the Green Ribbon is Park Nieuwe Koers, which was completed in 2019. The master plan for the park was drawn up within the framework of a *Meesterproef*, a competition procedure through which the Flemish Government Architect gives young architects the chance to develop a public project.

For Park Nieuwe Koers, Catherine Pyck created a clear plan with three zones. The northern section houses the Sint-Monica residential care centre and is designed according to the 'house-terrace-garden-pavilion' sequence. While drawing the master plan, the idea arose to issue a separate Open Call for the residential care centre. Bovenbouw Architecten won the competition with a smartly designed volume that the Green Ribbon runs through. The Green Ribbon thus connects street and garden, city and nature, and young and old in a single movement.

The events site forms the heart of the park. A concrete terrace serves as a stage or gathering place. The site is designed to accommodate large groups of visitors. This summer, more than 100,000 Rammstein fans descended on the park over the course of two days. Whereas tourists used to be drawn only to the city centre and the sea, today the green fringes of the city are also the subject of their attention.

At the southern tip of the park, space was made for Astropolis, an observatory. For this project, too, the city appointed an architect through a *Meesterproef*. The winning design by Pieter-Jan Peeters is not tucked away in the landscape, but connects to the airport further along with a strong formal idiom. →

→  
Bovenbouw designed a smartly conceived volume which the Green Ribbon runs through. The Green

Ribbon connects in a single movement street and garden, city and nature, young and old

→  
Bovenbouw, De Drie Platanen, Ostend, 2019: a care home for elderly people with assistance residences, a cafeteria and a service centre, directly connected to the allotment garden of Park Nieuwe Koers

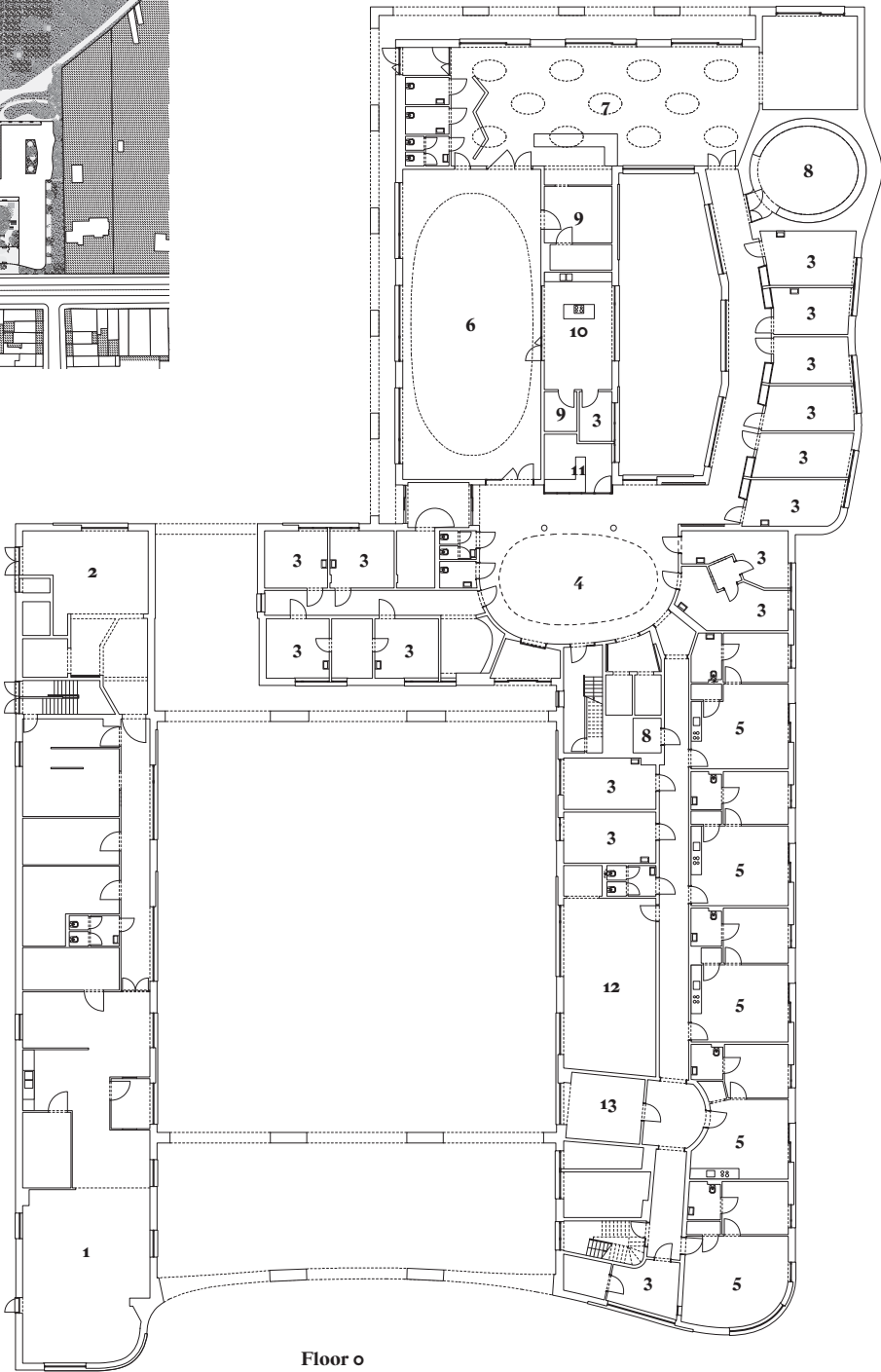
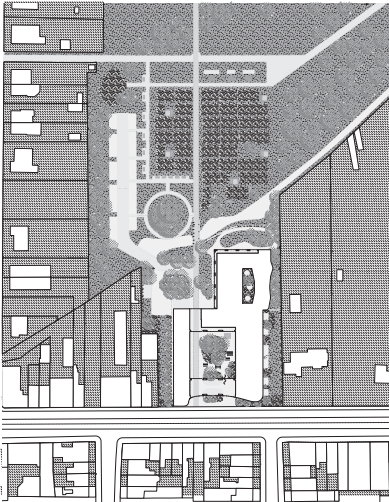
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- |                              |                     |                 |                              |
|------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| 1 industrial kitchen         | 4 entrance hall     | 8 silent room   | 12 relaxation area for staff |
| 2 loading and unloading area | 5 assisted living   | 9 storage       | 13 meeting room              |
| 3 offices                    | 6 multipurpose hall | 10 ergo kitchen |                              |
|                              | 7 restaurant        | 11 reception    |                              |

Architect  
Bovenbouw Architectuur  
Website  
bovenbouw.be  
Official project name  
De Drie Platanen  
Location  
Ostend, Belgium

Programme  
98 rooms for elderly people, 5 assistance residences, cafeteria, service centre  
Procedure  
Open Call (Flemish Government Architect)  
Client  
vzw Sint-Monica

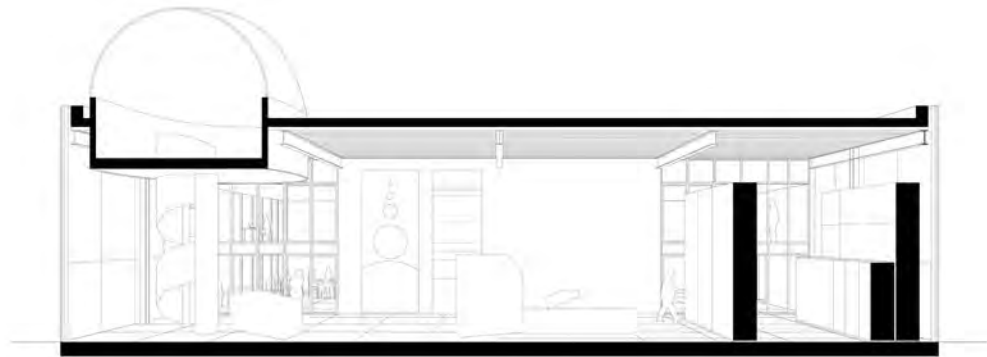
Lead contractor  
BAM  
Landscape architect  
Landinzicht  
Public realm  
Mahieu  
Structural engineering  
Establis  
Services engineering  
Ingenium

Building physics  
RaCo  
Completion  
February 2019  
Total floor area  
7,800 m<sup>2</sup>  
Budget  
€ 11,600,000 (excl. VAT and fees)

### City and countryside

For the *Tuinen van Stene* or Gardens of Stene, 35 ha of polderland, Ostend applied for the Pilot Project Productive Landscape, again under the wings of the Government Architect. 'I think the idea of the Pilot Project is brilliant. Society is evolving at lightning speed and so we need new architecture. You can write about this, but you can also build. MAAT ontwerpers and Technum quickly translated our idea for a food park into a design. The Gardens will be a productive landscape, with cows and sheep, parcels of arable land, a forest garden ... Such places, where city and countryside meet, will become crucial in the coming decades.'

The Gardens of Stene are in the process of being developed. Local associations are looking for volunteers to plant a forest garden, and work is under way on an irrigation system that drains surface water from the nearby village and channels it through a reed bed, where it is purified and buffered. 'A project like the Green Ribbon is never finished. Right now, there are three projects on the drawing board that we will soon realize. And besides that, there are still so many dreams.' ▲ ■ ●



Section



→  
Pieter-Jan Peeters,  
Astropolis: a building  
with a centre for  
space travel and  
astronomy, with a  
terrace and cafeteria,  
spaces for workshops  
indoors and outdoors,  
and a multipurpose  
auditorium

Architect  
Pieter-Jan Peeters  
Project name  
Astropolis  
Location  
Ostend, Belgium

Programme  
Space Science Centre  
Procedure  
Meesterproef  
(Flemish Government  
Architect)  
Client  
City of Ostend

Structural engineering  
Util Struktuurstudies  
Services engineering  
Arne Vangeenberghe  
(Atelier T)  
Building physics  
Arne Vangeenberghe  
(Atelier T)  
Lead contractor  
Himpe

Completion  
2018  
Total floor area  
770 m<sup>2</sup>  
Budget  
€ 1,300,000  
(excl. VAT and fees)





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ADRIEN TIRIAUX (INTEGRATION OF ARTWORK),  
SPORTS INFRASTRUCTURE DEPARTMENT  
(CONTRACTING AUTHORITY).

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GRAPHIC DESIGN: NNSTUDIO



“The Open Call represents a different way forward, one that public authorities everywhere would do well to learn from.”

— Oliver Wainwright in *The Guardian*, 28.04.2022

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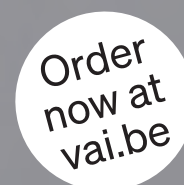
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# 300

## Start-up Architecture

Publication date: 27.02.2023

Belgium is a laboratory for up-and-coming talent. Young architects have many opportunities thanks to great variation within architectural training and specific procedures that give them access to public assignments. Who are the young lions who are defining or are going to define the architecture of the first half of the twenty-first century and with what work did they start out? How do they express their critical vision, their ambitions and expectations for the future? *A+* gives the floor to the new generation of architects and shows the work and the collaborations that enabled them to set up an office and to design the future.

→  
Notan, Duchesse,  
Molenbeek, 2022

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**A+301 Affordable Housing**  
17.04.2023

Housing is a basic right but is increasingly expensive. In Brussels, but also in Flanders and Wallonia, the pressure on the housing market is growing, driving the lower middle class and families from the city. *A+* investigates the impact that this has on architecture and the urban planning of housing.

**A+302 Tackling Water at the Source**  
19.06.2023

Periods of extreme drought followed by major flooding have shown that water management is a complex issue. Architecture and spatial planning can offer solutions to the question of water. *A+* looks at some concrete projects.

**A+303 On Campus: Designing Higher Education**  
25.09.2023

Drawing on recently built universities and university colleges, *A+* examines the needs of education and research today, and exposes the impact on the architecture of the campus.

## Dear architects, let us know what you're building!

The editorial board of *A+* loves to receive an overview of the latest quality projects to have been realized in Belgium.

**Have you completed a project in the past two years? Then let us know!**

Visit [a-plus.be/nl/dien-een-project-in](https://a-plus.be/nl/dien-een-project-in) (NL) or [a-plus.be/fr/soumettre-un-projet](https://a-plus.be/fr/soumettre-un-projet) (FR).

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**Architectural production in Belgium and its accompanying culture have set the tone for many years. This is due to the decisive architectural policy developed over the past two decades by bodies such as the Flemish and Brussels Government Architects, the various City Architects and the creation of the Cellule architecture in Wallonia. But regional cultural players and public clients also play a decisive role. Showcasing built projects and the personal narrative of a stakeholder in each procedure, this special edition of *A+* shows how this policy is the engine of architectural quality.**

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