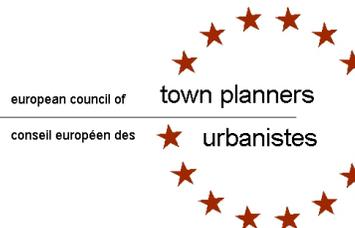




**Chambre des Urbanistes de
Belgique - CUB**



EUROPE-BRUSSELS, an urban project
Can the presence of the European Institutions in Brussels be used by the city
in an urban project on the local scale as on the regional scale?

ISOCARP - European Council of Spatial Planners (ECTP) - Chambres des Urbanistes (CUB)
Young Planning Professionals' Programme
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on the occasion of the 43rd ISOCARP Planning Congress, Antwerp, 2007

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Ambition of the workshop

As described below a lot of studies have already been made for the European Quarter and a lot will follow. The workshop did not aim to make a completely new study to add to this list.

Instead this workshop just wanted to test the results of three days of thinking by people from abroad, not familiar with the site or without the time to really get into it.

By presenting the results of the workshop, the subject of the European Area was put again on the Agenda of Urban Planners, at least the once participating in the ISOCARP Congress.



Bruno Clerbaux gives the introduction at the Berlaymont Building

The workshop site: the European Quarter in Brussels

The European area in Brussels is the site where the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament is located. In its immediate surroundings a lot of services connected to these institutes are accommodated, like embassies, cultural institutions, lobby groups, lawyers and all kind of consultancy groups.

Workshop themes

The two groups choose different themes to work on the site. One group focuses more on public space, while the other group worked more on a regional scale and mobility.

1. Theme Euroscape linked in
2. Theme Play Grid

Workshop assignment

Present the strategies for the European Quarter to the participants of the ISOCARP Congress 2007.

The European Area / Current planning context

Initially the area was a very homogeneous 19th century housing area, built up by regular building blocks and singular houses.

Since the 50ties almost every piece has been modified into offices, which today results in an area without atmosphere, architectural expression, identity, urbanity.

Lots of urban planning discussions and studies have already been made for this area:

- 'Brussels, Capital of Europe, final report' in 2001 for the European Commission by Umberto Eco and Rem Koolhaas,
- 'Schéma directeur du quartier Léopold-Schuman a Bruxelles, "recréer l'urbanité"' in November 2001 for the Ministère des Communications et de l'infrastructure by Bruno Clerbaux,
- Richtlijnen Brussel-Europa in May 2002 for Het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest by Agora,
- The Ombudsplan by Benoit Moritz,
- and some theoretical studies, published in
- 'Change, Brussels Capital of Europe', Prisme Editions, 2004 by Knopes L. and Claisse J.
- '-Brussels- A Manifesto towards the Capital of Europe', Berlage Institute/ NAI Publishers, 2005 by Aureli P.V. and Patteeuw V.

Actually the Brussels Region developed an urban project for the area. They will develop the area according to this plan during the next years. Lately an urban design competition for the Rue de la Loi was won by the French architect Christian de Portzamparc.

Group 1: Euroscape linked in

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Aysegul Altinors Cirak (Turkey)

Bart Steenwegen (Belgium)

Text written by Bart Steenwegen and Ana Maria Alvarez Gomez

1. Assignment

Focus on the local scale and public space

2. Observations/vision/strategy/action

2a Observations

connectivity? signification? public good? urbanity? identity? activities? 24h use? representation?

If it was not for the imposing Berlaymont building, it is difficult to realize that one is walking along the heart of Europe. It is more a problematic crossroads for cars and an insecure place for pedestrians, than the center where the most important institutions of the European Union are located. Everything seems to exist by chance: a street that leads to the city core – which is most a freeway; a few buildings in deterioration; a big park that disconnects its surroundings rather than acting as a subtle connector. As part of Brussels' urban fabric, the European Quarter is an area strongly connected to its surroundings by primary roads, but completely disconnected as for continuity of activities and persons' flow. Few pedestrians meet: the lack of services at street level, the cars' noise, and the absence of uses different from the governmental institutions, make this place not desirable to walk around and with a life limited to working hours.

2b Vision

2b-1 euroscape 'linked in'

The project proposes to use 'public spaces as a tool for urban enhancement'.

Just by improving the public space in the area the buildings can get connected better to each other, as well as to public spaces.

In general you can discern the street pattern of the grid, two squares, two main arteries (Rue de la Loi and Belliard), the Luxembourg Park, the Jubilee Park, the esplanade in front of the European Parliament, the Schuman roundabout, the soft link of the Maelbeek valley, the square Jan Rey, the Jourdan square.

The concept proposes one Euroscape in the form of a green banana. This public space consists of the esplanade of the European Parliament, the uncovered railway track, the Schuman roundabout and a part of the Jubilee Park.

2b-2 'puzzle'

This concept looks at the urban grid as a puzzle with different pieces.

At the moment the functions in the area are rather homogeneous. The majority of the area consists of offices, and also some activities linked to this, like bars, restaurants, pubs. Some housing can be found, but the area is not known as a lively or nice neighbourhood to live in.

Since the European renovated the Berlaymont building a lot of office space is not rented any more. The project proposes to exchange these pieces of the area with other elements to make the area more urban. These are the different colours in the scheme. These new activities can link the neighbourhood – in a programmatic way – to the rest of the city.

2c Strategy

The strategy was a pragmatic approach. In this context it seemed a good exercise not to try to solve urban problems on a higher level, but just to look at the actual existing situation.

The project would then define concrete solutions on the site itself. In the idea of the concept 'euroscape linked in' the workshop looked at the way to give more quality to the urban space.

An analysis of the vehicular problems of the area was done and also an analysis of the underground system of the Schuman Roundabout. All of this is extremely complex and loads of studies have been done on these cases alone.

The workshop just tried to analyse the site in a very specific and pragmatic way, trying to find a clear answer.

2d Action

2-d-1 Schuman Roundabout

situation

The Schuman roundabout is situated on the one hand between the building of the European Commission and the Council of ministers and on the other hand between the Jubilee Park and the Street of Law. This street functions as a main entrance to Brussels and looks more like a highway than an urban boulevard. On the level of mobility the local problem is situated on a regional level and cannot be solved just like this. The project looked at the site in a pragmatic way: which space is actually used by the cars and which spaces could be used in another way.

analysis

With the analysis it became clear that only one lane was used for the connection between the roundabout and the Street of Law. The taxis occupied almost half of the surface, because all taxis were parked there. A lot of space could just not be used because of bad design.

design

Therefore the conclusion was to keep only one lane, a smaller place for the taxis. All the rest can be used again as public space. The main parking of the taxis could be situated somewhere else.

Furthermore there also was the possibility to cover the exit of the tunnel that leads into the Street of Law. All this together creates a lot of new possibilities.



2d-2 Railway

situation

Between the esplanade and the Schuman Roundabout there is a building block, cut through by an uncovered railway track. At both sides of this railway some very beautiful 19th century houses remain. They are leftovers from the original 19th century development of the area, that has been wiped away since the 60ties.

analysis

The actual situation creates a paradox. At both sides (Schuman and Luxembourg Station) everything has been replaced by giant institutional constructions. In a way it is very interesting that some bourgeois houses are still remaining. The problem is the relation they have with each other.

The area that can be used to connect the major European Institutions runs through the backyard of these charming relicts of the bourgeois 19th century.

Bart Steenwegen describes this situation in his paper and uses the metaphor of the Collision city for Brussels and more specific for the European Area.

design

For the site of the uncovered railway track there are in general two solutions.

(1)The first one is to make a landscape design that improves the pedestrian connection between the esplanade and Schuman. This design should also add a certain identity to the connection.

For a landscape design competition this could be a very interesting project.

(2)The second one is a more radical one. One could say that the remaining 19th century houses have become a strange object in this area. Once the city administration and politicians decided to clear away everything in this area, but these houses survived for a strange reason. Instead of being conservative one could decide to continue the dynamics of the area, but this time to really improve urban quality and not just to gain money. In this scenario the whole site could be developed again. The idea is that the railway track has to be covered. The profit made by the new constructions at both sides could be used to pay for this.



2d-3 Esplanade

situation

The esplanade is the space between the buildings of the European Parliament.

analysis

This space exists as a result of the covering of the railway tracks. It has never been conceived as a public space.

The building of the European Parliament has almost no connection to the street and the main corridors are in the interior. As a result the esplanade is a vast empty space, covered by ugly tiles.

One gets a very uncomfortable feeling by walking through this area.

A previous proposal of the Ombudsplan suggested to close this space and to just make an interior garden of it. Recent developments by developers have made this option impossible.

design

Our project proposes using contemporary landscape design to make the place attractive again.



2d-4 The Jubilee Park

situation

At the centre of the Jubilee Park there is an uncovered part of a car tunnel.

analysis

If you drive by car you get some interesting perspective.

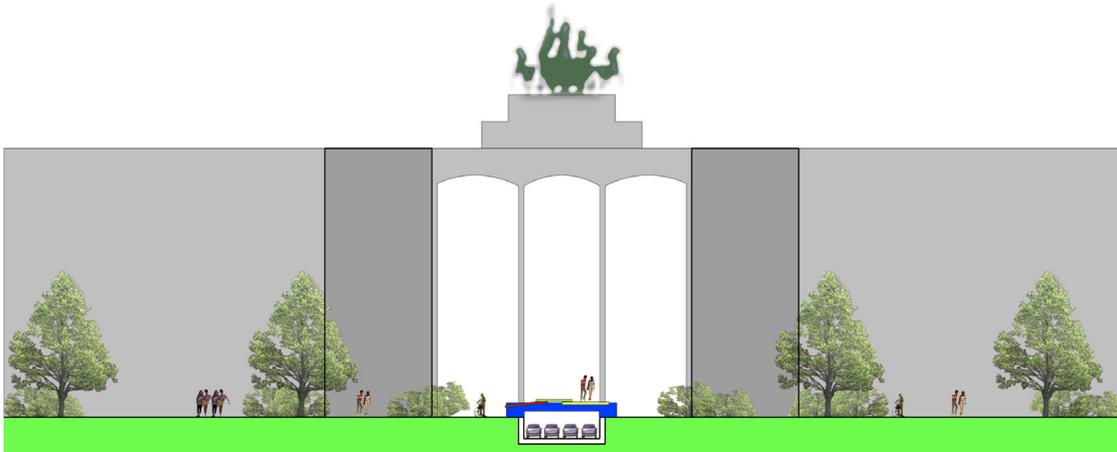
From the level of the Jubilee Park it is very strange to have these cars driving through the centre.

They produce smell, sound and definitively a physical barrier...

design

The covering of this tunnel might be a good opportunity to insert some contemporary landscape design at the centre of this park. It also could contain a piece of art.

At the same time it can be linked to the identity of the European Institutions.



2d-5 European walkways

The European walkways should be there to make it easier for people to connect different places and buildings to each other. At the entrance of each building a panel might be installed with a description about the activities of each institution. The walkway should be indicated in a clear way, so people find their way very easily.

Group 2: Play Grid

Nadya Nilena (USA)

Mohamed Abdelhamied (Sudan)

Jean Yves Schijns (Belgium)

Text written by Nadya Nilena

We were a small group. The three of us, defined by places as different as Sudan and Russia, cultures and beliefs spanning the globe, came together in Brussels to give a fresh look to the European headquarters. Headquarters we expected to represent the same kind of diversity we brought together as individuals.

Instead we found an agglomeration of buildings that could be located anywhere, with no particular identity or memorable quality. If not for the occasional signs we could barely distinguish if each structure was a hotel, prison or an office building. In the fine-grain fabric of Brussels, with its pretty streets and delicately nuanced facades, we saw a ruthlessly cut-through highway, straddled by massive defensive buildings contributing no more than a wind tunnel effect to the street life of the quarter.

We anticipated a district steeped in pride, designed to welcome different nations in its center, one that would inform us of the great achievements of the European civilization and its institutions, a modern-day agora where great minds meet to debate the future. Instead, we found the environment that could be described as nothing but alienating.

We were given three days to redefine the quarter, to breathe new life into its comatose, nine to five setting, dead after workers go home, utilitarian as a post-office stripped of its the pre-internet pride.

We tried to imagine, what it would be like to come here to celebrate European diversity within the now borderless unity, the potential and the optimism of the New Europe. We asked ourselves how we could transform the space so it would transmit the principles embraced by the EU. We contemplated the values and larger ideas propagated by the new European institutions, the concepts associated with them. We thought of democracy, equal opportunity, openness, broad spectrum of social participation in political life, environmental conservation, cultural and historic diversity embraced by the EU. We also considered what it was that we loved about other great European cities. And in that thinking we found a solution, evolving like the Europe itself.

We turned opaque, lifeless facades into interactive, transparent plasma screens capable of responding to the curious child's touch, answering questions, showing what is going on within buildings, allowing people to partake in the debates, showcasing history and present of Europe and its aspirations for the future. We usurped the space of the highway for public parks and promenades, cut through the asphalt to the underlying creek, brought trees where only flagpoles stood before. In the disjointed series of hostile spaces, we found continuity, reconnected quarters to the older city. We located spaces where festivals and gathering can take place and offered a new, changing, evolving character which was sterile and impersonal before. We introduced European city life back into the European headquarters, rejuvenated the ageing, abandoned streetscape, created pedestrian, welcoming, child, bird and dog- friendly land and streetscape.

We can only hope now that our recommendations will be understood as an urgent call to reinvent one of the most important spaces in the New Europe into what it deserves to be- the most public, open, centred on the citizen space.