

Urban Renewal in Flanders — (2002-2011)

A PARTICULAR PRACTICE IN EUROPE

Els Vervloesem, Bruno De Meulder and André Loeckx



Intermediate landscapeKelly Shannon

The industrial landscape of the right bank of the Garonne River in Bordeaux is clearly unlike that of its historically urbanized left bank. It is obviously also ripe for transformation. As in his masterplan for the Lyon Confluence, landscape architect Michel Desvigne has utilized the power of horticulture and an “intermediate landscape” (a transformed landscape whose primitive characteristics are spatial orientation, incline, and moisture) to frame incremental growth.

The project is premised on two successive landscape horizons, the newly created vegetative one and the more distant north-south topographic rise further to the east. The newly constructed vegetative horizon is both a structure for the transformation of the factory fabric that is gradually vacating the territory and a permanent unbuilt amenity – an urban forest of more than 100ha and with 8km of river frontage – for a city in dire need of green space. The park is a gesture at a scale comparable to those of Frederick Law Olmstead’s in 19th century America (a landscape such as New York City’s Central Park as a stimulus for development). However, in Bordeaux, the park is a driver of urban renewal and a counterbalance for the city’s enormous problem of sprawl by making the center attractive once again.

Existing parcels of industrial areas, parking lots, abandoned infrastructures and terrain vague are incrementally acquired by the city government and planted, progressively building up the forest. There is an intentional notion of diversity built into the scheme, as the planting varies from one parcel to the next. The forest areas grow and mature over time, some to remain as part of the park system, while others are temporary and eventually give way to urban development. The permanent forest structure includes a thick tree-lined parkway parallel to the river with perpendicular systems of varying band-width parks following the morphological system

of the obsolete industries. The legal building regulations of the city requires new developments and neighborhoods to be developed adjacent to the parks and to a certain extent, the new development appears as clearings in the forest. As Desvigne has himself stated, the project is primary about “the importance of the frame in future urban development. The landscape, both public and private, determines the shape of small, buildable islands, without setting down the contours in an absurdly strict manner. Moreover, the planned horizon lines and the geographic dimension of the project introduce the idea of excess, which comes from the beauty born from the loss of prosaic reference points. The very large park takes its materials and its shape from the land – its relief and its river. Rather the reducing the site by dividing it up, which would create an obstacle, we preferred to affirm its identity”.¹

The overall importance of the Garonne River Right Bank project will ultimately be measured in terms of economics and urbanism. Desvigne’s pragmatic land-based approach and fascination of the unfinished has thus far worked well with an unprecedented commission where landscape signifies both the permanency of structure and transience of nature. The large-scale project will clearly require a strong, committed political will and public management, since the various phases of the work will span decades. The incremental growth and “intermediate landscape” ideas of Desvigne are clearly extendable to urbanism, and particularly to urban renewal. As the well-known landscape architect James Corner has commented, Michel Desvigne’s approach to landscape architecture is primarily through the lens of a cultivation process and change over time, rather than formal composition. “His understanding of landscape as active infrastructure suggests new ways of validating investment in landscape in cities, as these green living infrastructures can be the catalysts for new forms of development and new lifestyles, new armatures for more complex forms of urbanism to grow and evolve.”² Desvigne’s landscapes are frames in anticipation of things still to come.

¹ Desvigne, M. (2009) *Intermediate Natures: The Landscapes of Michel Desvigne*, Basel: Birkhauser, p. 55.

² Corner, J. (2009) “Agriculture, Texture and the Unfinished” in M. Desvigne, *Intermediate Natures: The Landscapes of Michel Desvigne*, Basel: Birkhauser, pp. 7-10



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The landscape architect Michel Desvigne conceived a general strategy for the gradual transformation of the area of almost 150 hectares at the confluence of the rivers Rhône and Saône.

© Herzog & de Meuron / Michel Desvigne Paysagiste / SPLA Lyon Confluence

Re-building the city on itselfKelly Shannon

Over the past two decades, the city of Lyon has made incredible strides in urban renewal — from the scale of its larger regional territory to entire post-industrial districts to the revitalization of public spaces in both the city center and in its numerous suburban housing districts.

The remarkable aspect of Lyon's transformation, and the aspect from which lessons are transferable to Flanders, has been the level of integration between scales that the degree of coordination and quality control that a number of complex planning and design tools has steered. The Communauté urbaine du Grand Lyon and the Agence d'urbanisme, has worked to create a series of innovative policies, overlapping plans and a series of strategic urban projects, each which strengthens more wide-reaching visions for France's second largest urban conurbation.

Policy & Politics, Plans & Projects

The Communauté urbaine de Lyon (COURLY, today known as Grand Lyon) was established in 1969 as an inter-municipality cooperation consortium that was limited to utilities and urban networks management issues (urban transport system, sewage, water) and has since progressively enlarged to more strategic and political issues (planning, housing, infrastructures), operating at the essential scale for the construction of visions and strategies. More recently, Grand Lyon (now with more than 50 communes) has developed a capacity to elaborate strategies and implement policies in the economic field. "The almost continuous production of visioning and planning documents since the 1960s at various scales (Grand Lyon and city region) has created not only a shared vision between policy makers, but also a kind of predictability of public policies that proved to be an efficient way to secure private investment."¹

In the 1980s, with decentralization of urban planning and economic development in France, Lyon began its ascent as an urban beacon under the guidance of the Gaullist mayor Michel Noir, who also was president of COURLY from 1989-1995. Together with Henry Chabert, the City alderman in charge of urban planning (1989-2000), he launched a series of policies

aiming at enhancing the urban quality (architectural and urban heritage valorization, regeneration of public spaces, flagship buildings) as means to favorably position Lyon in terms of urban competitiveness. The Schéma directeur Lyon 2010 was approved in 1992 (and has since had subsequent updates) and was a strategic document for the metropolitan area which sought to link urban, economic and social development based on strengthening Lyon's inherent ecologies and pioneering developments in infrastructure. Raymond Barre, and ex-Prime Minister, followed Noir as mayor and chief of COURLY in 1995 and continued a progressive program of internationalization, planning, infrastructure, culture and event development.

Historically, Lyon developed with a strong connection to its landscape—particularly its marked topography at the bottom of the hills that begin the Massif Central and two rivers, the Rhône (the river bracketed by bridges) and Saône (the curving river with buildings of varying heights along its urban trajectory). The textile industries developed on the slopes of la Croix Rousse and banks of the Saône, while chemistry settled along the Rhône in the south of Lyon. Suburban municipalities of the south and east Lyon host heavy industries and a rather poor working class population. The Agence d'urbanisme developed a territorial-scale Plan vert, which focused on the protection of natural and agricultural areas and Plan bleu, which requalified watersheds and river-banks. These two plans were fundamental for the (re) structuring of natural ecologies which, in turn, laid a foundation for the Plan de déplacements urbains. This plan reorganized public transportation, pedestrian and cycle circulation routes, with the goal of reducing the domination of the automobile. In addition, the Agence d'urbanisme created a number of specific plans that concern only parts of the conurbation and more precisely qualify the Plan d'occupation des sols, which establishes land use. The Plan Lumière deals with the enhancement of the nocturnal landscape and was developed primarily for monuments, buildings, streets, squares, promenades and parks, while the Plan Couleurs (imposed a palette of colors on buildings along the quays and large complexes) and the Zones du protection du patrimoine architectural urbain et paysager reinforce the identity of historical places, including the conservation of the city center (through a specific Plan Presqu'île). The Schéma

Today, the Museum aan de Stroom forms the provisional high point of a large-scale transformation involving the redevelopment of the entire Eilandje, a total of about 170 hectares.



Incremental urban development

The 'Eilandje' is both the northern spur of Antwerp's city centre and the most southerly, dilapidated part of the international port. The area derives its name from the large docks that surround 'eilanden' (islands) of mainland. For a long time, as well as being the home of generations of bargees and dockers, the Eilandje was a social hub for anyone who was involved in Antwerp's harbour, with its mix of bars, cafés, dancing clubs, all kinds of import and export businesses, warehouses and business premises of the worst sort.

When the harbour activities moved further north in the second half of the 20th century, the once bustling former harbour neighbourhood faded away and lost its status as a legitimate and at the same time disreputable destination in the port. A number of empty warehouses were given a second lease of life as cheap rehearsal studios and workshops for dancers, fashion designers, theatre-makers and architects and a few lost students from the arts academy lived among the remaining harbour workers in between the sex shops, discos and nightclubs. However, no one visited the area if they didn't have any business there. The abandoned buildings and general neglect resulted in the district's visible deterioration.

The area came to the authorities' attention again at the end of the 1980s. There was increasing interest in regenerating the former harbour district to create a mixed residential, work and recreational area that was inspired by imaginative foreign examples. This jump-started a long series of ambitious plans whose rather sluggish realisation was implemented in fits and starts. Today the MAS (Museum aan de Stroom) is the culmination of a large-scale transformation in which the Eilandje, a total of 170 hectares, is being systematically (re)developed from south to north. Besides a considerable number of additional homes, there are plans for

offices, business premises and all kinds of social and cultural facilities. The Eilandje's urban project also pays particular attention to creating public spaces and incorporating the project into the existing, historically evolved urban fabric.

The first seeds of the project were sown at the end of the 1980s by a small group of active Antwerp citizens who launched the idea of the 'Stad aan de Stroom' (City on the River). The simplicity of their goal was matched by its innovativeness at that time: to demonstrate that the abandoned harbour district offered unique opportunities for a city like Antwerp. Instead of classifying the area as a 'disadvantaged' urban district, the 'Stad aan de Stroom' npo was convinced that on the contrary it could play a key role in the city's socio-economic recovery. This bottom-up initiative was a turning point in the perception of Antwerp as a metropolis and of the Eilandje in particular and culminated in 1993 when Antwerp was chosen as the Cultural Capital of Europe. In 1994 the local authorities brought the 'Stad aan de Stroom' mandate to an abrupt end and cut off its financing because of differences of opinion. However, despite this abrupt end the case for the 'Stad aan de Stroom' formed a powerful antidote to the former urban gloom (fed by the considerable turnout of the extreme right in Antwerp) and sluggish planning processes at the time. One of the most visible results of 'Stad aan de Stroom' is the urban design created by Manuel de Solà Morales for the competition for the Eilandje. De Solà Morales' central idea is a structural axis that knits the historical centre, the Falconplein, the Schipperskwartier, the Nassau Bridge and finally the Dry Dock Island to the Eilandje, creating a continuous public space. This basic concept continued to recur as a key theme in the many plans that followed.

At the end of the 1990s the local authorities appointed René Daniels as project leader for the Eilandje. Daniels had earned his stripes as project leader for

the regeneration of the Kop van Zuid in Rotterdam. His company, Buro 5 Maastricht, developed the master plan for the Eilandje in 2000. Over the next few years this master plan was expanded and a Visual Quality Plan for the Outdoor Space (by Atelier JPLX, landscape architect Michel Desvigne and Rob Cuyvers), an Architectural Visual Quality Plan (by Atelier JPLX), a Water Plan (by Urhahn Urban design and Rob Vrolijkx), a Green Plan (by Michel Desvigne) and a Spatial Implementation Plan (RUP) were added one by one. In the 2006 Strategic Spatial Structural Plan (s-RSA), drawn up for Antwerp by Bernardo Secchi and Paola Viganò, the Eilandje was incorporated as a strategic programme within the so-called 'hard spine' of the city's metropolitan axis, along which strategically chosen projects would reinforce the link with the Scheldt. As a result of this continuous zooming in and out, the design for the Eilandje became a whole network of plans that interacted with each other on different scale levels. The strategic vision for the city resonated as much in the tailor-made urban plans as in the architectural design of the buildings and public spaces. Each concrete achievement also served as a test for the durability of the vision as a whole.

What makes the Eilandje unique is that it is just as much a part of the harbour as it is of the city. This unique characteristic means that the harbour district was already urban in its very beginnings. In contrast to other port cities such as Rotterdam and London, where neither capital nor effort was spared in linking the harbour districts with the historical centre, the Eilandje has traditionally been a natural part of the urban fabric. At the same time this ambiguity created constant tension between economic interests involved in harbour regeneration and interests in urban development, which are always multiple. This manifests itself especially where the ownership of land is concerned. At one point the Eilandje was in the hands of the city council and then reverted back to the harbour. When urban land on the Eilandje was transferred to the Port Authorities in 1998 to enhance the value of the Pension Fund (and to compensate for historically accrued debts), this blocked any urban redevelopment for years to come. This was not for lack of plans! They just never got off the ground. Not even René Daniels' attempt was successful, although it featured a long-term strategy for the Eilandje's development that would be spread over a period of twenty-five years, during which the city council, the Flemish Region, the harbour and the private sector would each invest one million euro a year. Urban ambitions repeatedly clashed with the Port Authority's

pursuit of profit maximisation. The one notable and successful attempt at a public-private partnership (PPP) at the time was the development of six high-rise blocks of flats along the Kattendijk Dock, designed by a throng of internationally renowned architects such as Diener & Diener, David Chipperfield and Gigon & Guyer; at the time of writing the first two blocks have been built.

Things only started moving again after the new mayor was elected, since he put urban regeneration at the top of the political agenda, and the appointment of a new councillor responsible for the harbour, who was prepared to leave the Eilandje's management to the city council. The solution for the Eilandje was secured in a dual development strategy. On the one hand the city itself would be developed: subsequently it would purchase land and property from the Port Authorities through the Autonomous Municipal Department for Property and Urban Projects in Antwerp (AG Vespa) (at market prices) and projects such as the MAS, the St Felix Warehouse and the Red Star Line Museum could be carried out. On the other hand the Port Authority would put its land and property on the market in a controlled manner and in close consultation with the city council. This would enable the city council to have considerable influence on the Eilandje's development. The best example of this is the Cadix district. With innovative planning instruments such as the Visual Quality Plan, an Architectural Policy Document, a Sustainability Master Plan and a Socio-Spatial Vision Policy Document at its disposal, the city council can impose ambitious conditions on the private developers or social housing companies that would actually be responsible for the development. Because the city council would be in charge, the proceeds from the land could be systematically used to invest in the public domain. Finally, it is the most appropriate way to manage social housing policy. By imposing additional conditions, such as the creation of additional social housing and giving priority to people who already live on the Eilandje or who have a connection with the harbour, the city can control the dreaded negative effects of social displacement caused by soaring property prices.

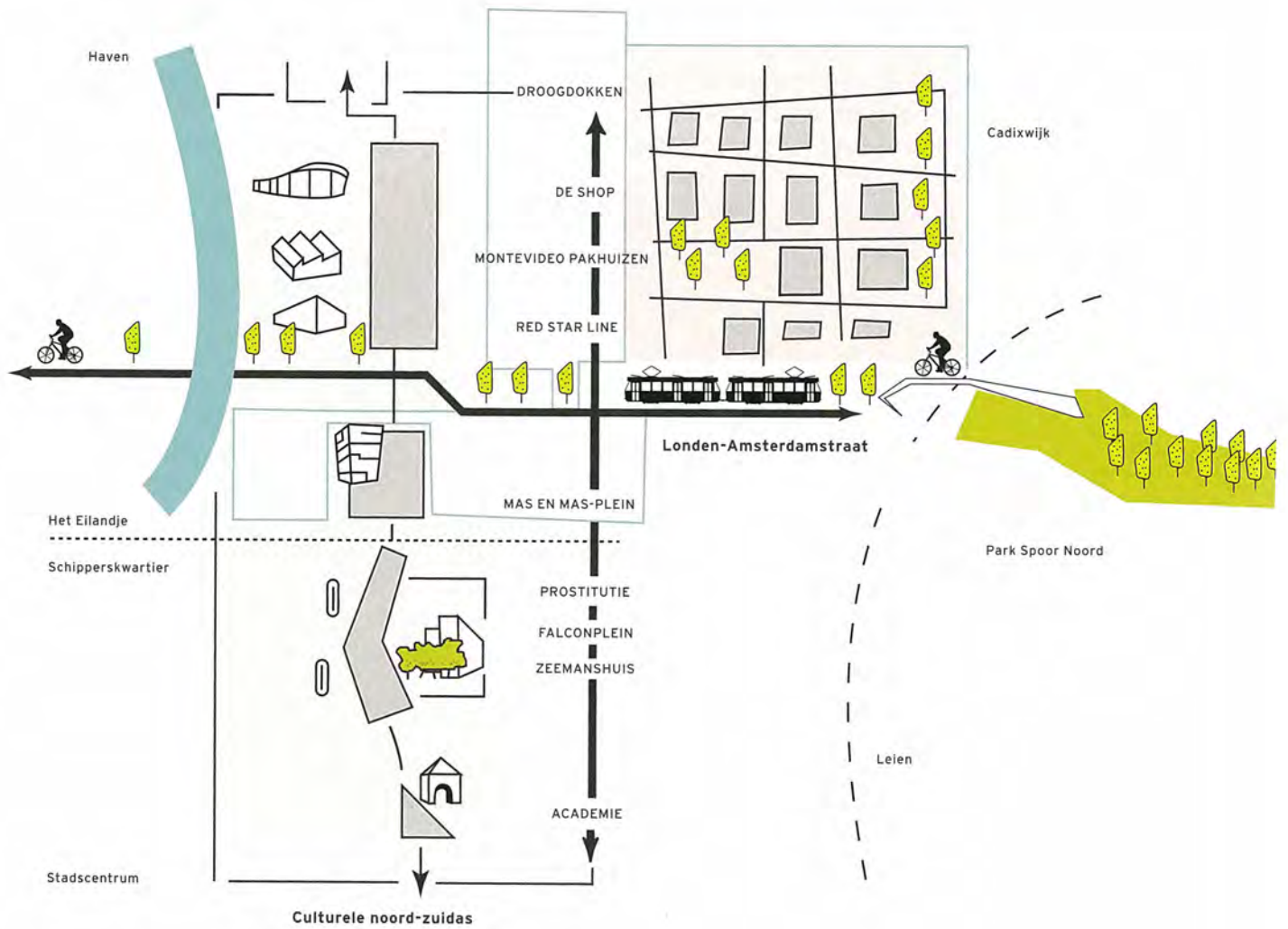
The MAS is the Eilandje's most striking feature. The sculptural tower designed by Neutelings Riedijk architects excels in its role as a photogenic logo for the city. A major marketing campaign for the museum's opening resulted in a prodigious rediscovery of the Eilandje. Until then the impact and visibility of the developments had been rather limited. The construction



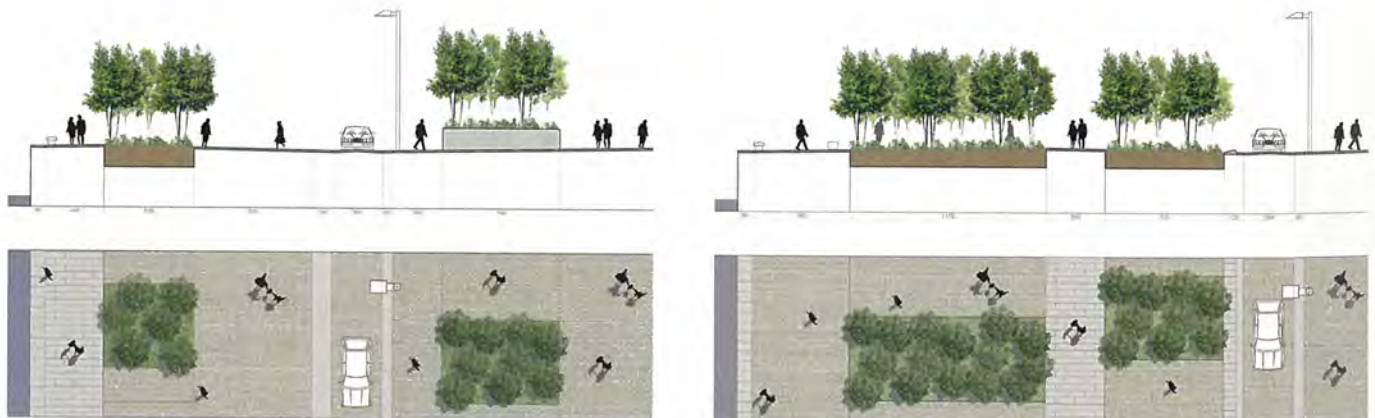
View over the city from the public roof terrace of the MAS. The former port area has long been part and parcel of the urban fabric.



On the Kattendijkdok six tower blocks will appear, designed by internationally renowned architects.



— Schematic representation of the two connecting axes of the Eilandje. The forecourt of the MAS marks the intersection of the north-south axis that connects the city to the harbour, and the east-west axis, which will eventually string together the Scheldt quays, the Eilandje and Park Spoor Noord.



Michel Desvigne and Bas Smets devised a Green Plan for the Eilandje. Groups of trees will appear along the quays. The number and density of these clusters will create a huge impact, without consuming large parts of the outdoor space. © Michel Desvigne



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Master-plan by municipal architect René Daniëls
in association with Atelier JPLX, 2004.

- 1 MAS
- 2 Godefridus Quay
- 3 Sint-Felix warehouse
- 4 Willemdok
- 5 Italiëlei
- 6 Noorderlaan
- 7 Scheldt
- 8 Amsterdamstraat
- 9 Londenstraat
- 10 Montevideo quarter
- 11 Tower blocks
- 12 Kattendijkdok
- 13 Cadixwijk
- 14 Kempischdok
- 15 Houtdok
- 16 Dry dock island
- 17 Mexico island



Robbrecht and Daem Architects transformed the Sint-Felix warehouse into municipal archives.



The MAS was almost immediately and unanimously embraced.

of a luxury marina in the Willem Dock, the redevelopment of the Godefridus Quay to a design by landscape architect Michel Desvigne, the first high-rise blocks of flats by Diener and Diener architects along the Kattendijk Dock, the stunning conversion of the St Felix Warehouse into the Municipal Archives: as a result of publicity surrounding the MAS they were suddenly hurled into the spotlight of a true media assault. What is remarkable is that the MAS was quite rapidly and unanimously embraced. While similar foreign projects were often received with conflicting reactions and at times (rightly) dismissed as cultural prestige projects that offered little added value to the neighbourhood or its residents, in this case a sense of collective pride prevailed. This may be partly due to the support that was patiently and steadily created by 'Stad aan de Stroom' and Antwerp 93.

The MAS as a building, and above all Neutelings Riedijk's flamboyant architecture, is particularly at home in its setting on the Eilandje. The large docks create the optimum distance and reflection so that 'our girl', as the tower is called in popular speech, can be admired from all sides. Inside, a monumental boulevard leads visitors to the top floor, viewing changing panoramas of the city as they go. The promenade and roof terrace act as an extension of Antwerp's public space, open and freely accessible until midnight. The museum collection is housed in a series of 'black boxes', stacked on top of each other, where the visitor is invited to discover the hidden treasures of Antwerp's history. The qualitative and strategic creation of the public space firmly anchors the museum in its environment. The artist Luc Tuymans designed a custom-made mosaic for the MAS forecourt, which marks the intersection between the north-south axis (the 'Falcon-Nassau' axis from the Manuel de Solà Morales project or the 'soft spine' from the Secchi & Viganò structural plan) and the east-west axis which in time will connect the Scheldt Quays, the Eilandje and the Spoor Noord Park. At the Eilandje, the east-west axis takes on the appearance of a 'green boulevard' with a new tramline and wide paths for cycling and pedestrians. This axis also interweaves the former isolated harbour districts (the Old Docks, the Montevideo district and the Cadix district) and forms the future commercial centre of the new urban residential area on the Eilandje.

A stone's throw from the MAS, along the urban north-south axis to the historical city centre, lies the Schipperskwartier with its red light district. To the uninitiated visitor this may give the impression that

the urban regeneration project has overlooked this particular neighbourhood, but this is far from the truth. This area's 'improvement' and regeneration dates back to just before the first developments on the Eilandje. For years this area, with the Falconplein at its epicentre, was known as one of the city's most problematic neighbourhoods. In the 1980s the age-old red light district fell into a downward spiral: shop-front prostitution was controlled by international criminal networks, trade was dominated by the Mafia-controlled sale of counterfeit goods and a lack of public and private investment resulted in the built-up area rapidly deteriorating. With a comprehensive approach and targeted policies the area is now habitable once again: the fraudulent trade has been eradicated and shop-front prostitution is now subject to strict conditions and limited to three streets. In the meantime, plans for the Schipperskwartier function as a trial project in terms of integrated socio-spatial policy. A number of innovative participatory projects were set up in which partnerships were sought with the area's current and future residents and users. For example, contact was established with mediators in the prostitution sector, but also with project developers who had plans for the neighbourhood or with new residents who had just bought or built a house there. Cooperation between the various council services provided innovative policy instruments such as 'renovation contracts' whereby grants were awarded for renovation work that represented visible added value for the area. The Falconplein, the former hub of informal trade, was redeveloped to a design by West 8. The designers transformed the grey concrete expanse into a trendy, predominantly pedestrian urban space. The plane trees that have been planted obliquely, combined with the monumental benches and the reconstructed square, which was draped over the road surface like an undulating carpet, contrast sharply (at the moment) with the surrounding multifarious facades. Here you can find night-shops next to cheap snack bars and trendy bars with graffiti-sprayed shutters. AG Vespa's new housing projects around the square should once more make the area attractive for residents. Rather than opting for the area's corrective improvement, which would only have transferred its problems, in the Schipperskwartier a deliberate choice was made for a sustainable, progressive and integral approach. In this way the urban north-south axis was not reduced to a themed, polished tourist attraction, but was transformed into a public space in the true sense of the word, which provides social contrasts and different aspects of urbanisation.

“The economic crisis was more of a blessing than a curse for the Eilandje. Thanks to the crisis, the Eilandje gained a bit of breathing space. The redevelopment of such an historic harbour area takes time. The building frenzy at the beginning of the 21st century resulted in a huge amount of demolition. Because everything then suddenly slowed down, there is now a better mix of old and new. That was after all a key principle of the Master-Plan.”

Filip Smits — AG Stadsplanning, project leader for Eilandje, Antwerp



The health clinic for prostitutes is a symbol of the city's integrated social and spatial policy.



West 8 transformed the grey asphalt surface of the Falconplein into a sleek urban space with inclined plane trees.

The level of difficulty encountered in communication on the demolition of the Seamen's Home matched the level of success achieved in participation during the initial stages of the Schipperskwartier redevelopment. Just like the rest of the Schipperskwartier, the Seamen's Home is a significant legacy from the harbour's glorious past. The fact that fewer and fewer sailors stay ashore meant that the complex had lost its function. The Flemish Government Architect's Open Call led to the selection of Rapp+Rapp architects' design, in which the old Seamen's Home was to be demolished; this led to a very heated discussion on conservation versus demolition. While those opposed to the demolition viewed the Seamen's Home as an important symbol of harbour history, a beautiful piece of maritime architecture and a social and cultural cornerstone for the neighbourhood, supporters of its demolition saw the strange, problematic urban design setting (an open campus model in a semi-open complex), the poor quality of the open space and limited possibilities for its conversion. The 'Save the Seamen's Home' campaigns resulted in considerable delays in the development process. However, the architects still felt it was their duty to present the project to the neighbourhood and other interested parties, but without wanting to create false expectations. The basic principles were not abandoned; these included the demolition of the Seamen's Home and the restoration of the historical and spatial structure of the complex, in which the inner area is divided into four inner courtyards. Though after consultation with the neighbourhood a number of new priorities and concerns were taken into consideration when developing the master plan, such as the public character of the inner courtyards, the preservation of the social and cultural function of the area and the fear of a loss of sunlight to homes in the adjacent street.

In the meantime it appeared that people in Antwerp were beginning to appreciate the importance of participation. The hangover that resulted from the controversial project for the Oosterweel link, a prestigious double-decker bridge across Antwerp harbour, has still not been fully digested. Plans for the viaduct's construction (which would also have had a detrimental impact on the regeneration of the adjacent Eilandje) were halted as a result of campaigns by local residents and action groups that included a public referendum. On the other hand there are a number of recent positive examples in Antwerp that involve a lot of work on intensive participation, such as the 'De kaaien op tafel' project, as a result of plans for the rebuilding of the Scheldt Quays and the participation project involving

the redevelopment of the Groot Schijn Park in Deurne, which involved innovative joint ventures with local residents and associations. However, on the Eilandje most of the participation processes are still at the stage of 'increasing the level of support' or drumming up interest and marketing campaigns. Nevertheless, this still creates valuable initiatives such as the youth projects starting with the 'MAS in Young Hands' venture. However, initiatives that take things further and which start with the opportunities and possibilities already available in the neighbourhood are also needed. Following advice from the Flemish Urban Policy jury, work began on an alternative, complementary approach that was less top down focused. In collaboration with the social geographer Maarten Loopmans, a socio-spatial vision policy document is being formulated. With the help of council grants, a local association called 'the A-landers' was set up and experiments are being carried out on additional projects such as temporary allotments or a pop-up bar. They are all initiatives that focus on mental ownership of the Eilandje, primarily by the residents themselves.

The impact of the MAS on the Eilandje's regeneration as a whole is undeniable. This is not just illustrated in the Eilandje's mass rediscovery. Hospitality businesses are shooting up like mushrooms and the number of individual and private development initiatives has increased significantly. One side-effect is soaring property prices. The time when less fortunate artists could find a home or studio here has gone forever. However, the economic crisis did reduce the pressure to some extent. This enabled the Eilandje to escape an all too ruthless surge of investment. The valuable but not always protected heritage has been largely preserved and the Eilandje's further development is expanding step by step. Partly thanks to project grants from the Flemish Urban Policy body for the MAS Museum square, the redevelopment of the Falconplein and Seamen's Home site and the project for the north-south and east-west axes, a number of strategic aspects of the Eilandje and Schipperkwartier developments as a whole can be used to reinforce the axes and important hubs and the spatial imbedding of previously separate parts of the city. Apart from the completion of the aforementioned projects, the programme includes many more plans for the near future, including the development of the Dry Docks Island with a new Dry Docks Park, the Cadix district, the Water Plan, the Red Star Line Museum, the construction of a new Port House to a design by Zaha Hadid, etc.



In their design, Rapp + Rapp restore the historic and spatial structure of the block of buildings. Four public courtyards lend structure to the site.

© Rapp + Rapp



The Zeemanshuis is a piece of heritage steeped in significance from the past of this illustrious port, but will be demolished.

“The protest against the demolition of the Zeemanshuis helped to keep a number of key items on the agenda. That’s an advantage. Public access to the inner courtyards and the establishment of sufficient public facilities are justifiable concerns among residents. When such projects are implemented, there is often a real danger of them becoming offices and flats with private inner areas. As far as I’m concerned, protest is often the best quality controller. It ensures that attention in the city remains focused.”

Kitty Haine — AG City Planning, Antwerp

The project for the Eilandje is the very opposite of 'instant urban planning', whereby everything is redeveloped at once and following strict market logic, which is so common in the Netherlands. Partly as a result of the economic crisis, a rather incremental urban planning approach is underway in Antwerp. While it steadily progresses, at the same time it allows time for modifications, fine-tuning and improvement.

Despite frustrations resulting from this long process, and especially the periods when the process came to a complete standstill, the sometimes winding trajectory that has been followed (as much in time as in space), has established the fundamental principles for a rich and diverse urban fabric, in which various development paradigms lie hidden from the careful observer.



Dead Skull. Luc Tuymans made a mosaic for the Museum square of the MAS.



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The site of the former Military Hospital has been transformed into a residential area with a mix of 'affordable' market-compliant social housing and large areas of green public space. Some of the social housing is situated next to the northern entrance.

The enclave opens up to the neighbourhood

Until a few years ago the site of the Military Hospital in Antwerp was a secret part of the city. Now that the demolition ball has done its job and partly destroyed the high wall around it, the entire area it used to conceal has suddenly become part of the street scene, and it feels rather strange — it's as if a new part of the city has suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

The former military site is an area occupying 7.8 hectares within Antwerp's 19th-century ramparts. The site's exceptional scale, combined with its central location close to the city's ring-road and Berchem station, make it a superb location for urban renewal. Nevertheless for more than ten years after the military had left the site remained untouched.

In 2003 Antwerp's local authority acquired the site and subsequently put it back on the market in the form of a 'conditional sale'. The conditions involved a number of guidelines and ambitions that the local authorities harboured for the area. In the first instance these concerned the development of a housing estate in which considerable emphasis was to be put on homes for diverse specific target groups. One particular requirement was that the development had to include at least 25% social housing and 40% 'affordable housing'. This resulted in a heated political debate surrounding the social mix. Not everyone agreed that social housing should be grouped on the outskirts. The city council also required there to be sufficient good-quality green public spaces and a public path running through the complex. A competition was launched which was open to both project developers and architects. What was unique about this public-private joint venture is that the fixed asking price of ten million euro was established at the very beginning. This meant that when the project was finally allocated, the bid played less of a role and the focus remained on the projects' ambitions.

The winning project was submitted by the Vanhaerents-Wilma-Beel consortium and Achtergael Architects. The project developers enrolled a team of urban planners, architects and landscape architects to work on the design: Stéphane Beel and Lieven Achtergael Architects, 360 Architects, Huiswerk, uapS and Michel Desvigne. All the listed historical buildings in the central part of the complex were given a new use. The hospital pavilions were renovated, fitted with balconies and converted into lofts; extra floors were added to the elongated north-south building, which was subsequently divided into flats; the general staff building will be converted into offices and service flats, and the former chapel will become a gourmet restaurant. The eastern part, which housed the former arsenal, would make way for 73 ground-floor terraced houses and three new 'park apartment buildings' will be constructed in the western part. This provides an effective mix of historical and new builds with diverse housing classifications ranging from spacious lofts and duplex penthouses to traditional terraced houses with gardens which, due to their strategic location, also provide a varied interconnection with public and private outdoor spaces. Rather than opting for one central, green open space with a large number of new houses built around it, the designers deliberately chose to design the site as an interconnected series of 'park rooms' that both link to and merge into one another.

However, the real ingenuity of the Military Hospital design lies in its treatment of the perimeter, whose form defines the erratic outlines of the rear side (and inner side) of the complex, which constantly changes: consisting partly of prominent remnants of the surrounding wall, private back gardens, rear facades (some blank, some not) etc. The designers did not try to mask the strange but characteristic perimeter, but attempted to make the most of its attributes. They developed different strategies in response to

“The current DBFM set-ups (design-build-finance-maintenance) often leave a lot to be desired, particularly in the long term. Local councils often fail to negotiate hard enough and with sufficient expertise on the division of rights and responsibilities. They ask for too little in return for public investments. In the end the costs end up at the door of the public sector. The Military Hospital in Antwerp is a good example of how it can be done. The city left aside the ‘F’ (finance). It sold the whole area at a fixed price, and made the sale conditional on a number of items, such as a minimum percentage of public space and a real integration of council housing.”

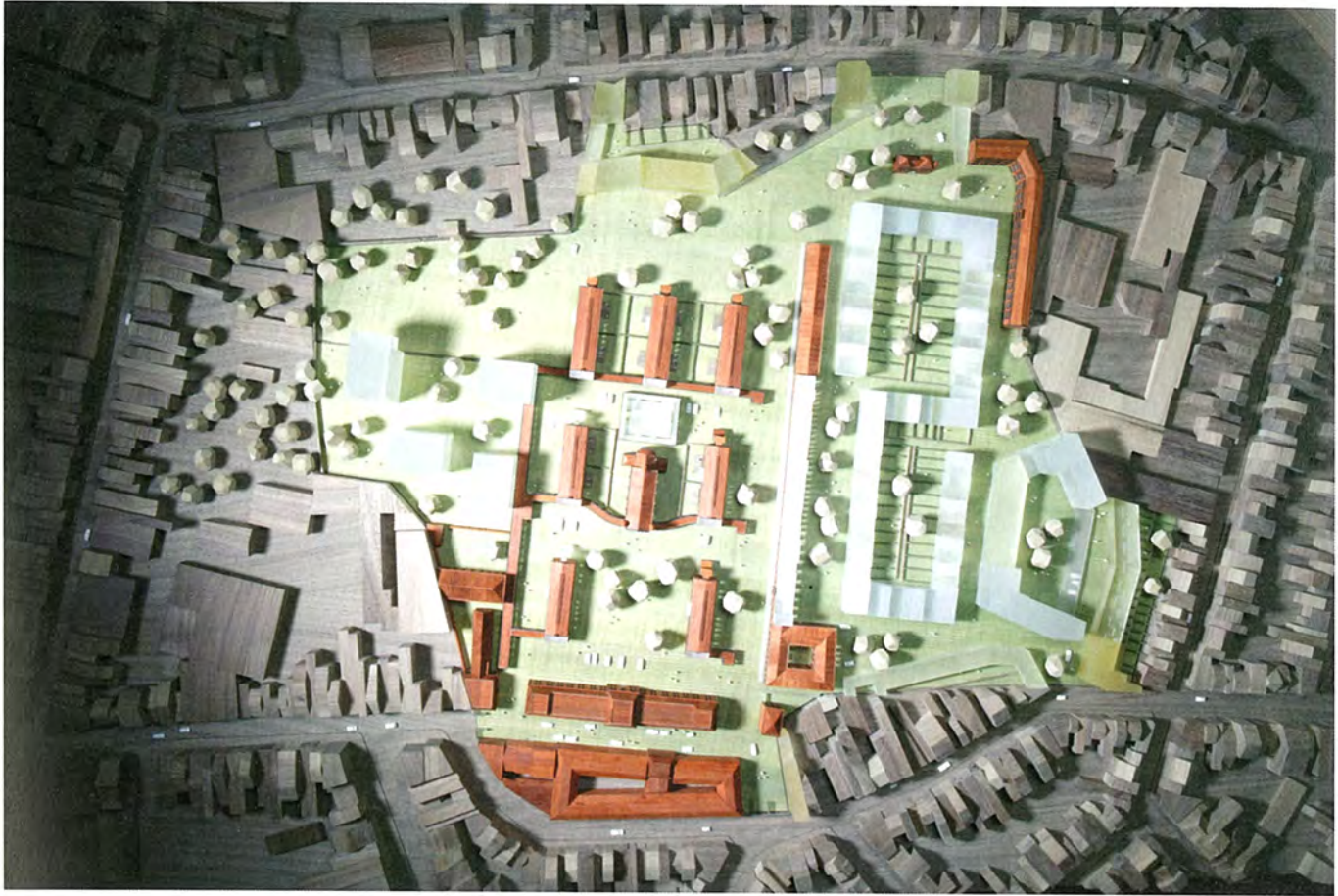
Linda Boudry — director of Knowledge Centre for Flemish Cities



In the central section all the listed historic buildings are given a facelift. Additional floors are provided on the roof.



The former chapel now houses a gourmet restaurant.



Model of the project. The former enclave opens up into the surrounding neighbourhoods.

© Stéphane Beel en Lieven Achtergael Architecten,
360 Architecten, Huiswerk, uapS, Michel Desvigne



A mix of historic and new building units has emerged with a variety of housing typologies. In the foreground the renovated hospital pavilion; at the rear the new units with 'park apartments'.

© Beel - Achtergael Architects, 360 Architects, Huiswerk, uapS, Michel Desvigne

the underlying pattern of ownership, possibilities for creating access and potential added spatial value. These included extending the gardens of existing labourers' cottages in Van Luppenstraat, which were connected in positive way to the gardens of the new houses on the Military Hospital site. They left sufficient distance in front of the wall that backs on to the former costume workshop which the Vespa independent municipal company converted into a nursery. This means that another new path can be created through the neighbourhood and residents of the Military Hospital site benefit from childcare facilities close by. There will also be access via Lamorinièrestraat. Looking to the future and intelligently anticipating possibilities for the expansion of the complex as a whole ensures that the site's expansion and integration into the neighbourhood will in no circumstances come under threat.

The redevelopment of the former military site into a contemporary urban residential area is not without risk. The greatest danger is that the area will become

a 'gated community': exclusively focused on and accessible to the limited group of residents who are able to secure a house or flat there. Partly due to the fact that it acquired the site, Antwerp city council has been able to make its mark on the project and, at the insistence of the jury of the urban renewal fund, has provided additional access points that connect the site to the surrounding neighbourhoods. The design has also responded to this danger by making the site almost entirely car-free and by maximising the public character of the 'park rooms'. The car-free nature of the site, combined with the new pathways through it, ensures that ease of access to the site is maximised. As the new houses do not have direct access to the 'park rooms', this will prevent the key green spaces being totally monopolised by new residents. Everything possible is being done to transform the formerly isolated, barely visible and inaccessible enclave into a new, open urban district so that it can once more be incorporated into and embraced by the neighbourhood



The city made the sale conditional on a number of issues, such as sufficient high-quality green public space and a public passage through the block. © Beel - Achtergael Architects, 360 Architects.

Huiswerk, uapS, Michel Desvigne