

COMMUNITY ORGANISATION

in the

European Quarter in Brussels



STRATEGIES FOR STRUGGLE – from 1986 until today

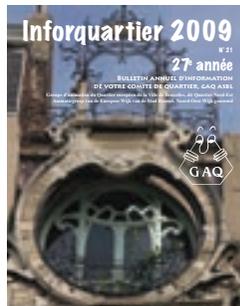


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1. INTRODUCTION : THE EUROPEAN QUARTER AND ITS INHABITANTS

Europe as a classic example

'Europe' is the dossier with the longest history that **Brusselse Raad voor het Leefmilieu (BRAL)** has ever dealt with. Bral has been keeping a close watch over the developments regarding the implantation and expansion of the European institutions in Brussels since the beginning of the nineteen eighties. Bral has witnessed the transformation of the neighbourhoods. Bral has seen and supported the reactions of the various neighbourhood committees. Bral has taken its own initiatives and supported those of others. We never received any specific or structural subsidy for our activities in the European Quarter. The choice to deal with 'Europe' has always been our own priority. From the first proposals for expansion at the end of the nineteen seventies, it was clear to us that the consequences of the European presence would be felt beyond the immediate neighbourhood. After all, the dossiers were being prepared on the national level, and local groups were therefore

much in need of professional support. We have been at the heart of the process during this time, more so than our French language sister-organisations **Inter-Environnement Bruxelles (IEB)** and **Atelier de Recherche et d'Action Urbaines (ARAU)**.

During those thirty years of involvement in the Europe dossier, we took part in numerous actions and initiatives. These were both large and small scale actions; they differed in style and strategy as well as duration (from short-term actions to actions lasting for years). The actions also varied as to the target audience and the number of participants and they were not all equally successful. In combination with varying partners, we made use of about all available methods of action and pressure: from press dossiers and consultations groups, occupations and squatting, cultural events, parliamentary questions up to even the elaboration of alternative studies and plans. In this publication, we describe several

of those projects and draw detailed and rigorous conclusions. Those decisions are very relevant in view of what is going to happen in the future in the Léopold- and North East neighbourhood, the area, which we meanwhile have come to refer to as the 'European Quarter'.

The main project that profoundly changed the European Quarter over the past decades is the construction of the **EU Parliament** with its adjacent offices next to the Leopold Station. The **EU Commission** has even grander plans to concentrate its buildings along the Rue de la Loi as set out in the **Projet Urbain Loi – PUL** (*City Project Loi*), the project for increasing the 'building density' of the European Commission in the Rue de la Loi. This fact alone justifies a review of the past to see what lessons may be learned. Moreover, we note that only sparse information about that new project is given out. Hardly any effort is being made to actively involve inhabitants and other interested par-

ties in the preparation process. That conclusion was another reason to record our experiences.

How do we view the actions of the inhabitants and their participation over the past decades? Could we have done things differently? Which opportunities did we miss? – What were the failures, the lucky breaks and the successes? And most of all, what lessons can we learn from all of this for the future? ■

A leading role for the residents' committees

At the beginning of the nineteen nineties, Bral motivated several groups of inhabitants from the neighbourhood to join forces in the **Coordination Europe**. In its heyday, more than a dozen committees were members of the partnership, well beyond the borders of the neighbourhood. Over the course of time, some of them left as active partners and the working area of Coordination Europe became restricted to the immediate neighbourhood, where the **Groupe d'Animation du Quartier Européen de la ville de Bruxelles (GAQ)** and the **Association du Quartier Léopold (AQL)** are at present the most important advocates. In their turn, these groups motivated Bral and its sister-organisation IEB to ensure continuity and their professional support.

The committees from the European Quarter always dedicated their efforts towards more involvement in the planning process. They continue to do so until the present. They want their needs and requirements to be taken

into account. It is essential to have security of tenancy, the quality of the environment needs to remain high and local facilities and local shops are necessary. Therefore, their efforts are not in fact intended to thwart specific projects or plans. Their only purpose has always been to strive for a lively future-oriented and mixed neighbourhood. The committees persist in demanding that the authorities take initiatives to get better control of the accelerated development in their neighbourhood and that they involve them in this as equal partners.

Sometimes the local commitment was very strong, sometimes a lot less – and this was clearly related to the lack of any positive results. Often, the final outcome of the actions was after

► Right from the beginning of the nineteen nineties the various neighbourhood committees of the EU Quarter have been united in **Coordination Europe**. One of the committees, which has remained active in **Coordination Europe** until the present is the **GAQ**. © GAQ



all not in proportion to the time and the energy that had been invested in them. This has a disincentive effect. **Henri Bernard**, who for decades was the driving force and the strategist of the AQL, proved that personal dedication plays an important role in the decisiveness of groups of volunteers. His sudden death in October 2008 was a major blow. Meanwhile, others have taken over the torch, but it remains a difficult battle.

In addition to the classical residents' committees, we also see other people asking questions about the present development of the European Quarter. An increasing number of expats as well as young people have doubts about the uninspired construction of public spaces, the mobility problem and the nuisance from building sites. The experiences of the past years will serve as a good starting point in particular for the people who are willing to actively commit themselves to take action in the European Quarter as well as elsewhere in Brussels. ■

Dealing with the private sector, even at present

From the nineteen fifties, the role of the private sector has been a determining factor in the European Quarter and this remains the case today. Therefore, the participation and actions of the inhabitants have never been directed against the authorities alone.

Experiences with various master plans have shown that the cooperation between the authorities and the private sector is not a sinecure. Both in the case of the **Schéma directeur** (master plan) **Tour et Taxis** as well as the **Schéma directeur Botanique (Cité Administrative de l'État)** it is self-evident that the implementation of a master plan depends on the goodwill of the private partners. The master plan is definitely a step in the right direction as a planning tool, but the analysis proves that the inclusion of the participation of the inhabitants cannot be taken for granted. Perhaps the experiences gained from the **accord-cadre** (*framework agreement*) could have served as inspiration [see 3.5].

That history continues to repeat itself is also evident from the pre-history of the **Projet Urbain Loi** (City Project Loi). The similarities with the plans from the mid-nineteen eighties do not come out of thin air. [see 3.1]. ■

▼ The private sector is all in favour of the demand by the EU Commission for more offices along the Rue de la Loi. The Brussels' government tries to manage the increasing office space by means of the **Projet Urbain Loi** (PUL). © ADT-ATO



Arbitrary, but with a certain sense of logic

It is not our aim to recount the entire history of the European Quarter. Neither is it our intention to come up with a sound, objective, irrefutable explanation for the occasionally odd succession of events and decisions. However, we do hope to offer a sample of optional actions by inhabitants, the classical, the most frequently used, the most original, the most diverse, the most striking actions... those, which we would like to put in the limelight.

We have grouped the actions according to the selected strategy: consultations [3.1.], the development of a vision [3.2.], the cultural approach [3.3.], occupations [3.4.] and the legal/contractual approach [3.5.]. For each category, we take stock. In order to provide a basic understanding of this very complex tale, we first provide a very short history of Europe in Brussels and we also set out a time line showing the important facts and events.

We are convinced that this publication will prove its usefulness. It will be useful for those who want to know what has happened, for those who seek inspiration to take actions elsewhere, for those who want to learn from the experiences of others, and finally for those who want to carry

on with the analysis in order to refine our conclusions.

All basic documents and practically all sources in this publication (plans, official texts, press releases...) are available from Bral. ■



◀ By means of a street action 'Europus Omnivorans' the Riverains Jourdan and Bral underline their point of view at the commission de concertation. They are demonstrating against the illegal expansion of office buildings by the EU Commission in the Rue Froissart. – 1994 © Way Press International



2. GOOD TO KNOW

Europe in Brussels

In order to understand the stories about the participation and actions of the inhabitants in the European Quarter, some basic knowledge about the EU and its presence in Brussels is required. Here follows a very brief and general introduction, including only those facts, which are relevant for the following text. The time line on p 20 – 21 helps to read the text.

For a detailed overview of the history of the European Institutions in Brussels, we recommend the following books:

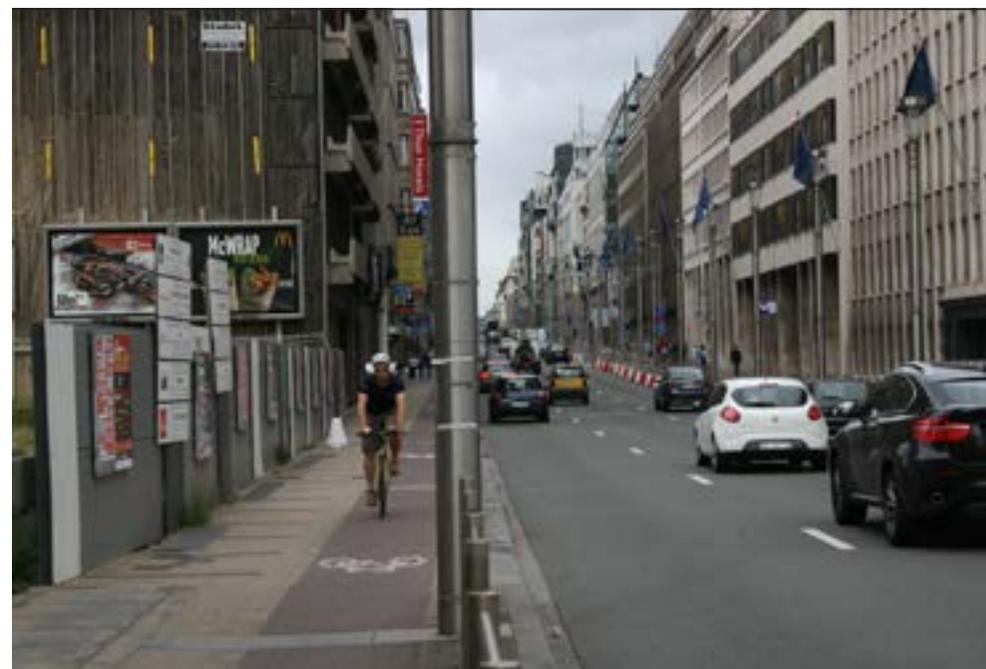
- ▶ Carola Hein – *Bruxelles l'Européenne: Capitale de qui? Ville de qui? / European Brussels: Whose capital? Whose city?* – *Cahiers de la Cambre – Architecture n° 5, La Lettre Volée*, 2006.
- ▶ Thierry Demey – *Bruxelles, chronique d'une capitale en chantier, 2. De l' Expo '58 au siège de la CEE – Bruxelles, Paul Legrain*, 1992.
- ▶ Thierry Demey – *Bruxelles, capitale de l'Europe / Brussel, hoofdstad van*

Europa / Brussels, capital of Europe – Badeaux, 2007.

The EU : its institutions and seats

When the ministers of Foreign Affairs of six European countries signed the **Treaty of Rome** at the end of 1957, it had not yet been decided where the institutions of this brand-new **European Economic Community (EEC)** would be located. This issue of the location of 'the seats' was a highly sensitive matter. The consequent provisional choices became more definitive over time and the end result was a distribution of all seats over three cities in three countries.

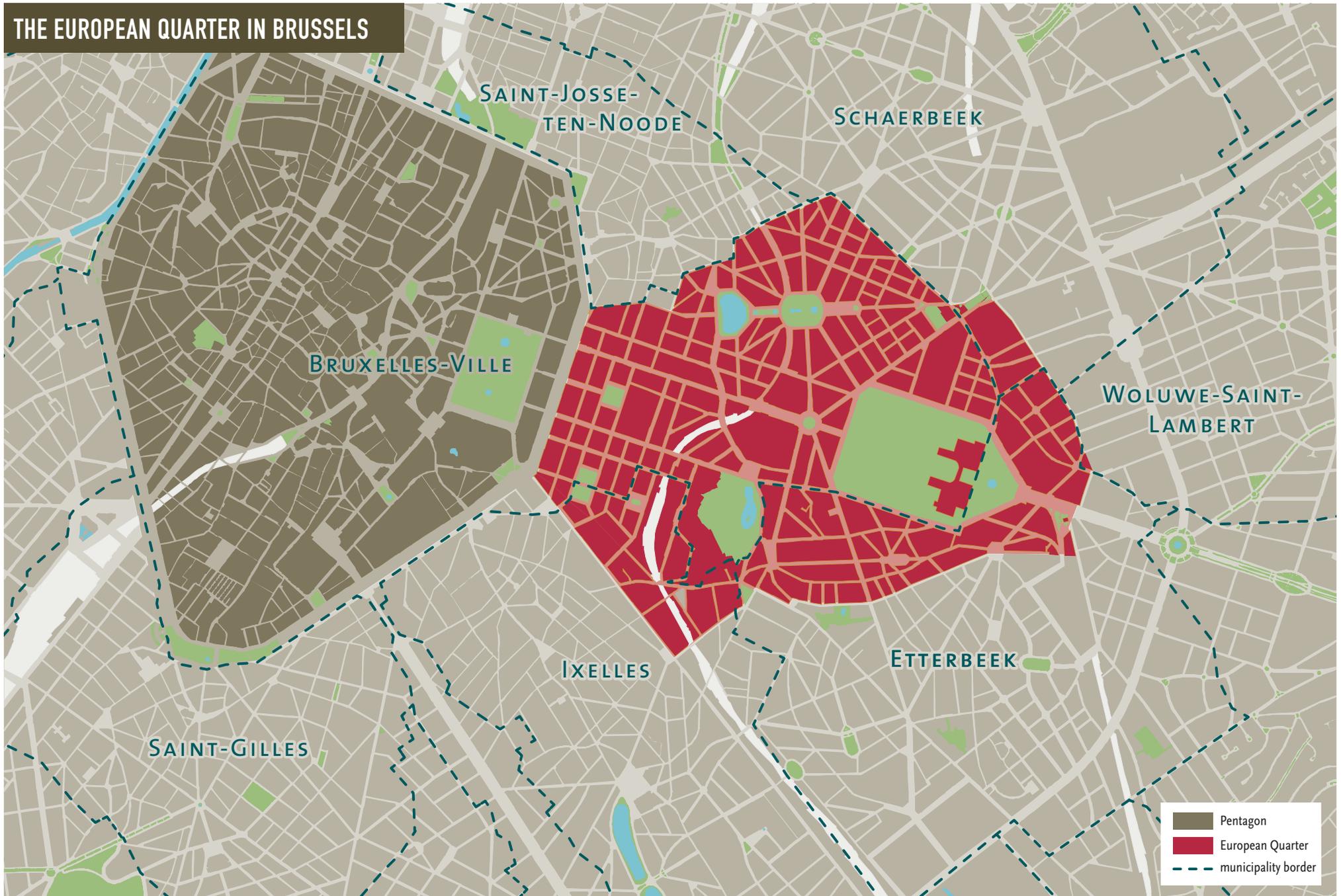
Luxembourg acquired the **European Court of Justice**, the seat of judicial power. Strasbourg acquired the legislative power, the **European Parliament**. The executive power came to Brussels: the **European Commission** and the **European Council**.



However, this simple separation was only the beginning. Although the seat and the hemicycle – where the plenary sessions of the European Parliament take place – had been established in Strasbourg, the offices of the Members of the European Parliament and their political groups as

▲ The present-day Rue de la Loi is the result of a lack of global planning. Over the course of the years, the EU Commission has taken over an increasing number of characterless buildings.

THE EUROPEAN QUARTER IN BRUSSELS



well as the meeting rooms for the Parliamentary Committees were located in Brussels, near the European Commission. The secretariat and the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation on the other hand are to be found in Luxembourg.

Meanwhile, in addition to the initial three large European Institutions, a number of other institutions have been founded like the European Investment Bank, the European Central Bank, the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, and so on. Following a lot of lobbying and negotiations, these institutions are distributed over various cities in Europe. However, the centre of gravity of all institutions is located in Brussels.

The European Quarter in Brussels

The neighbourhood in Brussels where most of the European institutions are

located, and which for the sake of convenience we call the European Quarter, covers an area of around 1 km². Most of it is located in the Léopold Quarter, a neighbourhood just east of the centre of Brussels, the so-called Pentagon [see map p. 11].

Over the course of the 19th century, the Léopold Quarter was developed as a residential neighbourhood for inhabitants of Brussels who wanted to escape from the inner city. The original buildings are stately townhouses. Two wide avenues connect the European Quarter with the Pentagon: the Rue de la Loi and the Rue Belliard. The Léopold Quarter is located on the territory of the City of Brussels, but some of the institutions (connected to the EU-Parliament as well as a number of buildings of the EU Commission) were also established in the neighbouring municipalities of Ixelles and Etterbeek [see map p. 13].

The continuous expansion of the EU-competences and the regular increase in the number of member



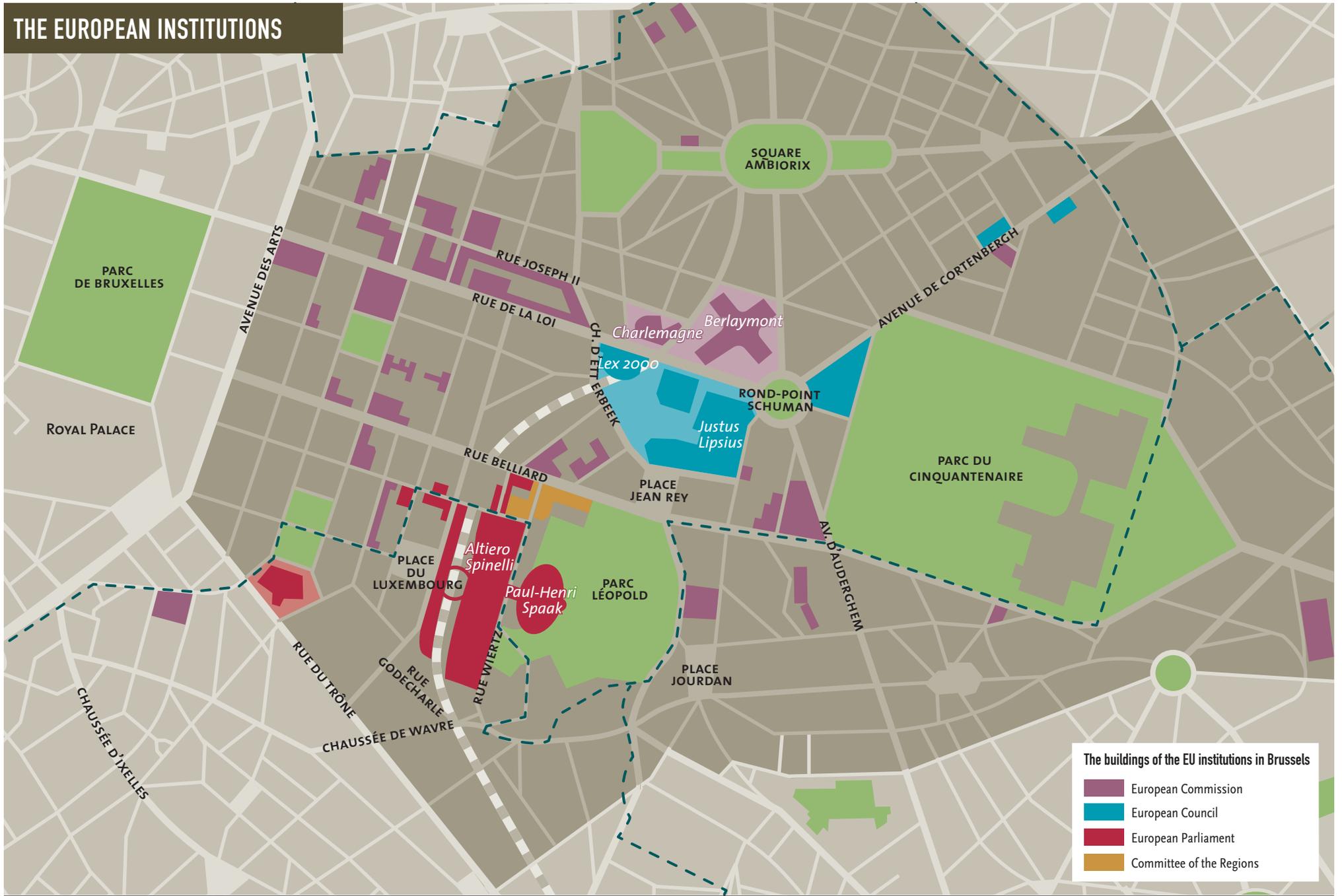
states provoked a not to be satisfied craving among the institutions for evermore office space and infrastructure. Commensurate with this there was a growth in the number of associated lobby groups, press agencies, NGO's, diplomatic and cultural representations, lawyer's offices and of course also the hotel and catering industry. In the year 2012, it was estimated that the surface area taken up by offices in the European Quarter was 3.4 million m², 1.5 million m² of which is directly intended for the use of the Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament.

▲ The iconic Berlaymont building – named after a former girls' school that was located there until the beginning of the nineteen sixties – houses the main seat of the EU Commission. Because of its central location, the building on the Rond Point Schuman has exerted an enormous influence on other developments in the EU Quarter. © BRAL (Catherine Antoine)

The buildings of the EU institutions in Brussels

The main seat of the European Commission is the **Berlaymont Building** on

THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS



The buildings of the EU institutions in Brussels

- European Commission
- European Council
- European Parliament
- Committee of the Regions

1971



2012



▲ Here you have a view of the area of the EU Parliament in 1979 and in 2012. When you look carefully you see the changes in the urban fabric, some city blocs have changed more than others. The old shunting yard was built over to make room for the EU Parliament. © MRBC – Direction Études et Planification 2013

the Rond Point Schuman. Together with the nearby **Charlemagne Building** they are the oldest European buildings in Brussels. Until 1995, the Charlemagne Building was the home base of the EU Council of Ministers. When the Council moved to the new and much larger **Justus Lipsius Building** across the Rue de la Loi and the Rond Point Schuman, the Commission took over the Charlemagne Building as well [see map p. 13].

During the controversial and lengthy asbestos renovation of the Berlaymont Building (from 1995 until 2004), the various services were distributed over many smaller buildings within and outside the Léopold Quarter. Even after its return to its home base at the Rond Point Schuman, the Commission continued to use several of those buildings. Meanwhile there are new plans for centralisation along the Rue de la Loi. The *Projet Urbain Loi* (City project Loi), is to fulfil this purpose with among others a new

tower building on the corner of the Chaussée d'Etterbeek.

In 2001, the EU decided by means of the **Treaty of Nice** to hold all future summits of the Council of Ministers in Brussels. Until that time, these meetings took place in the country that was in charge of the six-monthly presidency. Since that time, they always take place in Brussels and Belgium decided immediately to enlarge the existing infrastructure. For that reason, a new prestigious building is at present under construction along the Rue de la Loi next to the Justus Lipsius Building. The permanent chairman of the European Council, the European president will have his offices in that new building.

The European Parliament is located slightly further away, between the Place du Luxembourg and the Leopold Park and it consists of the hemicycle and meeting rooms for the political groups and committees as well as the offices for the

MEP's and their staff. This is only a place of work for the European Parliament; the actual seat is located in Strasbourg. The consequence of this is that each month a very expensive migration takes place back and forth between the two cities. Although the astronomical price for that monthly commute puts a heavy burden on the budget and places a heavy charge on the environment, there still are no concrete plans to change this absurd situation.

The neighbourhoods in the north east and the south of Brussels

The consequences of the arrival of the EU institutions were not the same everywhere. There is a great difference between what happened in the neighbourhood surrounding the Rue de la Loi, the so-called North East Quarter (on the border between Brussels, Schaerbeek and Saint-Josse-ten-Noode) and the neighbour-

hoods south of the Rue Belliard and the Leopold station (in Etterbeek and Ixelles).

Once the Berlaymont and the Justus Lipsius Buildings at the Rond Point Schuman had been constructed, no further large office projects worth mentioning had been planned. But of course the North East Quarter continued to change. The hotel and catering sector expanded immensely, the rental prices went up and the accompanying 'entourage' of the European institutions took up residence: diplomatic representations of the member states, lobbies, press agencies, and lawyers' offices etc. The inhabitants certainly did not get the impression that the EU integrated in the city, although this had been the original intention of the authorities; on the contrary, the EU simply took over the entire neighbourhood. The market mechanisms caused a rapid rise in the price of real estate and put pressure on residential accommodation.

There is one large project in the south of Brussels that has completely changed the area: the European Parliament and its adjoining offices of the **Espace Léopold**. For the purpose of this project, the old shunting yard was built over and the adjacent streets were completely expropriated. An aerial photograph [see p.14] immediately shows that this giant building is completely at odds with the remainder of the architectural context of the city. The project was carried out by one private consortium: the **Société Espace Léopold (SEL)**. The adjacent neighbourhoods of Etterbeek and Ixelles mostly retained their residential character, but there was a drastic change in the population. People connected to the European institutions were prepared to pay much higher prices to live in the area. In compensation for the office buildings in the Espace Léopold, residential projects were realised (including among others projects along the Rue Wiertz and the Rue Godecharles), but

these were mainly intended for the European public. The prices for real estate and rental property increased here as well and even today there is a lot of pressure to change one family houses into offices or smaller and more expensive studios or flats.

The committees

Since the nineteen seventies there has been a residents' committee in the North East Quarter: the **GAQ**. The residents organised the group to defend the residential character of their neighbourhood. After all, the attractive cultural heritage of the 'squares' (Square Ambiorix, Square Marie-Louise, Square Marguerite...) was put under pressure. During the sixties and seventies the value of the cultural heritage was insufficiently recognised, and many buildings were demolished in order to replace them by higher and more functional buildings. Meanwhile, those townhouses



▲ The implantation of immense office complexes like the European Parliament in the Rue Wiertz caused major scars in the existing urban fabric in various locations in the neighbourhood. During the eighties and nineties, major interventions were often carried out without coordination: the Leopold Park was also gradually taken over.

are again in demand, but mainly to be used as offices.

Since May 1981 the inhabitants and users of the southern neighbourhoods organised themselves into the **AQL**. The AQL was a coalition of six neighbourhood committees, the Ligue de Familles (Family Association), local SME's (like the *Office des Propriétaires*, which employed dozens of local people) as well as professionals from the area, including several artists. The main purpose of the AQL was to be able to react together to the **Brussels-Europe Area Study** (BEA Study) [see 3.1.] The founders wanted to be able to make use of a professional tool with legal and town planning expertise to deal with various aspects and monographs of the BEA Study. From the beginning, they stated clearly that they wanted to be autonomous and independent of any subsidies from the authorities. Other committees have also intermittently been active in that same neighbourhood: the businesses of the Place

Luxembourg, for instance or the *Comité Pascale-Toulouse*, the *Comité Idalie* and a few other very local committees. Most of the smaller committees were part of the AQL.

During the eighties, the neighbourhood surrounding the Place Jourdan in Etterbeek had much to endure as well as a result of what happened in the European Quarter located nearby: property speculation, traffic problems, local shops that suffered from a lot of competition from snack bars and restaurants, residential houses, which were divided up into small flats – which then in their turn were rebuilt into a flat hotel... The inhabitants felt inundated by people who simply made use of the neighbourhood, but did not really know it and who did not (really) live there.

Against this background, the residents' committee **Riverains Jourdan** was created. Their goal was to safeguard the living environment of their (lively) neighbourhood. European of-

ficials also joined the actions by the residents.

The AQL, the GAQ as well as the Riverains Jourdan were part of the **Coordination Europe**, created in the early nineteen nineties.

The Eurocrats

Not everyone who works for or is connected with the European institutions is equally involved in what happens in the European Quarter.

In general the so-called Eurocrats could be divided in elected representatives of the EU Parliament, officials of the EU institutions and various groups that reside only temporarily in Brussels.

Those elected to the European Parliament remain most of all involved in their own country. They stay in Brussels on a regular basis but they are not residents. Among the officials of the other institutions many settle down in Brussels and en-

vironment for a longer period of time, and they live there with their families. Amongst them, as is the case for all residents, there are people who are committed to a better quality of their urban habitat and environment. Some joined the existing residents' committees, including the AQL, the GAQ and the Riverains Jourdan. In addition, there are also people who only work for a short period for the institutions as well as large group of rotating trainees. These Europeans generally have little contact with the inhabitants of Brussels, and mostly live in the expats' community.

Coordination Europe always attached a lot of importance to maintaining good relations with the people working in the institutions. Gradually, an increasing number of European officials live in Brussels and the environment of the institutions. It takes a lot of time and energy (which is/was not always there) to maintain good relations with the trade unions. When we initiated legal proceed-

ings before the Council of State at the beginning of the nineteen eighties, to challenge the implantation of the Council of Ministers in a residential area, we acted together with the trade unions [see 3.4.].

Bral and IEB

Around 1980, Bral and IEB mostly reacted in a defensive manner to the expansion plans of the Council (the Justus Lipsius Building) and the accompanying infrastructure building work (the relocation of the Belliard tunnel). We lodged an objection dur-

► The sometimes complicated institutional organisation of Brussels, Belgium as well as the European Union explains the far from harmonious implantation of the EU institutions. The inhabitants were aware that they would also profit from the arrival of Europe, but they always resisted against being denigrated to a role of second-class citizens.



ing the meeting of the commission de concertation (*consultation committee*) and together we took legal action against the expropriations in the residential zone Comines-Froissart.

In 1986, Bral published the **Programmap Europa** (*Programme Dossier Europe*). In this document, we described the current situation of the European presence and the impact on the neighbourhood, and the possible on-going developments, and we argued strongly for integrated planning. We also asked to provide a clear answer about a specific location for the European Parliament. The Programme Dossier Europe constituted a change of direction for Bral: we no longer reacted to projects and building applications, but produced our own document to stimulate the discussion about the medium term.

Fragmentation everywhere

From the start, the establishment of the institutions in Brussels has been characterised by a complete lack of strategy and planning, both by the Brussels and Belgian authorities and by the institutions. It resulted in an often uncoordinated building craze, which in many cases was directed by the private sector.

The structure of the institutions also contributed to this situation. After all, the European Union decides by consensus and it was not able to obtain a consensus on the matter of the location of the seat of the institutions. It took a long time before the definitive decision about the various seats was reached. For that reason, the EU rented its offices for a long time on the private market, which each time managed miraculously to 'just happen to have' buildings available according to their requirements. At the same time, there is also a lack of coordination between the various European insti-

tutions. The European Council, the Commission and the European Parliament act in an autonomous manner. A number of services like the printing works and the archives certainly could be organised more efficiently. The institutions do not have a common mobility plan either.

The structure of the Belgian state also makes it difficult to formulate a coordinated policy. Since the complicated reform of the Belgian state at the end of the nineteen eighties, the competences for urban planning in Belgium are divided over three levels: the federal state, the Brussels Capital Region and the municipalities. All three levels have competence for the EU institutions. It is difficult enough to know which particular bodies deal with the various procedures, but in addition, the various levels regularly have a change in their political majority. This fragmentation is clearly an important factor in the sometimes-disconcerting history of the establishment of the European institutions in Brussels.

Moreover, the European Union remains a relatively young institution, which continually changes and expands. New member states join and new competences are acquired. The decisions about these issues are a laborious process however, which makes it difficult to foresee how much space each of the institutions will need at a particular moment in time.

In spite of all its promises and policy declarations, the Brussels Capital Region has not succeeded in overseeing a harmonious development of the European institutions with respect for the dynamics of the residential areas. The residents of the European Quarter have always been aware that they too would profit from the arrival of Europe, but they refused to be treated as second-rate citizens. This publication recounts what the inhabitants of Brussels have done to ensure that their interests were considered in the debate. ■

TIME TABLE

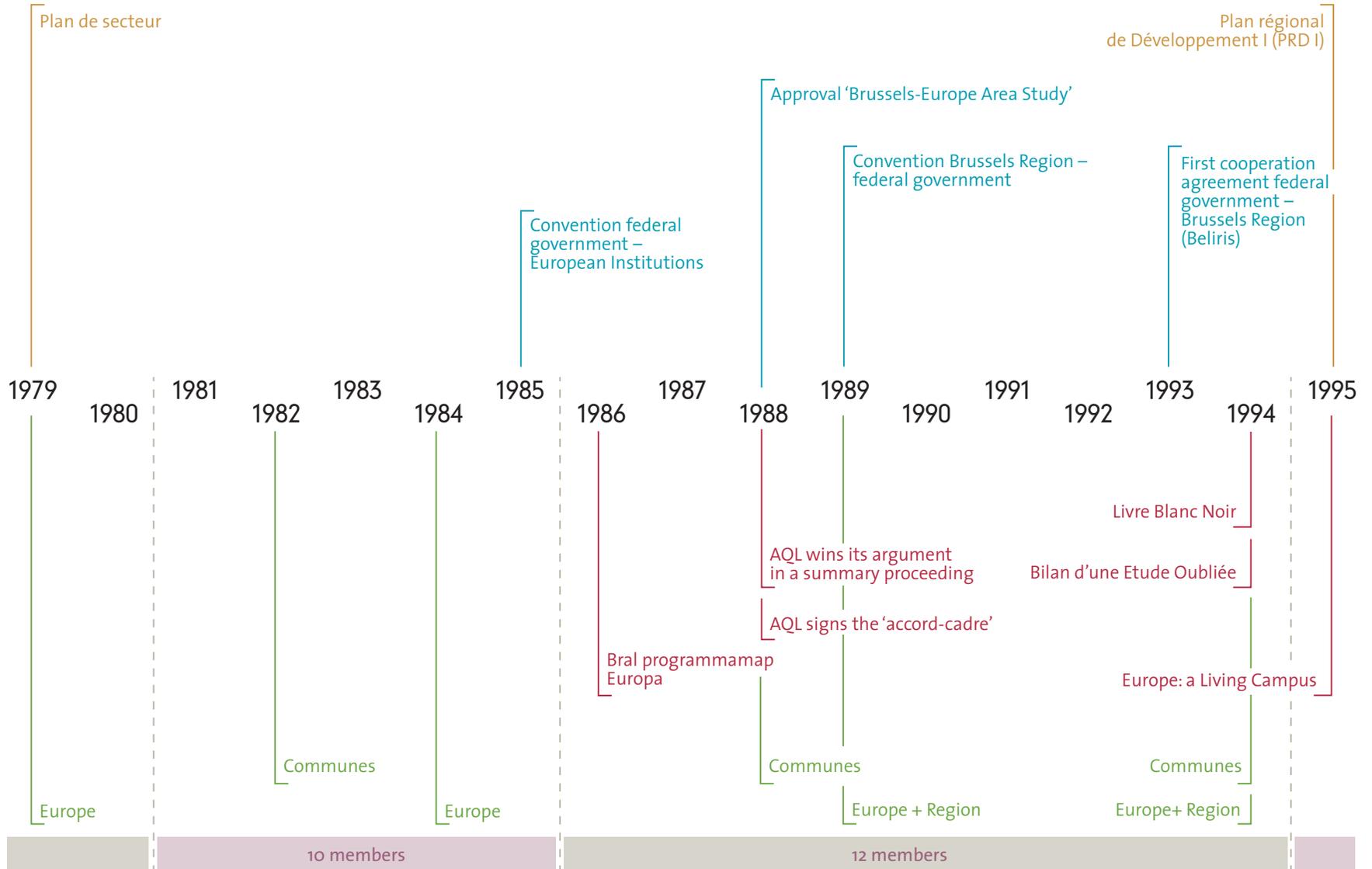
The planning context

Initiatives of the public authority

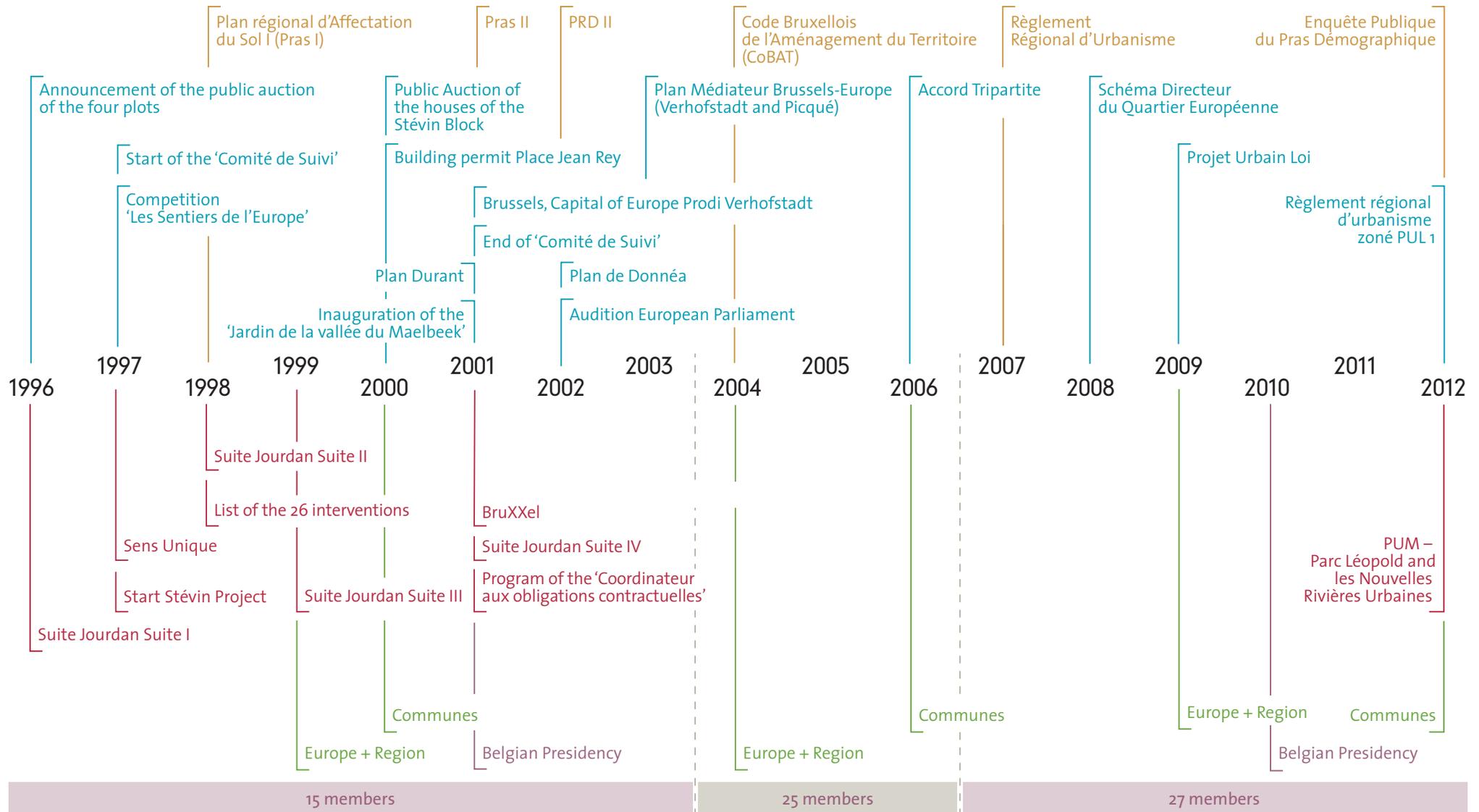
Community-based initiatives

The elections

Composition EU



▶ continue on p. 21





3. FIVE STRATEGIES



Over the years the Brusselse Raad voor het Leefmilieu (Bral), Inter-Environnement Bruxelles (IEB) and the inhabitants' committees of the European Quarter have used very different strategies to help shape their residential environment. There are five main categories: consultations, the development of a vision, the cultural approach, occupations and the legal-contractual approach. No single action or campaign is a pure illustration of any one of those categories; usually a combination of approaches was used. For instance, some kind of consultation and/or development of a vision will be found in each action.

We do not intend to compare the various strategies or styles of action. The efficiency of any choice does not only depend on the method alone after all, but also on a number of external factors. The analysis shows anyway that these external factors always determined the success of an action.

We will carry out an evaluation for each category of actions, with a view to the future, to find out what works under which conditions. Where should you dedicate your efforts, and what are the limitations?

Enquête publique Urbanisme et environnement
Openbare onderzoeken Stedebouw en Leefmilieu



3.1. CONSULTATIONS

The most obvious way to exert influence is to participate in the organised consultation meetings. This includes the steering committees for studies or projects, the classical commissions de concertation (*consultation committee*) in the framework of the urban planning legislation and land use plans as well as the rare consultative structures intended to search for solutions for specific problems.

Most of their attempts to be involved in consultation about the EU-dossier left the inhabitants with a sense of profound disappointment. The search for the best way of involving inhabitants in strategic planning in a coordinated, transparent way and on the basis of equality still goes on.

The Brussels-Europe Area Study (1986-1987)

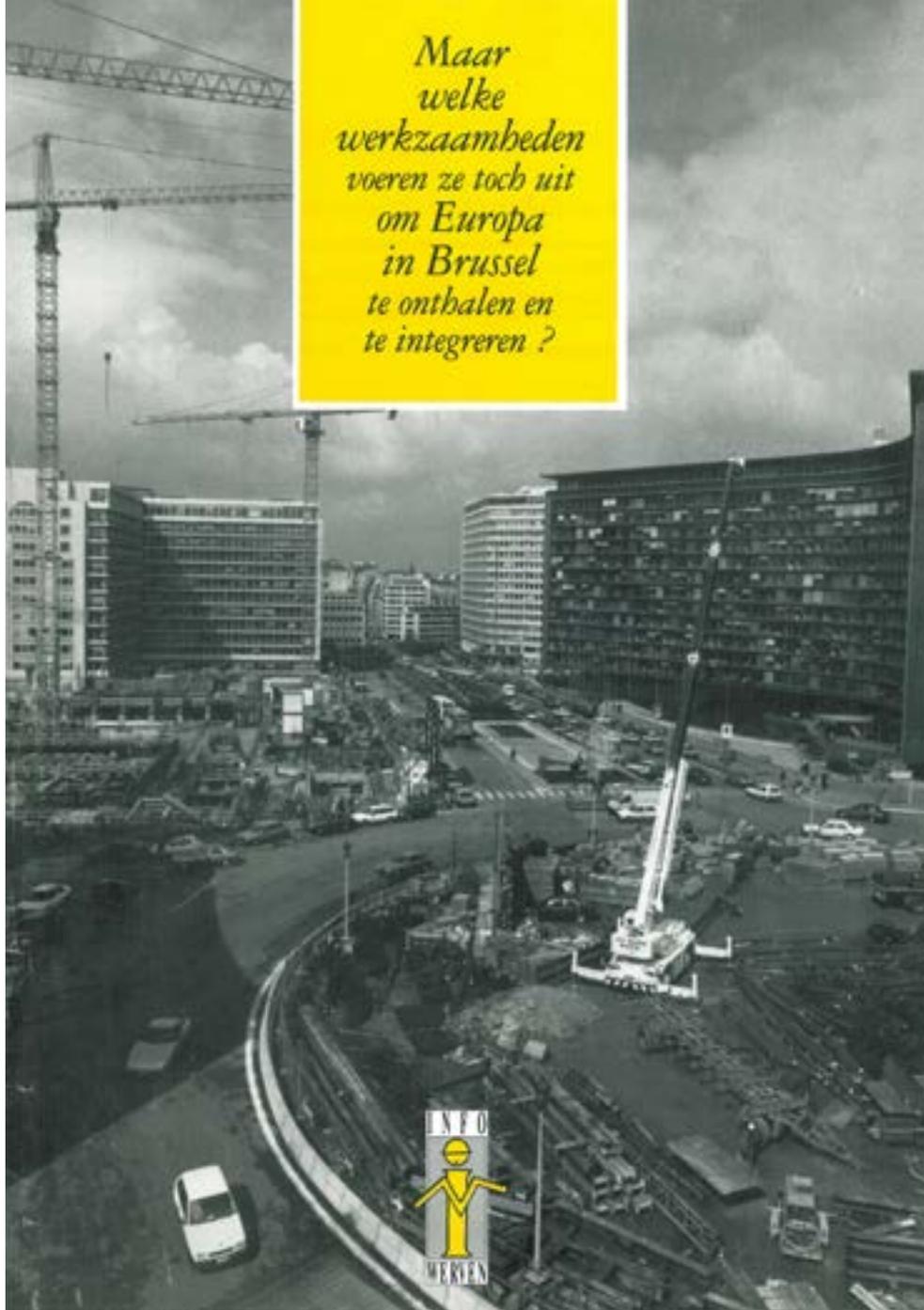
The context

In the early nineteen eighties important actors from the business world and the authorities had the same purpose: Brussels definitely had to become the capital of Europe. The most important condition to bring this about was to create the necessary infrastructure for the main European institutions.

The European Commission had been using its buildings around the Rond Point Schuman since the nineteen sixties. Now the European Council was also going to have a permanent seat there: in 1987, building permission was granted for the Justus Lipsius Building (the Council of Ministers). The preparatory procedure was an uphill battle. According to an agreement between

the then European Economic Community (EEC) and the national state, Belgium would construct and make office- and meeting space available for the Council of Ministers. Discussions about the expropriation plan and the building permit for the Construction of the Justus Lipsius Building started at the beginning of the nineteen eighties. During the protracted negotiations Eu-

rope requested ever more space, which meant that Brussels immediately had to allow an exception on its recently approved Plan de secteur (*Regional Land Use Plan*) (1979). The administrative zone that had been planned originally was too small and a residential zone (the residential block Comines-Froissart) needed to be expropriated for public benefit.



Maar
welke
werkzaamheden
voeren ze toch uit
om Europa
in Brussel
te onthalen en
te integreren ?

◀ Since the nineteen seventies, there has always been an active building-site somewhere in the European Quarter. The authorities might be prepared to inform the public about the major infrastructure constructions, as in the case of this poster, dated 1993. However, there is no question of genuine coordination about building-sites. © RBC-BHG

Still missing was a hemicycle for the European Parliament in Brussels. Because of political and diplomatic reasons the discussion about this issue could not take place on a public forum. After all, all member states had committed themselves not to undertake any initiative to provide a parliamentary infrastructure. However, proposals circulated off the record. In the **Programmamap Europa** (*Programme Dossier Europe*) (1986) Bral argued to end these backroom discussions, and to organise a discussion about all European institutions in the quarter in all openness whilst also including a location for the European Parliament.

After the granting of the building permit for the Justus Lipsius Building and the adjacent new Belliard tunnel, Europe still had insufficient space – even without taking the Parliament into account. The number of member states increased and competences were enlarged. In 1986, Secretary of State **Jean-Louis Thys**, who was competent for Land Use Planning in the

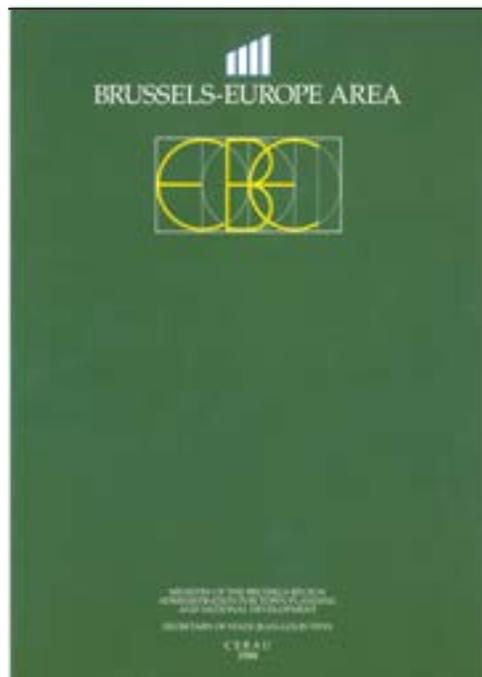
then Brussels Government ordered the first global study for the area of the European Quarter: the **Brussels-Europe Area Study (BEA Study)** (*Étude Espace Bruxelles-Europe*), which for many people was the source of all later EU plans. The intention was to involve as many interested parties as possible in order to get a large majority to agree with the growing European presence. This study was to reveal the needs in offices, housing, public facilities, mobility, ecosystems, social and cultural developments etc., based on the existing situation. At the same time, management standards were to be laid down, like for instance the maximum number of parking places for each office block.

The study: operating procedure and result

The BEA Study was a process that lasted for almost two years. It was ‘assisted’ by a limited technical steering group and an advisory commit-

tee: an enlarged roundtable of 30 to 35 representatives of various policy levels and administrations, includ-

▼ The influence of the Brussels-Europe Area Study is noticeable until the present. BRAL was also involved in the design of this mother of all European plans. © RBC-BHG/CERAU



ing the European institutions, associations (including Bral) and inhabitants. Three research consultancies collaborated in the assignment: They drew up a detailed overview of the situation as well as a series of proposals to achieve urban development of higher quality for the neighbourhood at large. It was difficult for the involved inhabitants to attend the monthly meetings, which usually lasted an entire day. However, it constituted an important source of information for them, the only source of essential information.

The result of the process was an entire series of measures on different levels. For instance, there was a proposal to allow higher office buildings in the area, on condition that the investor would construct public spaces. This concept would later resurface in the **Projet Urbain Loi** (City project Loi). The mobility problem was addressed among other measures by reducing the number of underground parking spaces and by providing more space

▼ The plans for an extensive project (CIC) on the location of the former Leopold brewery (photo) unexpectedly conflicted with the publication of the final conclusions of the Brussels-Europe Area Study. This demonstrates how a process lasting almost two years and involving over 30 stakeholders was thwarted by secret discussions. © AQL



for vulnerable road users. In reference to planning and development, a number of **Zones d'Intervention Prioritaire (ZIP)** (Priority Intervention Zone) were demarcated for city renovation programmes. Together with the **Société de Développement pour la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale (SDRB)** (Brussels

Regional Development Agency), houses would be renovated in those zones, and small enterprises would receive support. The purpose was to invest in the zones around the European institutions to create a buffer zone, which was to put an end to uncontrolled expansion.

The subversion of the consultation process: the CIC-plan

One month before the conclusions of the BEA Study were made public, the press suddenly discussed an extensive construction project on the location of the former Léopold Brewery. It was immediately obvious that the so-called **Centre International de Congrès (CIC)** (*International Congress Centre*) had been designed custom-made for the European Parliament. Therefore, there had to have been secret consultations between the consortium of investors – the *Société Générale* and

► The residents' committee AQL often requested illustrator Frank Pé for help to support their communications. This drawing of almost 20 years ago unfortunately is still remarkably up-to-date: private investors and the authorities sit around the table in order to prepare a large project. Residents can only stand idly by. © Frank Pé /AQL

BACOB – and the Brussels Government (which at the time was still a part of the Belgian government).

Moreover, the new project was located outside the EU-zone as defined at that time, and it was even at the other side of the buffer zone. There-

fore, it was not adjacent to the Berlaymont, Charlemagne and Justus Lipsius Buildings. One of the most important objectives of the BEA Study, to contain the EU-buildings within a small perimeter, could therefore no longer be achieved. Moreover, the

size and the importance of the CIC-project completely overshadowed the dynamics of the BEA Study. All the energy of the authorities was focused on the CIC-project, whilst neither time nor finances were left for the execution of the decisions of the BEA Study.

The same architects who had designed the CIC-project were also co-authors of the BEA Study, but they had never mentioned the CIC-project during that planning process. It seemed as if the BEA Study with its extensive description of urban development programmes in an extensive zone was to draw the attention away from 'the real work' that was planned surreptitiously elsewhere.

The frustration and indignation of the associations of residents did not so much concern the fact that a parliamentary hemicycle was to be build (as part of the CIC), but rather the manner in which that decision had been taken. Everyone suspected that a parliamentary hemicycle





would arise at some time, but during the BEA Study, the Parliament was never discussed.

The consultation that had started with so much acclaim therefore publicly lost its political credibility. The residents who had been directly in-

◀ The Brussels-Europe Area Study was approved at the end of 1988. The implementation of the programme –among others via the municipalities who were to draw up the Specific Land Use Plans – was set in motion, but there never was any question of an operational component. It never became clear who was to do what, let alone by means of which funds. © City of Brussels

involved in the steering committee and the associations that had supported them had invested a lot of energy and (mostly unremunerated) time to gather the required information and to prepare dossiers. They had accepted their responsibility in what they viewed as a potentially positive development. However, when it became evident that the planning process had not taken place in all openness and that the important decisions had been taken behind the scenes, they felt betrayed yet again. It was a second betrayal, because just before the

BEA Study started, it had also already been decided to construct another flagship, the Council of Ministers, in a residential zone (according to the Plan de secteur of 1979).

This course of events left the inhabitants with great disenchantment. It laid the foundation for the distrust and even cynicism of Brussels inhabitants towards research consultancies and development plans.

The Brussels Government only approved the BEA Study in December 1988; more than a year after the results had been presented. The scope of that decision never became completely clear. The BEA Study resulted in an action plan and a programme to alleviate the effects of the EU presence, but no clear commitments were laid down regarding the further development of the European institutions. The implementation of that programme required the collaboration of various services and policy levels: the municipalities for the **Plans particuliers d'affectation du**

sol (PPAS) (*Specific Plan for Land Allocation*), the SDRB for the renovation projects and the national Ministry of Public Works (predecessor of the current Beliris) for the infrastructure projects. However, the operational part of the programme was omitted. It never became clear who was to provide the funding, let alone who would coordinate the actions.

More inhabitants of the immediate surroundings became active member of **AQL**. They decided that in future they would deal with their new colossal neighbour as ‘advisors’ rather than as combatants [see 3.5]. ■

Plans as occupational therapy?

Les Sentiers de L'Europe (1997)

In 1997, in cooperation with EU Commissioner **Erkki Liikanen**, whose competences included European real estate policy, Brussels' minister for Urban Planning **Hervé Hasquin** launched the international competition **Les Sentiers de L'Europe**. During the presentation, he stressed the importance of repairing the image and quality of life of the European Quarter by means of the reorganisation of public spaces. A few years earlier, the inhabitants had already formulated a series of proposals on this issue [see 3.2.]. However, the inhabitants were not involved in any way in the composition of the programme of the competition, the explanation to the candidates or the judging by the jury. Hervé Hasquin considered that 'this would exert too much influence on the international character and external expertise'.

The prize-winning design was never executed, for reasons including the high cost price. However, it

is in particular the atmosphere of scandal that is remembered about this first international competition in the EU Quarter. One of the candidates later won his court case, after he submitted a complaint concerning the unauthorized conflict of interest between the jury and two of the laureates. Moreover, the winning design had not been limited to the public spaces and the pedestrian connections, but it had also located a number of new large-scale projects, like Lex 2000, an expansion of the Council of Ministers, which meanwhile has been realised [see map p.13].

The next series of 'plans' (2001–2008)

In the period before Belgium took over the presidency of the European Union (the second half of 2001) and after the Treaty of Nice (at the beginning of 2001), the development of the European Quarter gained momentum. At the European Summit

in Nice the EU had decided that all future European summits would take place in Brussels. This provoked a multitude of new plans and studies for the European Quarter: **Brussels, Capital of Europe** (October 2001) at the request of the president of the European Commission **Romani Prodi** and Belgian Prime Minister **Guy Verhofstadt**; the **Schéma directeur du quartier Léopold-Schuman à Bruxelles** (*Master Plan for the Léopold-Schuman Quarter in Brussels*) (November 2001), which is usually referred to as the '**Durant Plan**', after the federal minister competent for Beliris; the **Axes directeurs Bruxelles-Europe** (*Guidelines for Brussels-Europe*) (May 2002), better known as the '**de Donnée Plan**' as they had been drawn up at the request of the then Minister-President of Brussels, and finally also the **OmbudsPlan Médiateur Bruxelles-Europe** (2003), ordered by Prime Minister **Guy Verhofstadt** and the new Minister-President of the Brussels Capital Region, **Daniel Ducarme**.



▲ *Les Sentiers de L'Europe* (1997): a competition intended to enhance public spaces and interconnections. The results were never carried out because the costs were considered too high. © RBC-BHG/ Art&Build

The fact alone that so many different bodies were involved in producing their own plans proves the lack of coordination. None of these

plans was based on well-organised participation; moreover, none of them had an operational part.

The authors of the Ombudsplan Médiateur had spoken to several expert witnesses during the preparation. After the plan had been completed – it was a thick tome containing 133 proposals and measures – the King Baudouin Foundation organised two round table conferences at the request of the federal government. One of these conferences was aimed at the civil society (the cultural world as well as universities, trade unions, a number of organisations associated with the EU as well as Bral, IEB and ARAU). The other conference included an arbitrary sample of inhabitants. The intention was to obtain feedback to the proposals. The conclusions of those round table conferences were included in a report, but the plan itself was not amended (nor was it executed).

A telling anecdote from that period relates that the Ombudsplan Mé-

diateur also included an exhibition. One of the authors had invited the inhabitants for a guided tour on a Saturday morning. Unfortunately, there was also an EU summit at that time and the exhibition room had been reserved as a coffee lounge for the drivers on duty. In the end, the explanation to the exhibition had to be given in a different room, without a chance of seeing the exhibition itself...

In 2008, the **Schéma Directeur du quartier européen** (Master plan for the European Quarter) was produced as well, which claimed to summarize all the above-mentioned plans... a complete déjà vu. The drafting of this plan could no longer expect much enthusiasm from the part of the inhabitants. Another abundance of monographs and proposals was produced, the implications of which were unclear. The result of that information exchange was that nobody could see the forest for the trees. Moreover, it was followed by yet another new plan of the EU Commission: the **Projet Ur-**

bain Loi. It was a large-scale project, providing for the concentration of offices along the Rue de la Loi. This time, the Brussels' government and the European Commission decided that a global proposal would be based on an international competition. The programme and the judgment of the competition were decided completely without any public debate. At the same time, the execution of the Mas-

ter plan experienced considerable delays. ■

▼ Following the Treaty of Nice in 2001 the EU decided that henceforth all European summits would take place in Brussels. This resulted in an uncoordinated plethora of plans for the EU Quarter. This 'Plan de Donnée' did not have a properly organised participation either, let alone an operational component.

© RBC-BHG/Agora

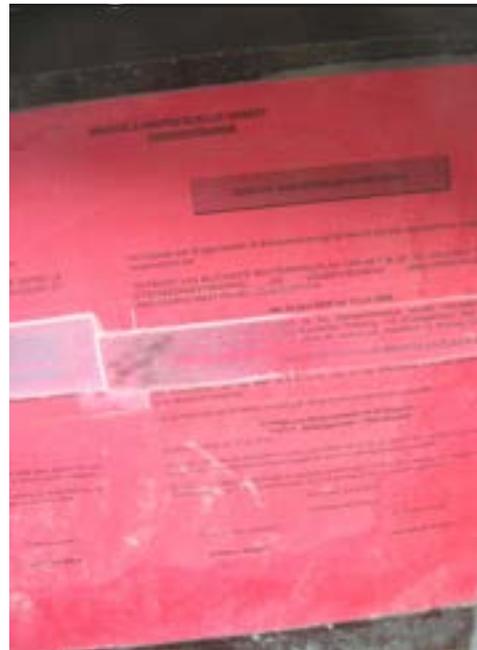


Commissions de Concertation in the European Quarter

The system of public inquiries and commissions de concertation (*consultation committees*) is embedded in the Brussels' town planning legislation. Since the approval of the **Plan de secteur** (1979), certain building permit applications are governed by this system. A commission de concertation carries out an individual examination of project applications. The committee issues an opinion to the authorities, which then take the final decision about the permit. Inhabitants may study the dossiers and have a chance to get their voices heard at these commissions de concertation.

Since the nineteen eighties there has been a plethora of public inquiries in the European Quarter, for both large and small projects. In addition to the applications for the European institutions, applications were – and are still being – submitted by lobby groups, representations of member states and regions, lawyers' offices, the hotel and catering industry,... in short the entire 'entourage' of the EU.

The residents of the North East Quarter were rather confronted with 'smaller' projects and therefore with individual public inquiries. In the south of the Leopold Quarter, one large intervention has completely altered the environment: the implantation of the buildings of the European Parliament. Further north, the



transformation was no less invasive, but came about by the multiplication effect of small-scale projects.

We do not wish to give a complete overview of these projects, for that would make for a long list. However, we will mention some of the important dossiers that the residents were confronted with unexpectedly. In addition to the building projects of the EU institutions, there were among others the Cortenbergh project (offices instead of residential housing on the Ave de Cortenbergh, Rue Newton and Rue Fulton), the application for the extension of the Centre Borschette at the Place Jourdan (the extension never happened but the project changed many years later into a

◀ **Red posters, *enquêtes publics* and commissions de concertation. Residents and their committees have studied hundreds of dossiers. They were a source of information, but the projects were usually too far advanced to be able to really influence them.**

hotel and apartment project at the corner of the Place Jourdan and the Chaussée d' Etterbeek), applications by the political and cultural representations of several regions or federal states the residential buildings along the Rue Wiertz and the Rue Godecharles and so on.

Did participation in the commission de concertation produce an effect?

The inhabitants' expertise and the knowledge of the dossiers ensured in some cases that 'frivolous' projects did not receive a permit in the end: for instance, a project on the corner of the Rue Joseph II and the Rue St-Quentin was turned down, after it had been clearly proved to the commission de concertation that the project violated the legal building code in various points. This was a blatant example, because it concerned buildings from the Block Stevin [see 3.4.], for which the authorities had imposed



The block of houses situated on Chaussée d'Etterbeek, Rue Belliard, and Rue Froissart has had an eventful history of blight and speculation. The result is that several townhouses with cultural heritage have been demolished. They had to make way for new office buildings and dwellings.

very strict technical requirements at the public auction. Such projects should never even have made it to a public inquiry, as they were in fact inadmissible. It clearly demonstrates that the (too often shifting) members of the commission de concertation had too little knowledge of the gen-

eral context or agreements that had been made at a different level.

One of the fundamental problems for the neighbourhood is that each town planning application is judged separately. There is no tool to measure the pressure of the entirety of all projects. The **Plan régional**



d'affectation du sol (PRAS) (*Regional Land Use Plan*) and the **Plans particuliers d'affectation du sol (PPAS)** (*Specific Plan for Land Allocation*) ought to deal with this, but they allow too many exceptions: because of the value of the cultural heritage, facilities for collective use or public services and so on. Moreover, the authorities were also concerned not to deal too severely

◀ Obviously it would be impossible to construct a tunnel under the Justus Lipsius Building (Council of Ministers). For security reasons, the tunnel needed to be relocated to run under the present Place Jean Rey. This is only one of the many projects for which the commission de concertation only served as a pure formality. © RBC-BHG

▲ On this photograph, taken in the nineteen nineties during one of the many press conferences, we recognise among others Marcel Rijndams, former chairman of BRAL, Jean-Michel Mary, at that time general secretary of the IEB and the late Henri Bernard, the driving force of the residents' committee AQL. © Way Press International

with the EU. Thus, the function and the social composition of the entire neighbourhood gradually changed. It was not immediately visible, but all the more noticeable for the residents.

Experience has taught us that once large projects with clear political support are being discussed in the commission de concertation, there is little that can be changed.

In total, a lot of time and energy has been spent in the analysis of the various applications for permits, the information and mobilisation of the neighbourhood and the preparation of an argument to be presented to the commission de concertation. The residents frequently asked for assistance from residents' federations like Bral and IEB and other specialised associations for urban planning, mobility or cultural heritage. The press was repeatedly involved in order to increase the impact of the interventions. Even if the residents did not think that their contribution at the commission de concertation could still bring about any amendments to the project, they still carried out a policy of being present there, in order to avoid that their silence would be interpreted as consent. Repeatedly, the commission de concertation was used as a forum to emphasize the general demand to involve the residents and residents' committees in global planning. ■

Comité de Suivi (1996-2001)

At the end of 1996, Henri Simons, alderman for Town Planning of the City of Brussels, organised a consultation between representatives of residents' committees and the EU institutions. The federal government, the Region and the neighbouring municipalities of Ixelles and Etterbeek were also invited. This initiative first was referred to as the Comité Europe-Habitants, later it became the **Comité de Suivi**. The Comité de Suivi was not a steering committee linked to a project or study, but a forum where all involved partners of the authorities were present and where the representatives of the residents were also entitled to submit points for discussion. Bral and IEB made a clear decision not to take part in this consultation, in order to give priority to direct consultations with the residents and volunteers of the residents' committees (GAQ, AQL and the Riverains Jourdan).

Because of the occupation action of **Sens Unique** [see 3.4.] the city of Brussels gave this forum of consul-



tation a clearer structure with a permanent secretariat from the spring of 1997. From 1997 to 1999, the Comité de Suivi met very frequently, during some periods on a monthly basis. The then EU Commissioner Erkki Liikanen, supported the initiative and attended the first meetings in person...

▲ According to Coordination Europe the renovation of the Leopold Park was a bone of contention in the Comité de Suivi. Without the pressure of the Coordination, most of the park was likely to be taken over by the European Institutions, in stead of being a neighbourhood park for the surrounding residential areas of Etterbeek and Ixelles. © Riverains Jourdan

A structure is one step...

Coordination Europe invested a lot of time and energy in the Comité de Suivi. It submitted very well prepared points to the agenda, and took on most of the work. They proposed better pedestrian crossings in the European Quarter for instance, a shuttle bus for the European area as well as the renovation of the Leopold Park.

In the framework of the competition **Les Sentiers de l'Europe** Coordination Europe drew up a programme consisting of 26 points, with which it wanted to influence the agenda of the competition (1998). They concerned a list of small limited interventions, which would significantly improve the access to the neighbourhood. This programme was proposed and discussed in the Comité de Suivi. A sometimes-painful consensus was reached on a number of those points. The process was painful, be-

cause not all partners took the consultation equally seriously.

One of the 26 points on the programme was the new layout of the intersection Chaussée d'Etterbeek – Rue Belliard [see map p.13]. The committees, the Brussels Region and the City of Brussels came to an agreement about the plotted route of the Maelbeek valley and the extension of the Leopold Park up to the new square. However, Beliris completely dismissed that compromise. Beliris submitted its own application in 2000 and also provided the funding to realise its proposal. The present route and the adjoining Square Jean Rey needed to be constructed quickly, in preparation for the Belgian presidency during the second half of 2001. This stratagem also hit the residents particularly hard.

During the first meetings the residents had also raised the issue of increased access and better maintenance of the Leopold Park.

After all, the entrance to the park along the busiest residential streets was always closed. Thanks to funding by Beliris, a thorough refurbishment took place like the cleaning of the ponds. However, several of the footpaths were enlarged and reinforced to allow car traffic, which occurs on exceptional occasions, for instance when the Solvay library is used for special events. Meanwhile the buildings and the use of the park are gradually being privatised. The Solvay library, a listed building, which had been restored by public funding, has been hired by a European lobby group, a crèche of the European Parliament has been established in the Eastman building and it is soon also to become the location of the House of the History of Europe. In other words, the condition of the park has certainly been given a lot of attention, but it was not undertaken in order to provide a green space for the neighbourhood.

Consultation should also lead to implementation

The main obstacles to the implementation of the agreed measures were not only the lack of funds, but also the fragmentation of competence and the lack of communication. The disappointment after the BEA Study was followed by a further sense of let-down, this time because of the Comité de Suivi. It became evident that Coordination Europe would need to take further action. There certainly was no shortage of plans for the EU Quarter, but this hardly made for any local improvement for the residents. Coordination Europe adjusted its list of demands and requested a so-called 'Coordinateur aux obligations contractuelles' (*Coordinator of contractual obligations*), who would need to ensure the management and coordinated implementation of the plans and projects on the various levels.

According to Coordination Europe, the federal level needed to ap-



▲ In order to enrich the state coffers, the Régie des Bâtiments (*federal Building Agency*) planned to quickly sell off four plots in the EU Quarter. However, the Régie was not familiar with its own dossiers; it was not allowed to sell those plots and was not even the owner of one of them.

point that coordinator. After all, the European institutions had agreements with the federal level about the financing of the infrastructure of the European Parliament and the other institutions. After the Treaty of Nice, the federal government was

also to provide a suitable infrastructure for the European summits. Too many important partners failed to attend the Comité de Suivi, which was said to be 'only' an initiative of the City of Brussels.

Coordination Europe set out the following tasks for this coordinator:

- ▷ The management of the consequences of the interventions on the quality of the urban habitat and environment in the surrounding neighbourhoods;
- ▷ The production of a permanent and current overview of the various sites and the monitoring of the legal provisions and implantation of new projects (this was an essential requirement if you consider for example that at the end of 1996, the Régie des Bâtiments (*federal Building Agency*) planned to sell a property, which it did not even own).
- ▷ The production of company transport plans for the new buildings,

taking into account both staff and visitors.

- ▷ The drawing up of scenarios for the organisation of large events like summits, taking into account the access to the neighbourhoods.
- ▷ A sound management of construction sites, with permanent supervision and adjustment to limit the nuisance as much as possible.

Coordination Europe elaborated the proposal in 2001. It was presented to the Councils of Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Brussels, Ixelles and Etterbeek as well as the federal government. However, it did not produce any results. ■

Conclusions

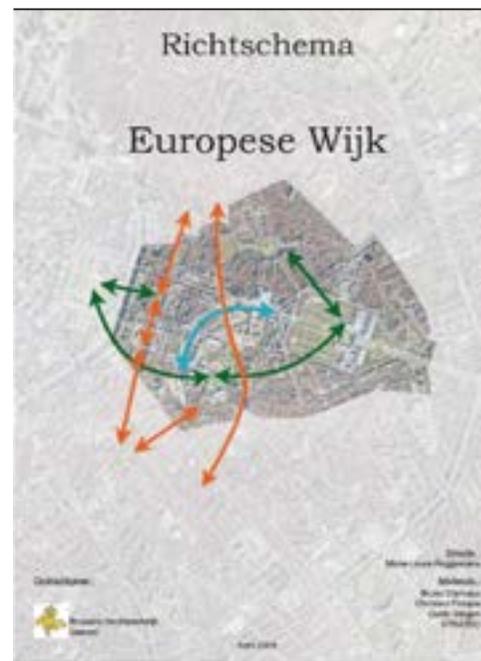
Negative

A consultation between inhabitants and the authorities and/or private sector is not self-evident. A number of factors have a negative impact on the consultation. Some factors even completely prejudice matters:

▷ First of all, the various partners in the consultation do not have equal standing: neither in their role in the decision, nor as far as access to information and ways to process that information, nor as far as their economic position is concerned. The large contribution from the European institutions to the Brussels' economy plays a deciding role in the decision making process. The Brussels' and federal authorities wish to avoid at all costs for Brussels to lose its privileged position as capital of Europe, and therefore they tend to accede more to the questions (or even demands) of the institutions.

▷ Consultation requires a commitment of the participants. At least they have to be present, and their mandate needs to be clear. In the Comité de Suivi the concept was definitely too informal. Important partners (like the federal authorities) usually did not attend. People came too often in a personal capacity and their institutions did not really consider this as a mandate. The longer the consultation lasted, the more people were absent. The consensus that was achieved could not be put into practice. After all, what is the value of a consensus that is reached without the attendance of the most influential actors?

▷ In many cases of consultation, it is not clear what points will be discussed and who can take decisions about which issues. For instance, there was such an abundance of monographs and information during the BEA Study and the Schéma directeur (*Master Plan*) that it was



▲ The purpose of an *enquête publique* is to make concrete remarks in reference to a specific plan. However, there are often so many monographs and new information, that in the end you no longer know what has already been decided, what the long-term ideas are and which are the real points under discussion. In that case, it is impossible to make really relevant observations. © RBC-BHG

no longer possible to differentiate between the state of affairs and the points under discussion. The consultation was not well defined. In both cases the planning processes lasted for more than a year. There was no information if and when (partial) decisions were to be taken and there was no feedback to the various participants in the consultation. In that context, it is impossible to have an efficient influence on the policy. Although the residents had been invited, they were no more than recipients of information and had therefore no influence on the discussion and the decisions.

▷ The participation in consultation is frustrating if important decisions are taken elsewhere. That was the case for the BEA Study, the Comité de Suivi as well as for the Schéma directeur (*Master Plan*).

▷ The recognition and framework of the Comité de Suivi was a direct

result of Sens Unique, the occupation action by the residents. This is a clear victory in itself. However, because of the unclear process of decision making, the irregularity of the various partners and the 'coup' by Beliris concerning the reconstruction of the Square Jean Rey, the Comité de Suivi fizzled out into a talking shop. The last meeting took place in March 2001.

Positive

In spite of all of this, some positive elements can be found in the consultation strategy:

► By means of the various types of consultation, the residents obtained important information: that happened in the case of the classical procedure of the enquêtes publiques (*public enquiries*), but also in the case of the long-term consultation procedures like the BEA Study and the Schéma

directeur. The main challenge is to process, combine, and analyse that information and to draw conclusions. That has certainly been one of the strong points of the committees and of Coordination Europe. Although people rarely commit themselves to committees for long periods of time, this has proved to be a strong point in the European Quarter. Here the residents' committees often proved to have more continuity and knowledge of the dossiers than some administrations. At any rate, the administration's familiarity with the dossiers and its expertise has decreased over the course of the years, because so many of the studies were outsourced to external research consultancies.

► Consultation structures facilitate personal contacts. Because of their knowledge of the dossiers and their involvement, the residents won respect and could count on the good-

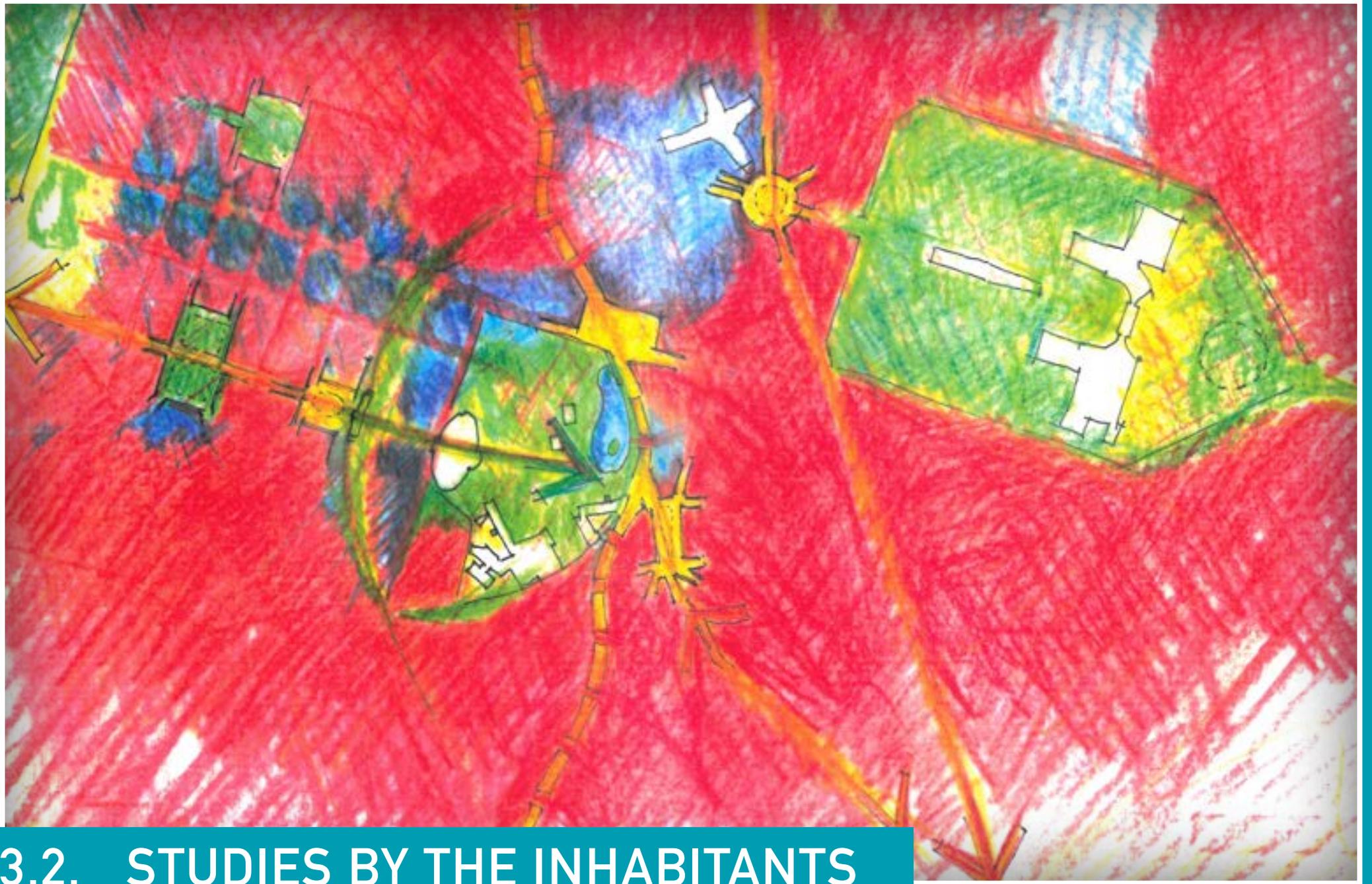
will of other representatives. This made it possible to obtain access to the right person to address specific problems.

► During the course of the consultations, the strategy of the inhabitants evolved. They were first present during the steering committee of the BEA Study. Based on those experiences, Coordination Europe formulated their demand for a more permanently structured consultation with all partners involved as well as more opportunities to help set the agenda. Thereby they raised the standard and argued for consultation linked to supervision of the implementation. It is necessary to make plans and to consult, but in the end, it all comes down to the implementation. The many different partners need a structure with a clear mandate to see to the observance of agreements and if necessary to enforce them. For a while, Coordination Europe ham-

pered that point home, but obviously with insufficient result. In the conclusions of the *Ombudsplan mediateur* (2004) a type of organisation was proposed, which might have partially satisfied their demands. However, none of the Ombudsplan mediateur was ever implemented and neither was the structure.

Recently, the concept of a structure of guidance is gradually finding acceptance. You might argue that the Agence de Développement Territorial (ADT) (*Agency for Territorial Development*) has been founded with that intention in mind. For the major players in the European Quarter, however, this structure will still need to prove that it carries sufficient authority.

Although there is a more important flow of information, for the moment the willingness to involve residents on a regular basis in global consultations about plans and their implementation is not enough present either. ■



3.2. STUDIES BY THE INHABITANTS

Developing visions and carrying out studies is an indirect, but therefore no less efficient way of taking action. By developing and elaborating your own alternatives, you as resident, committee or association can have a positive impact on a planning process.

There are numerous examples. Each remark about a proposal or plan, whether during a meeting of the commission de concertation (*consultation committee*), in a press release or on a banner during a street action, contains in fact an alternative. Bral considers it important to respond by proposing a very carefully prepared solution. Based on the slogan ‘if they do not do it (properly), than we shall’, we shall elucidate two publications with concrete alternatives, prepared by residents.

The Livre Blanc Noir (1994)

The context

The **Brussels-Europe Area Study (BEA Study)** (1986-1987) contained an extensive section on traffic. This set out concrete proposals including a hierarchical ranking of streets to keep through traffic out of residential streets, a limitation of the number of parking places, the increased frequency of public transport and so on. However, like other important parts of the study, that section was never implemented either.

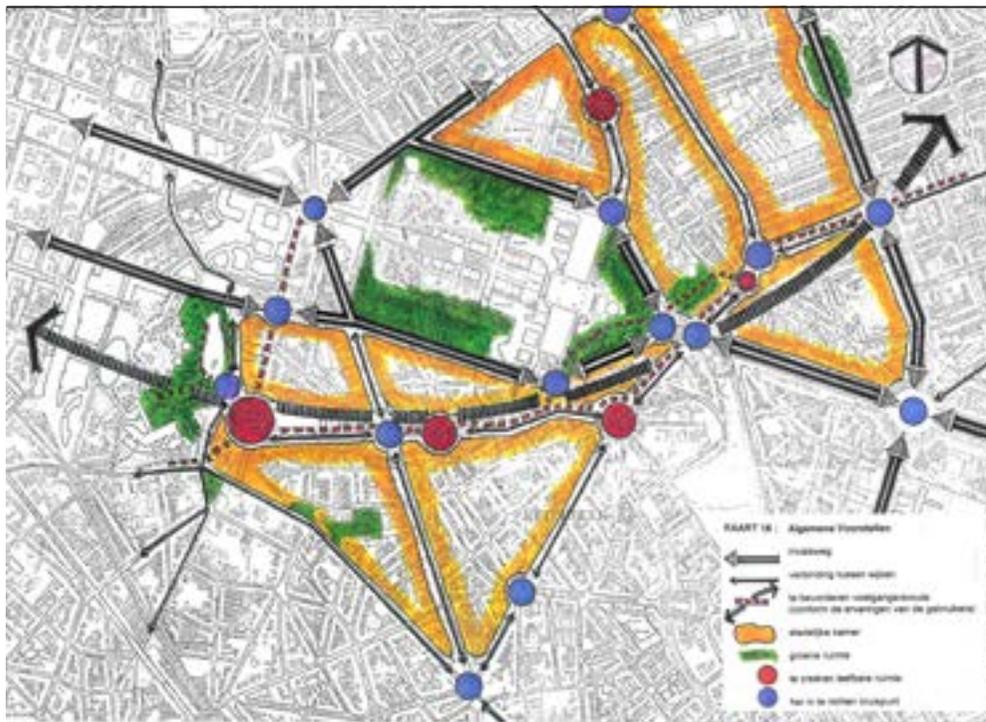
Other studies were carried out later on. In 1989, the consulting firm

Strateg was commissioned to review the organisation of the traffic in the BEA Study. In 1991, the consulting firm Van Wunnik completed the study entitled ‘Public Spaces in the Leopold Quarter’. The objective of these studies was primarily to tackle the problems of car traffic and to improve the access to the institutions. That approach did not change the mobility problems of the residents, however. On the contrary, the situation deteriorated day by day.

In 1991, the **Gemeenschapscentrum** (*community center*) **De Maalbeek** of Etterbeek took the initiative to an-

▼ During an analysis of the traffic situation in the EU Quarter, the inhabitants are the pre-eminent local experts. Within the framework of a call for projects Bruxelles Mobilité, the inhabitants from various neighbourhoods worked together to carry out a survey among passers-by at the beginning of the nineteen nineties. All this resulted in the so-called Livre Blanc Noir (Black White Paper), the impact of which unfortunately remained limited. © AQL (Lagasse)





▲ The residents' local knowledge of the area can and always should complete the 'official' studies commissioned by the authorities. In reference to the production of the *Livre Blanc Noir*, the residents of the EU Quarter advocated among other things for the setting up of 30 km zones and a hierarchical street lay-out. These and other ideas were illustrated in this colourful map. © GC Maalbeek

analyse the mobility situation in their area from the perspective of the residents. The initiative fitted into the

framework of the call for projects Bruxelles Mobilité, organised by the King Baudouin Foundation, and the result was the so-called *Livre Blanc Noir* (the *Black White Paper*).

The project

A number of residents' committees that was active in the area adjoining the one covered by the BEA study, joined forces. They included the residents from the areas of the

Place Jourdan, the Linthout neighbourhood (Bosman Park, Rue Gérard, as well as Rue d'Oultremont and Rue Degroux) and the Etterbeek section of the Ligue des Familles. Together they organised the participation of the remaining local residents.

On the one hand, there was a core group, which distributed a survey they had prepared among the members and sympathizers. Its purpose was to get an insight in the routes most used by the residents, including bottlenecks and proposals to improve matters. There was a high degree of participation: two thirds of the forms were returned completed. Yet some effort was required to fill in the forms, as the participants had to draw routes on a map and add remarks, experiences and suggestions.

In addition, there were volunteers to carry out the census based on the *Workbook Bruxelles Mobilité*, a notebook that Bral had put together in 1992, also with support from the

King Baudouin Foundation. It contained a number of very accessible tools to measure traffic intensity and speed among others. In dozens of locations, the volunteers measured the intensity of the car traffic and the volume of the parking pressure. The underlying concept was the quantification of subjective complaints. In this way, both 'subjective' and 'objective' data were collected, which were subsequently analysed with the assistance of experts.

This project was very time consuming; it included the mobilisation of the various associations, the production and distribution of the survey about the census and its processing into the formulation of the conclusions. However, at the beginning of 1994, the bilingual leaflet *Livre Blanc Noir* was finally presented to the press and the policy makers.

In addition to a presentation arguing for a better design of public

spaces, the Livre Blanc Noir contained three guiding principles:

- ▶ The creation of ‘urban chambers’ according to the borderlines of urban districts, with the imposition of 30 km zones within those chambers and the introduction of a system of residential parking;
- ▶ A hierarchical classification of streets: important approach roads, district connecting roads and local streets;
- ▶ A number of proposals for the re-design of the public space to promote pedestrian traffic. ■

Europe : a Living Campus (1995)

The context

In September 1994, **Coordination Europe** presented its ‘Bilan d’une Etude oubliée Espace Bruxelles Europe’ (*Assessment of a forgotten Study Brussels Europe Area*) by means of a press walk. This document called to mind the main conclusions of the BEA Study, which had been ratified by the government, the proposed actions and most of all the results achieved and the efforts of the various policy bodies.

The balance sheet showed a very negative result: hardly anything had been done to realise the promised buffer zones. Yet those zones were required to prevent an unrestrained expansion of the institutions. Even worse, the authorities had neglected the whole concept and had tolerated infringements. There was barely any reaction to the publication of this poignant assessment.

Coordination Europe then decided that it was time to think about the

future, and to draft a common programme for the future development of the European neighbourhoods. Its aim was to formulate a thorough and well-considered programme from the perspective of the residents.

The project

Contrary to the defensive position that the residents had to take up each time during the numerous commissions de concertation about ever more new building plans, Coordination Europe elaborated a global project for the future of the European Quarter: the Northeast Quarter and the neighbourhoods surrounding the Rond Point Schuman, the Place Jourdan and the Place Luxembourg. This project allocated space for the European institutions, but with respect for the requirements of the area.

It took very many discussions and consultations between the residents’ organisations of the various areas to

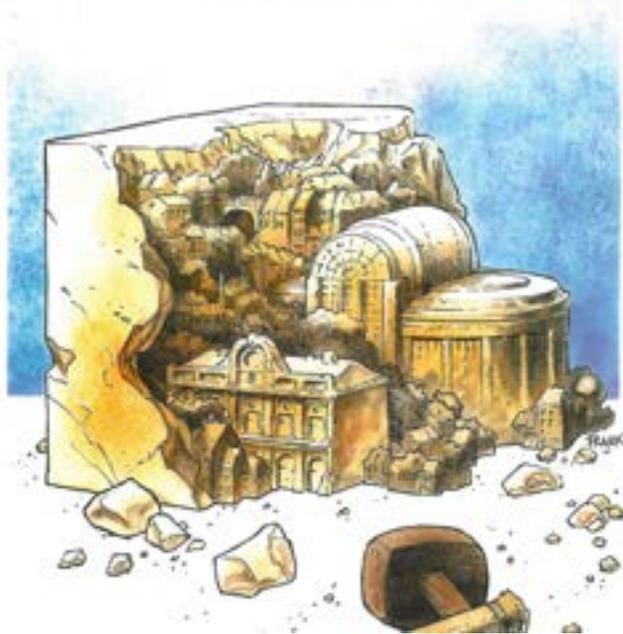
reach a consensus. The federations IEB and Bral provided substantive, strategic and logistic support. In addition, ARAU and two trade unions of European officials were also involved in the discussion and they co-signed.

The result was a well-organised and clear brochure, published in three languages: **Wijken voor Europa / Europe en Quartiers / Europe : a Living Campus** [40 p.]. First of all, the brochure offers a clear overview of the history of the area, as experienced by the inhabitants. Because of its compact form, the many illustrations and clear brief background texts, it was suitable for a wide public and could be distributed on a large scale.

Some details of the brochure might well be outdated at present, but the key ideas remain up to date: two axes should provide a structure to determine the development of the area. On the one hand, the Chaussée d’Etterbeek operates as a north-south connection, as a residential boulevard with mixed functions linking

EUROPE : A LIVING CAMPUS

How to accompany
the presence of Europe
in Brussels ?



Ixelles and Saint-Josse. On the other hand there is the 'city path' which runs from east to west along cultural and green stops: from the Cinquantenaire Park, along the Rond Point Schuman, the Leopold Park across the esplanade of the European Parliament and the Rue Luxembourg to the Place Royale.

A map is included in the centre of the brochure, and shows the residents' proposals in colour. Together with the scale model that was produced later for the campaign of the **Fondation Sens Unique**, it proved to be a handy didactic tool for the discussion about the future of the areas.

◀ The brochure 'Europe: a Living Campus' from 1995 was a joint report by the committees united in Coordination Europe. The key ideas of this beautifully illustrated platform text remain current issues until the present: the core idea of two axes which would provide a structure to determine the development of the area was also included in the *Schéma directeur du quartier européen (2008)*.
© Coordination Europe

The objectives

Europe: a Living Campus was a common platform text. Coordination Europe had been established to unite forces and to speak as much as possible with one voice. This was necessary in order to transcend the sometimes local interests of the committees, for the priorities of the Northeast Quarter are not identical to those of the area surrounding the Chaussée de Wavre and the Place Jourdan. Europe: a Living Campus was a mobilising project, both internal and external. It brought about a growing consensus about the common interests.

Moreover, it also constituted an invitation to the various policy bodies to restart the dialogue (which the Steering Committee had provided during the BEA Study). That consultation between all bodies involved as well as the residents should bring about a new vision for the more extended European Quarter, and could serve as a guiding principle for future developments. ■

Conclusion

In our evaluation, we distinguish between the internal and external level.

Internal

These two publications were milestones for the committees and the organisations for the following reasons:

- ▶ Elaborating and deciding a point of view has had an educational and emancipatory aspect: research was carried out and in the case of the **Livre Blanc Noir** (*Black White Paper*), fieldwork was done with traffic counts and surveys. People's own experiences were objectified and became transferable.
- ▶ The collective research, analysis and development of a vision reinforced the internal cohesion of the groups.
- ▶ They gave rise to coalitions with not always obvious partners. The involvement of the Gemeenschapscentrum De Maalbeek for

instance was unique. It had already mounted an exhibition about the European Quarter in the past in cooperation with the *Louis Paul Boon Kring* and in this way it raised awareness among its grassroots. They went even further by taking the initiative for the project *Bruxelles Mobilité*. Bral attaches great value to these kinds of initiatives, but unfortunately, it is very rare that community centers (*gemeenschapscentra*) take the lead in this way.

▶ **Within the territory of the EU Quarter, neighbourhood- or residents' committees do not always defend the same interests. However, they do agree about the fact that long-term solutions need to be found for the traffic congestion often caused by the European presence in the area.** © IEB



In the case of Europe: a Living Campus, the cooperation with the trade union of the European Officials and the European Civil Services Union was important. Those two trade unions co-signed the vision of **Europe: a Living Campus** and for the inhabitants this signified the recognition of their programme.

- ▶ Both publications were used for a long time as a showpiece to present the vision of the inhabitants for the area.

External

On the external level, our evaluation is less positive:

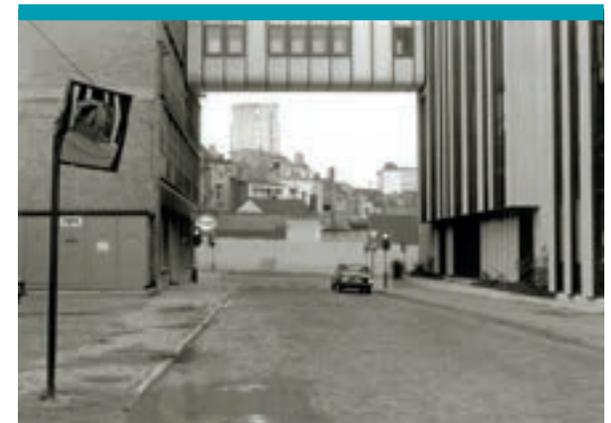
- ▶ Incredibly, the direct response to the content of both the Livre Blanc Noir and Europe: a Living Campus was non-existent. In spite of the substantial dossiers, the presentation and the concrete proposals, those responsible for policy did not take the content seriously. Nobody requested the details of the studies to verify them, let alone use them. The reactions to Europe: a Living

Campus were polite and friendly, but nobody took up the offer. The press warmly welcomed the Livre Blanc Noir, but apart from that, nothing happened. The inhabitants did not receive any recognition either for their practical experience.

- ▶ However, we conclude that in all future master plans up to and including the most recent Schéma directeur du quartier européen (*Master Plan for the European Quarter*) (spring 2008) core ideas from Europe: a Living Campus have simply been copied. Its contents have become com-

monplace. For instance, nobody doubts any longer that two axes provide the structure for the lines of development for the area. ■

▼ In order to prevent the rampant expansion of the EU institutions the Brussels-Europe Area Study proposed the idea of 'buffer zones'. None of this was realised. On the contrary, the political authorities allowed overt infringements. The residents of the EU Quarter sometimes had to pay dearly for the hospitality extended to Europe. © Bral (Luc Verhaegen)





3.3. THE CULTURAL APPROACH

Suite Jourdan Suite was a musical event where inhabitants and European officials met each other during concerts in private residences, in public places and in European buildings. During the period between 1996 and 2001 it took place four times.

The context

The initiative for a large musical happening was taken by the people who lived on and around the Place Jourdan, and who were united in the residents' committee **Riverains Jourdan**. For many years, the committee had been dealing with town planning dossiers concerning their neighbourhood and it reacted when necessary. In this way, the committee always tried a 'defensive approach' in raising public awareness about the disruption of the urban habitat. However, after many years of campaigning and reacting against issues, they decided in 1996 to change tack. The inhabitants' committee found in the *Louis Paul Boon Kring* a partner with experience in organising committed cultural spectacles in Etter-

beek. After all, in 1993 the *Louis Paul Boon Kring* had organised 'Brussels Capital... as well as residential city?' a project with debates, an exhibition about the EU neighbourhood, walks and a publication.

The Riverains Jourdan and the Louis Paul Boon Circle succeeded together to convince an impressive list of partners to support the project: the association of businesses of the Place Jourdan, the other residents groups of the European Quarter – the **Groupe d'Animation du Quartier Européen de la ville de Bruxelles (GAQ)** and the **Association du Quartier Léopold (AQL)** –, the residents' federations **Brusselse Raad voor het Leefmilieu (Bral)** and **Inter-Environnement Bruxelles (IEB)**, the Dutch- and French language mu-

► With the event of *Suite Jourdan Suite* the residents changed tactics and decided to take positive action. By playing music together, the residents and the Eurocrats became better acquainted and gained respect for each other.
© Riverains Jourdan

sic academies of Etterbeek, the French speaking Centre Cultural Espace Léopold Senghor, the Dutch speaking Gemeenschapscentrum De Maalbeek, the municipality of Etterbeek, the City Brussels, the European Parliament, the European Commission and the

Liaison Office Brussels-Europe. The Office considered this musical event a concrete illustration of its dual mission to help European officials in their integration in Brussels and to make Europe better known to the inhabitants of Brussels. ■



The event: Suite Jourdan Suite (1996-2001)

The inhabitants wanted to demonstrate that there was a lot going on in their neighbourhood in spite of the growing and threatening shadow cast by the office buildings. That goal was not innovative in itself; however, it used a new strategy: music.

Brass bands and the public briefly brought new life to undeveloped plots of land. The focus was on the Chaussée d'Etterbeek, which was to be turned again into the arterial road of the lively residential city in the heart of Brussels Europe. The adjacent 'Van Maerlant' plot (which the federal authorities had wrongfully offered for sale – [see 3.4.] was taken over by Brazilian rhythms. For a few hours, the illegal parking lot was to dazzle like the future Place Europe that had been planned there and that was to become a reflection of a viable, democratic and humane Europe.

European officials played music in private houses. Inhabitants brought music to the buildings of the European Commission and the

European Parliament. The purpose of **Suite Jourdan Suite** was to bring about mutual contacts. An enduring acquaintance would help the people who resided and those who worked in the so-called European Quarter to live harmoniously together.

After fifteen months of preparations and rehearsals and an intensive promotional campaign with a press conference, a colourful poster and a lot word of mouth advertising, the first edition of the event attracted around 5,000 visitors. The programme paper was for sale in five locations in the area. During the afternoon, it was also possible to get to know the area in a different way: via an exhibition of films and photographs, art, old post cards, maps, drawings and so on.

The **Jourdan Suite** was performed in the Cultural Centre Espace Léopold Senghor. This music had been especially composed for the occasion. It was a unique total work of art, a symbiosis of Beethoven's ninth symphony (the European anthem) and folksongs



◀ In total, four editions of the musical happening **Suite Jourdan Suite** took place in the EU Quarter. Inter-Environnement Bruxelles (IEB) featured the event on the front page of its magazine of the time **Ville et Habitants** (now: *Bruxelles en Mouvements*) © IEB

- ▷ **12 OCTOBER 1996:** The European Parliament opens its buildings for the public and agrees that the immediate environment is taken over. For this edition, a scale model was produced of the proposals for the Maelbeek valley as set out in **Europe: a Living Campus** [see 3.2.].
- ▷ **9 MAY 1998:** The intensive cooperation between the merchants of the area resulted in an Open Party on the Place Jourdan. In addition to the musical event, there were also exhibitions to remind people of the disappearance of the houses and artists' workshops on the even numbered side of the Rue Godecharle and the Rue Wiertz.
- ▷ **27 NOVEMBER 1999:** In collaboration with City Mine(d), an agency producing social-artistic interventions in the city, the theme of 'eternal construction sites' is elaborated. In the centre of the Place Jourdan, an enormous scaffold is erected. This is the starting point of

a number of walks along a musical route. Residents open their houses, merchants their shops and schools their halls.

► **13 OCTOBER 2001:** During the afternoon, there is a walk along various musical locations. Two lecturers from the Sint-Lukas school of Architecture have designed awnings for the occasion to enhance the visual recognition of the various locations. During the performance of the renewed Jourdan Suite, a video film is projected which depicts the contrasting life in the European Quarter in 7 scenes. During this Suite Jourdan Suite brass bands ensured the connection with the Leopold Station where the collective BruXXel started an occupation, which would last for months. [see 3.4.] ■

DES TOURS POUR « PROTÉGER » L'HABITAT RUES DE PASCALE ET DE TOULOUSE ?

Les rues De Pascale et de Toulouse sont à nouveau envahies par le béton. L'Etat est pourtant bien situé en zone d'habitat culturel et historique. Les habitants ont même droit à un droit spécial de priorité à la réhabilitation pour rénover leurs immeubles, dont le plus grand est construit avant 1900. Ré-

plan autrement pourrait la construction d'une tour de 10 mètres au-dessus de la rue De Pascale, au-dessus d'un bloc de bureaux de 25 mètres dans le haut. Une idée de manière de défendre le patrimoine du centre-ville ? Une pétition a été adressée à l'architecte de l'Urbanisme de la Ville, Michel Demaret, pour visu-

en ce qui concerne les garanties des immeubles de bureau proposés.

Une fois de plus, les autorités de cette ville semblent réagir dans le plus totale insouciance. Situation qui ne nous maintient pas les familles dans les rues De Pascale et de Toulouse ? Ces deux rues constituent un patrimoine architectural de la moitié urbaine, telle que l'a voulu l'Europe Bruxelles-Europe. Et, sans, il n'est à nouveau la petite grande ouverte vers l'architecture de l'Europe. Or, la construction de

(le peu coûteuse) de protection de l'habitat dans les deux rues contre les nuisances du trafic automobile dérivant de la rue Belliard ? Il y a deux semaines, un enfant de trois ans a été blessé aux jambes par un automobiliste arrivé par les embouteillages et qui a bloqué la rue De Pascale à une vitesse folle.

Et si cela profiterait finalement la fonction bureau-école au logement dans pas une, ou vite le sera clairement. Tout le monde aurait le loisir de revendre son bien avec une juste plus-value et de dénicher dans les meilleures conditions financières possibles.

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LE PARCOURS SANTÉ DU QUARTIER LÉOPOLD

ARRIVÉE DÉPART

Le Parcours Santé du Quartier Léopold est organisé le 30 juin 2001 en accord avec la Société Générale de Belgique et le C.O.J., promoteurs de 400 000 m² de bureaux, salles de réunion et parkings du Parcment européen, sur le site de la gare du Luxembourg, rebaptisé Espace Léopold. Cet engagement des habitants et des entreprises du quartier représente un pari sur la rénovation et le développement urbain, un pari à court, sans trêve, pendant les 15 ans de la durée des chantiers.

Or, le pari est réel (même si l'objectif de promouvoir une « rénovation du quartier dans un contexte non spéculatif » est à leur honneur) : l'Agence Léopold (par le Parlement Européen) dans un environnement de quartier. On ne dispose pas d'un milliard d'Euros (42 millions de F) sur un espace auto-accaparé que celui de la gare du Quartier Léopold (250 à 300 m) sans affecter directement les lieux situés dans le voisinage immédiat et les fonctions de coexistence et d'entente de coexistence, et sans susciter les appels d'investissement et les activités immobilières aux objectifs sociaux et économiques.

En parcourant le quartier et les articles de ce journal, ou par luit, on peut légitimement se poser des questions : le plus de l'ère du Quartier à une

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▲ Le Parcours santé du Quartier Léopold: the goose board game, designed by illustrator Frank Pé for AQL, should obviously be regarded with a pinch of salt. If you survived the course in spite of the major challenges and the many obstacles in the EU Quarter, you were allowed to become a member of the residents' committee. © AQL/Frank Pé

Conclusions

- ▶ For each edition of Suite Jourdan Suite the public turnout was a success: each time there were around 500 participants and over 5,000 visitors. For a large part, this was due to the mobilisation efforts of the neighbourhood committee, but also to the press, which paid a lot of attention to the original event. The Jourdan area, which usually was viewed as a ghetto of offices was put in the spotlight as an animated residential neighbourhood.
- ▶ Suite Jourdan Suite brought people together: not only residents and officials, but also top officials and politicians. However, in the long term those new contacts did not bear fruit. The new relationships and the goodwill created never succeeded in transcending the informal level. In spite of the 'good contacts' with EU Commissioner **Erkki Liikanen**, who after all opened the doors of the European Commission

▶ Filmmakers are also often inspired by the surrealistic situations in the EU Quarter. © Monique Quintart

for Suite Jourdan Suite and also carried out a noted intervention in the tent of Sens Unique [see 3.4.], the residents' committees were never invited during that period, for instance within the framework of the competition **Sentiers de l'Europe** to share their local expert knowledge or to give their opinion about projects.

- ▶ The four editions took place without proper financial support. At first, only expenses were reimbursed, but in later editions, even that was omitted. The event, which developed from the grass roots, unfortunately was never taken up by the political institutions. Yet, the European institutions could have grasped this opportunity to show that they were not a sealed fortress and that they valued cooperation with the neighbourhood. ■





3.4. THREE OCCUPATIONS

Between 1997 and 2001, three occupations or actions by squatters took place in the immediate environment of the European institutions. The local committees did not initiate the actions, but they gave them their intensive support.

Sens Unique (a week in 1997)

At the end of 1996, the Régie des Bâtiments (*federal Building Agency*) announced the public auction of four plots of land in the European Quarter: the so-called **Parc Anonyme**, **Comines-Froissart**, **Van Maerlant** and a **site adjacent to the Résidence Palace** [see map p.54]. A diverse group of Brussels' activists felt that they had to react to this and put up a circus tent on the Van Maerlant plot.

The context

The sale of the plots of land was entirely dictated by financial motives. The Régie des Bâtiments wanted to sell all of them to the highest bidder

and did not impose any obligations. They completely ignored existing – legally binding – agreements and the crucial strategic role of these sites. After all, each of them had a 'past'.

During the nineteen sixties and seventies, all these residential blocks had been 'sacrificed' in favour of the EU institutions, their possible expansion and adjacent infrastructure. Houses were demolished and/or expropriated. During the second half of the nineteen eighties, conventions were adopted between the federal authorities and the European institutions (1985), and the Brussels' Region and the federal state (1989), about the infrastructure construction work to be car-

ried out and the distribution of the charges and costs. The conventions also set out specific 'compensations' and decided the use of these urban wastelands that had been the result of the real estate policy of the past. Each of those four plots of land was cited explicitly in those legally binding provisions.

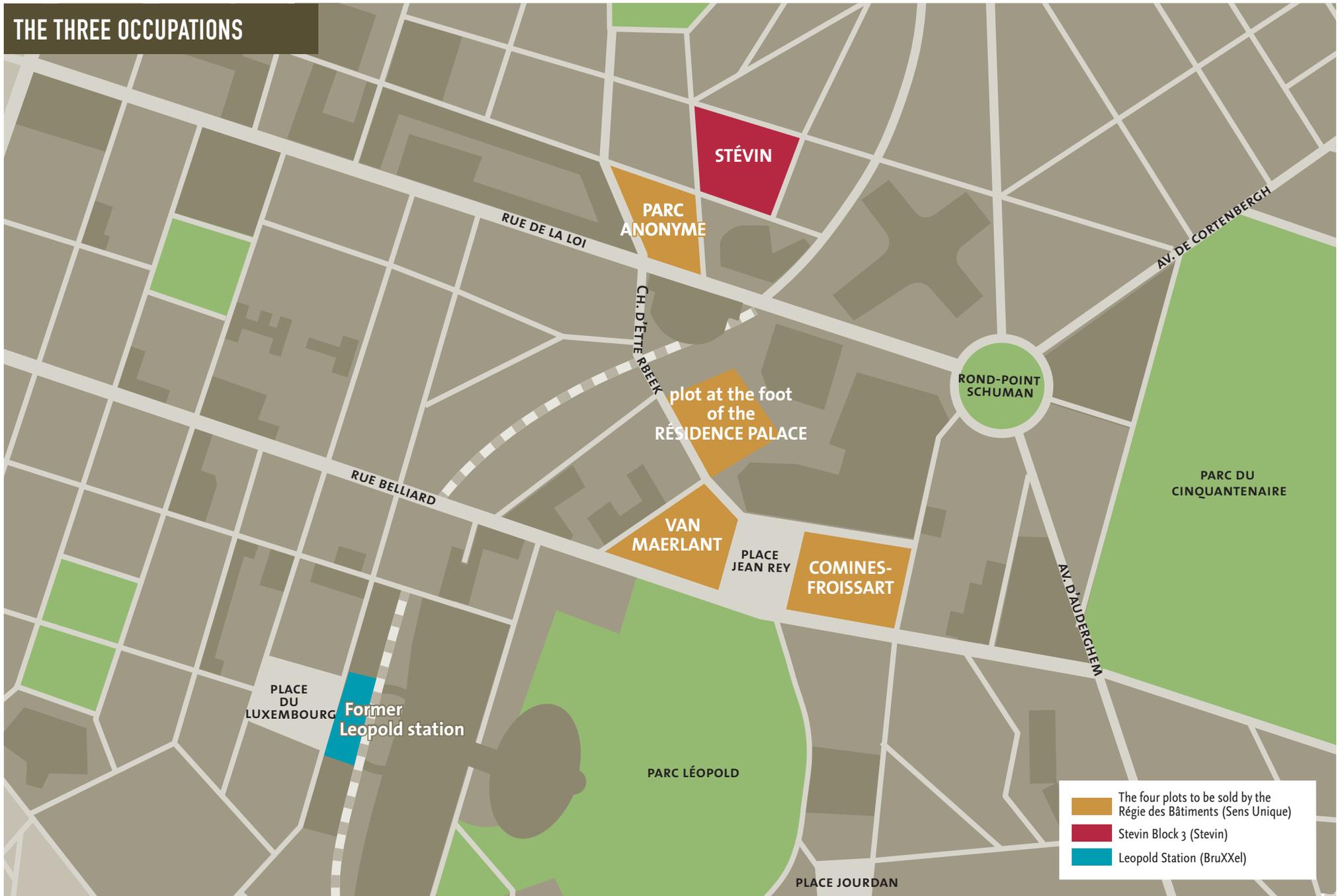
The auction announced in 1996 did not refer in any way to those provisions and in some respects was completely in contradiction with them. This move by the Régie des Bâtiments caused a number of city activists to react by setting up a temporary **Fondation Sens Unique**.

The name 'Sens Unique' refers both to the main urban motorways,



▲ The residents' committees put an architectural model together in order to visualise their vision of the area. EU Commissioner Erkki Liikanen gave a noted performance in the tent of *Sens Unique*. However, it did not lead to a structural cooperation.

THE THREE OCCUPATIONS



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contents

the Rue de la Loi and the Rue Belliard, that each traverse the area in one direction, as well as to the one way direction in which decisions about the development in the European Quarter are taken i.e. from top to bottom.

The initiators

A number of Brussels' residents, including people from outside the European Quarter, students and artists had already met (in 1995 and 1996) during the occupation of the empty **Hotel Central** across from the Bourse to denounce the speculative vacancies in the centre of Brussels. They shared the conviction that the public at large needed to be made aware of the policy pursued in the EU Quarter.

This time they did not occupy a building but an undeveloped plot of land (Van Maerlant) by erecting a circus tent there for ten days.



The objectives

The campaigners hoped to achieve four objectives by means of the Sens Unique action:

1. To realise general coordination between the residents and all the involved authorities and institutions, under the symbolic title 'Miss Europe (f/m)'.
2. To halt the sale of the plots of land.

3. To draw the attention of politicians to the needs of the area.
4. To find a sustainable solution for the so-called Block 3 of the Stevin blocks.

The event

The campaigners tried to involve the residents in advance of their action. They handed out empty boxes to lo-

▲ The circus tent on the Van Maerlant-site was the epicentre of the battle against the public auction of four crucial building sites in the European Quarter. Blinded by gold fever, the *Régie des Bâtiments* managed to momentarily forget all that had previously been agreed about these sites.



▲ By means of this invitation, Sens Unique publicized its action in the area. Sens Unique refers here in particular to the one-way traffic in the case of decisions about the area: all were top-down decisions. © Sens Unique

cal residents with the request 'to do something with them' and to bring them to the circus tent during the action. They could write or paint on the boxes, use them as scaled-down

models etc. The box-campaign was not an overwhelming success, but it did bring a number of extra people to the tent.

The action week started with a press conference about the planned 'sell-out' by the Régie des Bâtiments. A voluminous dossier, prepared by **Coordination Europe**, provided clear evidence why legal reasons prevented the sale from going ahead. This immediately set the tone. Throughout the week, discussions about the neighbourhood raged in the circus tent. Meetings took place between residents and politicians, there were debates between campaigners and those in charge of policy, and there were playful actions and performances. The centrepiece in the tent was a large homemade model illustrating the themes and proposals from **Europe: a Living Campus** [see 3.2.] with the common vision of the future of Coordination Europe. The model was an excellent starting point for discussions with visitors.

At the end of the occupation, the Fondation Sens Unique dissolved itself. The follow-up of the contents and agreements with the policy makers took place by way of Coordination Europe, which therefore had a very busy agenda in the following months. The physical presence on the location and the strong dossier concerning the planned sale had provoked a lot of public attention and political reactions. The action had put the residents of the neighbourhood in the picture.

The results

To what extent did they achieve to four objectives that were the purpose of the action?

1. A GENERAL COORDINATION BETWEEN THE RESIDENTS AND ALL THE AUTHORITIES INVOLVED

As a direct consequence of Sens Unique, the alderman for Town Planning of the City of Brussels made

funding available from 1997 onwards for the secretariat of the **Comité de Suivi** [see 3.1.]. This provided new oxygen and a structure for the consultation between the residents and the various policy partners (the European Commission, Brussels, Ixelles and Etterbeek, the region and the federal authority). The last meeting of the Comité de Suivi took place in March 2001.

2. THE SALE OF THE PLOTS OF LAND

The announced public auction of the plots of land did not take place in 1997, but in the end only one of the plots of land was to remain in the hands of the authorities. The dossiers prepared by Coordination Europe carried enough weight to help insure that the sale of all the plots of land as a whole was withdrawn.

The so-called 'Block 1' which the residents and campaigners jointly called the **Parc Anonyme** ('park' to stress that the demolished block of houses had better not be rebuilt, and



'anonymous' to indicate that it was unclear at the time who owned the block), remained for the time being under control of the Régie des Bâtiments. It wanted to construct offices on that location, as provided in the Plan de secteur (1979). The City of Brussels favoured a green zone in

▲ The houses on the Van Maerlant-site had been demolished at the beginning of the nineteen seventies in favour of a motorway, which fortunately was never constructed. Afterwards, it became a gigantic building-site, first for the storm drain and later once again for a car tunnel. According to agreements between the Brussels Region and the federal authorities houses were going to be constructed here. The complexity of this dossier caused an urban wasteland that lasted for years. © AQL (Lagasse)

that area, but the federal authorities estimated that such a change of use would mean a loss to them of slightly over 340 million Belgian Francs. Finally this plot of land became a part of a larger exchange operation between the City and the federal authority in the wake of the Stevin Dossier. The inauguration of the Parc de la Vallée du Maelbeek, constructed with the financial assistance of Beliris, finally took place in October 2001.

Comines-Froissart was one of the rare – all be it dilapidated and undeveloped – remnants of the ‘typical residential area’ that had been razed to the ground because of the construction of the European Council of Ministers. In the building permit of the Council and in the consequent convention between the Belgian state and the Brussels region, it had been laid down that the federal authority was to ensure new houses would be built there before 1990, for otherwise its properties in that block of houses would fall to the Region of Brus-

sels. Finally, after many tussles, this is what had happened by the middle of 1993. At the end of 1996, the federal authority could no longer offer the plot of land for sale, for the simple reason that they no longer owned it (!). After they had investigated the dossier, the federal authority also reached that conclusion and withdrew the sale.

The Region of Brussels did not construct the promised houses itself in the end, but sold the plot in 2003 to a private construction promoter. The result today is ‘Léopold Village’, a complex of apartments and a hotel.

In principle, the **Van Maerlant** block had also mainly been destined for housing. At the beginning of the nineteen seventies, that block of houses had been expropriated by the federal authorities for public use: the construction of the Maelbeek-collector and road construction. The buildings were demolished and the undeveloped plot of land had been marked as a typical residential area

on the Plan de secteur of 1979. In the previously mentioned convention between the federal state and the Brussels Region (1989), it had been agreed that the land would remain the property of the authorities. Based on the press file of Coordination Europe it was withdrawn from the sale. In 2006, the so-called ‘tripartite agreement’, between the federal authorities, the Brussels Region and the three municipalities Brussels, Etterbeek and Ixelles provided among other things, that the Van Maerlant block could be sold after all, but according to specific conditions. In 2007, the federal government sold it to a promoter to construct offices and houses. The terms and conditions that were laid down in the sales contract, required the construction of at least 18,700 m² of housing, of which at least half for middleclass families according to the system of the so-called ‘government regulated houses’. At the end of 2011, the City of Brussels granted the permits for the so-called Light-

house project: a housing tower block of 24 floors, much higher than is allowed according to the Regional Urban Planning Regulation (RRU) and with a disproportionate number (of m²) of luxury housing as opposed to the number of middleclass housing. Some members of Coordination Europe have meanwhile lodged an appeal against this. The procedure is under way.

The **plot of land at the foot of the Résidence Palace** was quickly sold. However, the construction site for the building of apartments was still active at the end of 2013.

3. POLITICAL ATTENTION FOR

THE NEEDS OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Politicians of the federal and the Brussels’ government as well as from the European Parliament visited the tent on the occupied plot of land. Questions were raised in the Brussels’ Parliament and some politicians even made formal pledges. Politicians from different political groups

asked questions, based on the press file about the sale of the blocks of houses. Consequently, the Brussels Region put pressure on the federal government and the public sale was cancelled. Even afterwards, the problems of the European Quarter received regular attention on different political levels. However, the needs of the neighbourhood were never high on the agenda.

4. FINDING A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION FOR THE STEVIN BLOCK OR 'BLOCK 3'

Bral continued to work on this project for two more years (see next). ■

The Stevin Project (1997-1999)

The Bral-project for the so-called 'Block 3' of the so-called Stevin Blocks [see map p.54] was a direct result of the Sens Unique campaign. Thanks to the public interest, the Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie (VGC) (*Flemish Community Commission*) approved a pilot project. This allowed Bral to have one of their staff members support the residents of this block of houses for two years, from 1997 to 1999.

The chequered history of the Stevin Blocks

26 AUGUSTUS 1971 – The Belgian authorities expropriate four blocks of houses along the Rue Joseph II and the Rue Stevin, in the shadow of the Berlaymont Building, for a potential expansion of the EU institutions. After a few years during which most of the houses stood empty, the Régie des Bâtiments (*federal Building Agency*), which has managed the buildings since their expropriation, decides to



allow people to live there again but with very precarious rental contracts (one-month notice).

28 SEPTEMBER 1980 – All residents, 250 families, receive a notice of eviction, although there is no concrete building project. According to the Plan de secteur of 1979, the Stevin blocks are intended for housing or for the expansion of the EU, on condition that the EU does not expand on a different plot of land on the other side of the Rue de la Loi. After the lodging of protests, the notice is withdrawn.

▼ A thirty (30!) year tug-of-war about the future of these residences in the Stevin-block caused the residents to pay a heavy toll. Many of them left at the time, because they were fed up with the uncertainty.

23 MARCH 1981 – The same scenario: all residents again receive notice to vacate the premises and again this notice is withdrawn after protests have been lodged.

15 JULY 1981 – The decision is taken to expand the EU offices on the other side of the Rond Point Schuman (to construct the so-called 'interpreters building' on the Rue Breydel) and therefore not on the side of the Stevin Blocks. The consequence of this is that the latter will be earmarked for housing according to the provi-

► Allowing houses to deteriorate for years in order to make a considerable profit in the end. This is what we call speculation. For years the City of Brussels and the Régie des Bâtiments have resisted taking any responsibility. All this took place at the expense of the residents.

sions of the Plan de secteur. On 15 July 1981, the expropriation decision is withdrawn by means of a Royal Decree. However, nothing changes for the residents. They are still confronted with insecurity of tenure and badly maintained houses.

1985 – The Régie des Bâtiments sells the houses of Blocks 2 and 4 separately to the highest bidder. This results into an enormous wave of speculation. ‘Block 3’, the so-called ‘Stevin Block’ remains the property of the Régie des Bâtiments. The federal authority decides to renovate this block for housing, in compensation for the construction of the European Council of Ministers (Justus Lipsius) on the housing block Comines-Froissart in a residential zone (according to the Plan de secteur of 1979).

20 MAY 1985 – The City of Brussels gives its approval to an exchange with the Régie des Bâtiments. The Régie is interested in a row of shops along the Rue Ravenstein, in view of the expansion of the Palais des Beaux

Arts (the present-day Bozar). The Régie takes over the shops from the City, which in return becomes the owner of the Stevin Block, on condition of the payment of an outstanding balance. From the beginning, the City wants to immediately sell on the Stevin Block to a private promoter (with an obligation to renovate) in order to use the sale price to make up for the balance due after the swap with the Régie. However, the City commits errors in the tendering process, which results in many years of a legal tug-of-war. Meanwhile, the Régie des Bâtiments initiates proceedings against the City for the non-payment of the amount they had agreed.

1 SEPTEMBER 1992 – After the long legal battle, the private promoter is no longer interested in the renovation operation and cries off. This results in confusion about the present ownership of the Stevin Block. Neither the City of Brussels, nor the Régie des Bâtiments considers itself responsible. The tenants are left without support



to confront renovation, maintenance and urgent problems. A number of them move away, which results again in vacant buildings.

20 SEPTEMBER 1994 – The remaining inhabitants of Block 3 propose to both the Régie des Bâtiments (*federal Building Agency*) and the City to purchase the block of houses collectively with the assistance of the Fonds du Logement (*Housing Fund*). They receive no support from the City or the Region.

20 JANUARY 1997 – The Fondation Sens Unique again calls attention to the improbable situation of the Stevin Block.

1997 – Start of the Stevin project designed by Bral.

The objectives

The goal of the Bral-action was wide-ranging. Our main concern was the situation of the residents. Firstly, we wanted to obtain clarity about the ownership-situation. In addition, we demanded lease contracts with a standard term of tenancy and the recognition of the block of houses as an area for renovation with increased premiums. Finally, we demanded the

renovation of all buildings according to the requirements of the residents.

Our first step was the foundation of a tenants association. All tenants were associated in the non-profit association **Logements Célestes** (literally “heavenly lodging”) in order to search together for solutions. At the beginning of 1998, the Region officially recognised this association as a Association d’Insertion par le Logement (AIL) (*Association for Integration by means of Housing*).

The renovation proposal

Logements Célestes produced a scenario where all residents obtained a decent house within the block. It concerned a total of 37 houses, 13 of which were vacant at the time. Forty-five families consisting of 173 people lived in the remaining 24 houses. All possible renovation subsidies were discussed with each family individually, taking into account their needs

► **This photograph demonstrates how stately buildings in the EU Quarter can deteriorate because of decades of mismanagement.**

for accommodation and their financial options. Logements Célestes also received permission to use one of the vacant buildings as a meeting place.

A financial plan was drawn up and at the same time, discussions started with the Fonds du Logement and a number of interested social housing companies in order for them to take on the renovation of a part of the housing block. They were prepared to do this, on condition that the proprietor agreed. This is of course a logical condition, except that in this case it happened to be a sticking point. After all, after the swap between the City and the Régie des Bâtiments had run aground, neither of them considered himself to be the owner of the 37 houses.

Finally, Logements Célestes succeeded in drafting a complete and financially viable renovation and re-



housing plan. The residents signed a charter laying down the rehousing conditions. After additional political lobbying, the block of houses received its regional recognition as a renovation perimeter with increased subsidy in June 1998. Within such a perimeter, the normal renovation subsidy in force everywhere else is considerably increased.

The negative response by the City

Without any consultation with Logements Célestes, the Régie des Bâtiments and the City of Brussels had meanwhile reached an agreement and the original swap was finally concluded. The City of Brussels was now the official proprietor of the block of houses. One day after the official presentation of the renovation plan in June 1998, all tenants received a notice to vacate the premises in 6 months. The City of Brussels was not prepared to pay for the required

renovation, not even with the (considerable) financial assistance of the Fonds du Logement and three social housing companies. More importantly, the individual sale of the residential houses, located in the heart of the European Quarter could considerably enrich the City's treasury. This was a poignant conclusion of many years of speculation by the authorities.

The timing could not have been worse. Most of the families were preparing their annual holiday to Morocco. Therefore, it was impossible to agree to a common reaction at that moment. Logements Célestes tried to get external support, from individual politicians, from the Brussels' Parliament and the trade unions. However, the City was unyielding and refused to change its decision to sell the houses.

In the autumn the weekly meetings and negotiations started again. The possibilities to purchase a number of the houses from the City were investigated. However, the financial conditions soon proved that the City

of Brussels was aiming at a completely different public than the sitting tenants. The City did not wish to negotiate with the association, but only with the individual residents. Moreover, they made use of an out-dated list of residents, thereby unjustly excluding several families. The City clearly exploited a traditional principle: divide and rule.

By means of external pressure and some procedural delays, the first notice was indeed withdrawn and the entire process took an additional year. However, many residents became discouraged and sought elsewhere for a solution. Most of them had given up hope.

The result

In 2000, the houses were sold by public auction to individual buyers. The sales contracts contained provisions for a renovation obligation and a minimal term of residence. Almost



▲ Without any consultation, the Régie des Bâtiments and the City of Brussels reached an agreement about the sale of the Stevin-blocks. A day after the announcement of this agreement, the residents were informed that they had to leave their homes within six months.

all new owners came from outside the area. However, when building permit applications were submitted

later on the City was very lax and the conditions imposed were not always respected. Yet, it had been the City who had imposed these conditions, be it under pressure of Logements Celestes. However, only two members of Logements Celestes remained in the area and the neighbourhood was insufficiently alert to check each time on the agreement during the various enquêtes publiques (public enquiries) and permits during the following months and years. This is how the promised family houses in the Stevin block were replaced by mainly small apartments and studios for a European public. Moreover, the new (well off) owners were able to take advantage of the increased renovation premiums that the previous residents had fought for. This was a bitter pill to swallow for the original residents and the campaigners. ■

BruXXel (2001)

Belgium held the presidency of the European Union from July until December 2001. For a group of anti-globalists, this was a reason to occupy the then vacant station building in the Léopold Quarter. This occupation lasted 89 days.

The context

The Belgian presidency provoked the discontent of the anti-globalists in Brussels about the gap between the EU institutions and its citizens. During the same period, the European Parliament in Brussels was involved in expanding its stock of buildings in the Leopold Quarter. In 2004, the EU was to expand from 15 to 25 member states. Therefore, in the autumn of 2000, the promoter of the **Société Espace Léopold (SEL)** had – at the request of the EU Parliament – submitted building applications for additional offices and meeting rooms (D4 and D5) along both sides of the Leopold Station. In the



autumn of 2001, during the Belgian presidency, the town planning permit for this project was being dealt with. The demolition of the Leopold Station was part of the application.

For many people, the promoter's plans for the demolition of the sta-

▲ After the European Parliament had already taken over part of the Leopold Park, the Leopold Station risked being completely demolished as well. Today the station has been relocated and only the façade has been preserved. © Het Nieuwsblad (December 1991)

► The collective BruXXel managed to maintain its occupation of the Leopold Station for almost 3 months, day and night. In this way, they forced the European Parliament to organise a hearing with all those involved.

© BruXXel

tion building illustrated once more, how clumsily the European institutions were plonked into Brussels. It became a symbolic dossier to denounce the state of affairs in the European Quarter.

The initiators

City activists founded a temporary collective: **BruXXel**. The group of **Cinema Nova** and **City Mine(d)** made an important contribution. The latter association, dating from 1997 was the result of occupations discussed previously (Hotel Central, Sens Unique...).

The name BruXXel indicated the multilingualism and the local grass-roots of the collective. Because of their regular press conferences and a website on which their platform text could be signed, BruXXel could count on the



support from numerous French and Dutch speaking social and cultural associations (KVS, Beursschouwburg, KunstenFestivaldesArts and others) and even from individual Members of the European Parliament.

The objectives

The goal of the occupation was in the first place to halt the imminent demolition of the station. In addition, it was the intention to use public debates to create a forum where European topics could be discussed in an alternative way. The collective BruXXel wanted purposefully to act differently from the European summits that always took place in highly secure meeting sites and in very select company.

The action

The occupation started on Saturday 13 October 2001, following the fourth edition of Suite Jourdan Suite [see 3.3.]. Visitors and residents de-



parted from various locations and accompanied by brass bands in the direction of the Leopold Station. During the occupation, the campaigners supported by Coordination Europe were able to carefully review the global town planning dossier of

the Espace Léopold and the accord-cadre (*framework agreement*) [see 3.5.] concluded between the investors, the residents' association AQL and the SDRB (*Regional Development Company for the Brussels Capital Region*). In this way, the campaigners put not

◀ Impression of the construction site of the European Parliament that lasted for years. Bottom right the entrance to the relocated Leopold Station, and adjoining it the building site of what would later become D5 or the József Antall building. The former station now only has a decorative purpose and is used as an information kiosk and exhibition space. © Philippe de Gobert

only the preservation of the station building on the agenda, but they also asked questions about the legitimacy of the building permits for the buildings D4 and D5.

The procedure for obtaining the building permit for these buildings was in fact a very complex dossier for technico-legal reasons. First, the municipality granted a *certificat d'urbanisme (planning certificate)* (that sets out the general framework within which a permit can be delivered). Later on changes to this certificate were approved retroactively, although meanwhile an *enquête publique*



▲ The then federal minister for mobility Isabelle Durant, whose portfolio also included the National Railway Company of Belgium came to encourage the BruXXel occupiers of the station. “These people attest to a democratic will that should not be stopped” she then said. © Gert Jochems

(public enquiry) about the permit had already taken place concerning a dossier based on the first certificate. Statutory periods expired without any decisions being taken and international tendering procedures were not abided by. In spite of the size of the construction site and in spite of the fact that the buildings were intended for the EU Parliament, it was still up to the municipality of Ixelles – and not up to the Brussels Capital Region – to grant the permit, for the simple reason that the official applicant was a private promoter. Moreover, all these events took place during an election year, which changed the municipal majority during the period that the dossier was discussed. That complexity made it very difficult to communicate with a wider audience. The press focused mainly on the preservation and the new destination of the Leopold Station.

Nevertheless, a smaller group remained active within Coordination Europe to deal specifically with

the procedure of granting building permits for the buildings D4 and D5, in particular to ensure that the construction of compensation housing – as had been imposed in the Plan particulier du sol (*Specific Plan for Land Allocation*) of the Espace Léopold – would in fact be realised. As had been the case for the European Council, it had been laid down that as a part of the consent for the construction of the European Parliament, houses were to be constructed. In this case, it concerned housing with a surface of 41,000 m².

The results

The intensive negotiations between the campaigners and Coordination Europe, in particular AQL on the one hand, and the European Parliament and the investors on the other hand resulted in the organisation of an official hearing by the Bureau of the European Parliament in January 2002.

In a meeting room of the European Parliament, the Bureau invited delegations of the partners involved: the various Brussels' authorities, the promoters as well as the neighbourhood committees. Everyone was given the opportunity to explain his point of view, but there was no possibility to debate. For that reason, no conclusions were formulated and no further agreements about any future adaptations were concluded.

Because of the disgraceful handling of the procedure for the granting of the building permit for the buildings D4 and D5, the town planning edict was changed in 2002: from now on, the *fonctionnaire délégué régional (official designated by the regional authority)* would always have the competence for granting permits for construction work of public interest, no matter who the applicant was (authority of private promoter). The complexity of the European dossier has resulted in an amendment of the legislation in other cases as well.

A second result might be that the region took a stricter stance in the town planning permit that was finally issued. The government signed the town planning permit for D4 and D5 in March 2002 and linked it to an agreement with the real estate promoters. That agreement set out more details about the time limits for completion, bank guarantees and sanctions. According to a survey carried out by the Agence de Développement Territorial (ADT) (*Agency for Territorial Development*), around 10,000 m² of housing still remained to be realised at the end of 2011, as town planning compensation for the construction of the European Parliament and its extension D4 and D5.

In the end, only the listed façade and the interior of the first floor of the Leopold Station were preserved and restored. Until the present, the former station – or what remains of it – is in use as an information desk and exhibition space. ■

Conclusions

A thorough knowledge of the issues is essential

For all three occupations– Sens Unique, Stevin and BruXXel – the thorough knowledge of the dossiers proved to be a deciding factor. This includes not only a familiarity with the facts and the history of the case, but also the various legal elements, analysis and strategic choices. In the case of Sens Unique, it allowed us to stop the public auction of the four plots of land. In the case of the Stevin block, the convincing dossier managed to persuade the *Fonds du Logement* and some social housing companies to join us in a far ranging renovation plan. In the case of BruXXel, the knowledge of the dossiers also helped to transform the action from a campaign against the possible demolition of the Leopold Station into a renewed debate on the houses to be built in compensation. The local groups' knowledge of the dossiers proved to be a strong point

not only during the occupations, but for the entire EU dossier.

It is certainly worthwhile to maintain a permanent structure to exchange information with the various partners and to invest in good archives. Authorities often do not have as good a memory as the residents and sometimes 'forget' parts of conventions. You need knowledge and information to be able to exert influence. However, not all information can be obtained easily. For instance, it is not always obvious who takes a decision about which issue, and at what moment, and what the exact content of the decision is. To collect, analyse and interpret the information is also a time consuming business.

The mobilisation and support from the grassroots

The original types of action always had a mobilising effect. The media ensured that public attention was fo-

cused on the combination of a solid content and unexpected action. Because of the press interest, a local dossier turned into a regional issue. Both organisations from civil society as well as politicians from various levels were sensitive to the message. A clearly defined line of action, like the halting of the demolition of a building, facilitates that mobilisation more than a complex dossier.

The length of time the action lasted was also a definite factor: Sens Unique lasted for a week, BruXXel lasted three months and Stevin lasted for more than 2 years. That proved to be a disadvantage for Stevin. The long-lasting administrative battle for security of tenancy had too little news value for the press. Bral, which had organised the project, had nolens volens focused in particular on the required internal social cohesion. After all, it had been obvious from the beginning that individual solutions could only be enforced by means of solidarity. A broader external atten-

tion and support might well have been able to put more pressure on policy makers.

Follow-up immediately after the actions

Both for Sens Unique and for BruXXel the initiative was developed by a limited group of campaigners, who were not part of the residents' committees. Their commitment was of a limited duration. Therefore, agreements and relations with the existing committees and the larger group of grassroots supporters are necessary. Before the beginning of the action, the city activists of Sens Unique had consulted for months with the residents' association of Coordination Europe about the follow-up of the issues in the dossier. These agreements about continuity constituted an important lesson, learned from the occupation of the Hotel Central.

COMITÉ DE SUIVI EUROPE HABITANTS

À L'INITIATIVE DE LA VILLE DE BRUXELLES



- Avec la participation de:*
- Commission européenne
 - Parlement européen
 - Conseil des Ministres de l'Union européenne
 - État fédéral
 - Région de Bruxelles-Capitale
 - Ville de Bruxelles
 - Commune d'Etterbeek
 - Commune d'Ixelles
 - Association Quartier Léopold
 - Groupe d'Animation du Quartier Nord-Est
 - Comité des Riverains Jourdan, de Pascale, Toulouse et Sévris
 - Comité des Riverains de la rue de la Loi
 - Société Espace Léopold

In the case of BruXXel, there were no such agreements. However, because the occupation lasted slightly longer – just under three months – the required cooperation could be realised during the time of the occupation. ■

◀ After Sens Unique the City of Brussels took the initiative to organise regular consultation meetings with all the stakeholders. They met each other in the *Comité de Suivi Europe Habitants*.



3.5. ACCORD-CADRE – A SPECIAL TYPE OF RESIDENTS' PARTICIPATION

The residents' committee AQL used a legal victory as leverage to conclude a contract with the private investors through direct negotiations. This accord-cadre (framework agreement) (30 June 1988) enabled the committee to come forward as an interested party each time the real estate project 'Espace Léopold' was further elaborated and realised.

The context

The preparations for the construction of the **European Parliament** in Brussels started in the shadow of the **Brussels-Europe Area Study (BEA Study)** (Etude Espace Bruxelles-Europe). That study was intended to provide a total picture of the European implantation in the city as well as to ensure an integrated approach. However, the actual plans were made behind closed doors. The origin, development and conclusions of the BEA Study were related previously in this publication [see 3.1.].

As mentioned previously, the Belgian authorities had committed themselves not to take any initiatives in reference to the construction of a potential parliamentary hemicycle in Brussels. However, this did not prevent the finan-

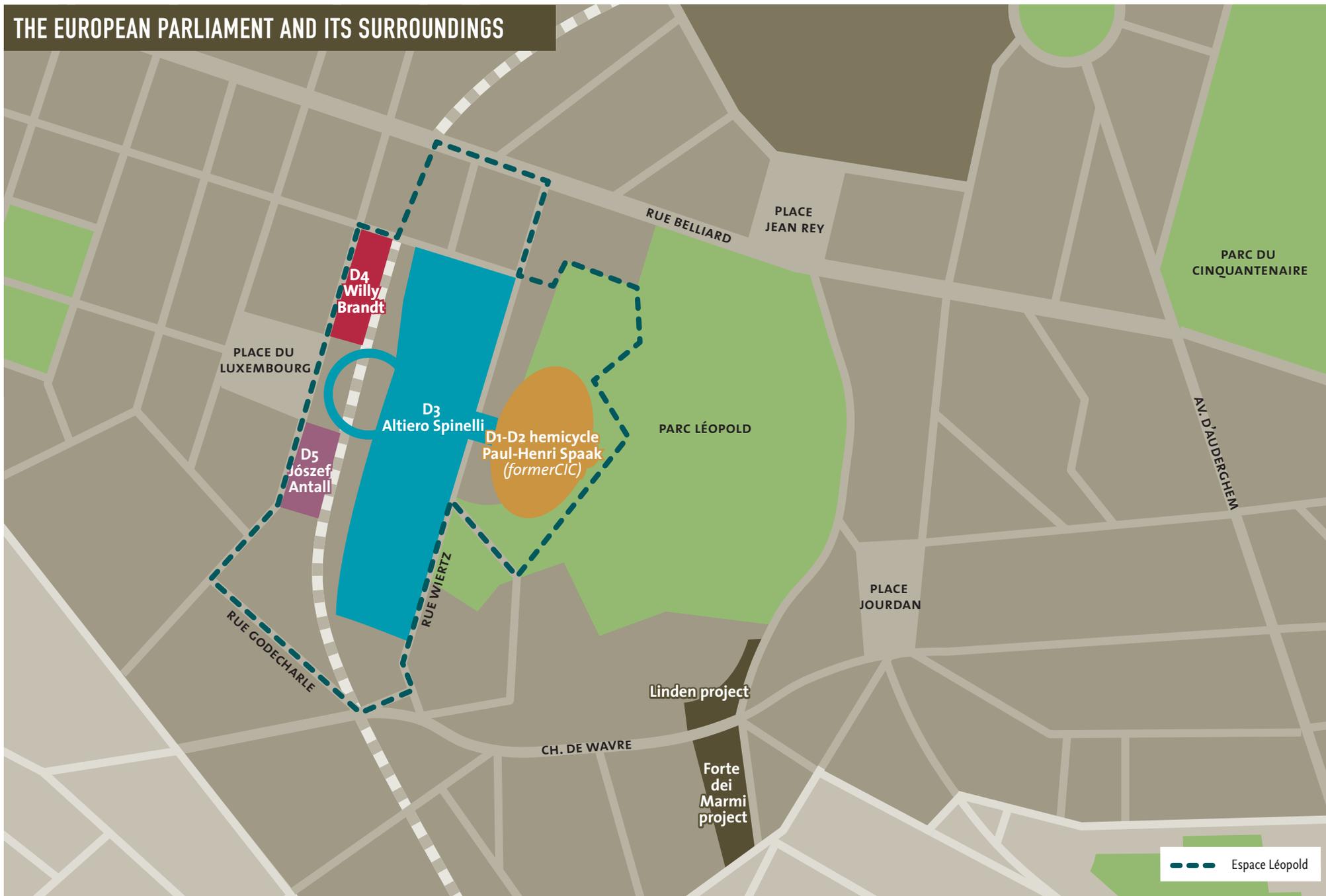
cial-economic world from doing so. An investment group including the BACOB bank and the Société Générale, which in the end would operate under the name of **Société Espace Léopold (SEL)**, devised a concrete project on the site of the shunting-yard near the Leopold Station and the surrounding neighbourhood.

That shunting yard certainly presented a number of advantages as a potential location. Several construction sites in that area were waiting for a new destination. The shunting-yard itself was underused and the adjacent Leopold Brewery had also been vacant for a while. Several buildings in the Leopold Park were also neglected: like the old Pasteur Institute and the empty Solvay Library. ■

▼ This building was named the 'Caprice des Dieux' (the whim of the gods). By pure chance, the Centre International de Congrès (CIC) happened to include a large meeting room, which was perfect for the European Parliament. © Firmin De Maître



THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND ITS SURROUNDINGS



The Government of the Brussels-Capital Region contravenes the law

The investors initiated the entire project. The name of the project could not refer to a parliamentary hemicycle, hence the name **Centre International de Congrès (CIC)** (*International Congress Centre*).

From the beginning, the investors envisaged an imposing project. The CIC was to be constructed on the site of the brewery and even partly in the Leopold Park. The building would provide a space large enough to hold a plenary session of all European Members of Parliament. Another new building would be constructed adjacent to it, across the old shunting-yard to provide even more offices.

In 1987, the investors had completed a first master plan for the entire project between the Rue Wiertz and the Rue de Trèves. The global project was called **Espace Léopold**. Its location was in part on the territory of the City of Brussels, in part in Ixelles and bordered on Etterbeek. The master plan underwent refinement, negotiations and adjustments and

finally it consisted of two approved Plans particulier d'affectation du sol (PPAS), together constituting a programme of a maximum of 195,000 m² for offices and commercial space (although the latter was only a fraction of the project) and at least 41,000 m² for housing.

At the end of the nineteen eighties, the EU consisted of 12 member states, whilst today there are 28. At that time, it was not clear who would make use of all those offices, nor was it the intention to build them all at once. However, the European Parliament has meanwhile taken even the last office complexes of the Espace Léopold (D4 and D5) along the Rue de Trèves into use and they are in search of additional offices elsewhere.

Although the authorities and the investors (and possibly also some groups in the European Parliament) agreed that the old brewery with the adjacent shunting-yard was the best location, there was a legal problem. The project contradicted the Plan de

secteur from 1979, where this area had been designated as a mixed residential and business area. It was obvious that the CIC was a complex of meeting rooms cum office building and that it could therefore in principle not obtain a permit.

In an attempt to avoid this constraint, the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region proposed a revision of this part of the Plan de secteur, in favour of a project of public interest. The revision took place at the request of **Jean-Louis Thys**, the State Secretary for town and country planning (he was also the initiator of the BEA Study). However, the Brussels Government thereby contravened its own rules; as the EU member states had committed themselves not to undertake any initiative for a parliamentary hemicycle, the CIC could only be a private project... and therefore not a project of public interest. ■



▲ A procedure pending before the Conseil d'Etat (Council of State) opened the doors to direct negotiations with investors involved in the construction of the European Parliament.

The reaction of the inhabitants

The **Association du Quartier Léopold (AQL)** challenged the ‘public interest’ of the private project and in February 1988, it won its argument in a summary proceeding before the Court of First Instance. A ruling on the substance of the dispute was pending before the Council of State. Soon this proved to be an extremely important element in the struggle of the residents of the Léopold Quarter. After all, the AQL was able to use this legal victory as a lever to start direct negotiations with the private investors and could finally even conclude a contract with them, the later **accord-cadre**.

Although the ruling of the judge prevented the CIC from obtaining a permit immediately, it was self-evident that the investors would do their utmost to realise the project at all costs. The project was far too important to be dropped just like that. Therefore, the AQL could not afford to wait indefinitely for the court’s decision. In addition to the high cost

of lawyers and the small chance of obtaining a positive result, they were also afraid of very difficult legal actions. The memory of the unfortunate legal battle about the expansion of the Council of Ministers (1984-1985) had made a deep im-

pression on their minds. It is certain that the Stevin-saga [zie 3.4.] where the legal tug-of-war between the City of Brussels and the Régie des Bâtiments (*federal Building Agency*) was still in full progress, and which resulted in a visible degradation of

this block of houses, also played a role.

The option of putting pressure on the authorities – to make them stand firm and to apply their own rules – was not acceptable to the AQL either. The recent past had demonstrated that the authorities were not reliable partners. First of all when they kept important decisions about the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament outside the global planning of the BEA Study, and later on by immediately calling into question the important conclusions of the BEA Study [see 3.1.]. The AQL was well aware of the fact that the authorities did not always de-



◀ The neighbourhood committee had managed to reduce the size of the CIC-mammoth. A conviction in the Court of First Instance and a penalty payment of 300,000 BEF for each day of continued construction ensured that the investors came to the negotiating table.
© AQL/Frank Pé

defend the public interest. Remember Jean-Louis Thys who had personally asked for revisions to the Plan de secteur to be able to grant a building permit to the CIC, supposedly for the public interest. In other words, the Brussels authorities clearly sided with the investors, and if necessary did so by means of illegal methods.

Another reason why the AQL preferred not to put their trust in the authorities was the fact that the Espace Léopold and the CIC are located on the borders of three municipalities: Brussels, Ixelles and Etterbeek. Good cooperation would be required to ensure a coordinated approach. The Regional level would only really take shape in 1990. The Brussels Government that was still part of the national authorities was unable to make autonomous decisions. That national government was clearly more focused on the international rather than the local Brussels' interests. Both in the case of the ongoing expropriations of the

Stevin blocks as well as in the case of the expropriation of the residential area Comines-Froissart, the national authority consistently defended Europe at the expense of Brussels.

In view of all these considerations, the AQL decided not to follow the habitual strategy of influencing

the policy and consultations, nor did they take up the fight. The association chose to be part of the structuring of the project by means of direct negotiations with the investors. ■

▼ AQL started discussions with private investors in the Espace Léopold in order to become a fully-fledged partner in the project and to enforce matters that would offer guarantees concerning the integration of the project. © Archives d'Architecture Moderne



AQL demands management and long-term vision

After the ruling of the Court of First Instance and using the lever of a possible confirmation of this ruling by the Conseil d'Etat (*Counsel of State*), the AQL therefore decided to start negotiations with the investors. The committee did not oppose the arrival of the hemicycle in the area, but wanted to ensure the quality of life for the residents in the neighbourhood.

A few years earlier, a committee of the Brussels' Quartier Nord had followed a comparable strategy in a similar situation. It had managed to halt a project to expand office space in a residential zone by taking legal action before the Conseil d'Etat. By means of direct negotiations with the building promoter the committee managed to obtain that he was to construct an important social housing project in cooperation with a social housing company. Without being a direct partner in this convention, Bral also actively supported this initiative at the time.

The AQL's negotiations with the investors were not intended to obtain a similar one-off compensation, like the construction of a neighbourhood infrastructure or social housing. The AQL started discussions in order to become a partner in the management of the entire project; they wanted to guarantee the interests of the residents in the project in the short term as well as in the long term. It must be recognised that this was a particularly ambitious project.

The AQL was perhaps more aware than the authorities of the consequences of the construction of the Espace Léopold in the long term. The area would be completely redesigned as far as town planning was concerned. A wave of expropriations and demolitions would follow. Office space, which until then had been almost absent, would dominate the neighbourhood. International civil servants and not necessarily Brussels' residents would become the main users of the area.

The economic activities in the neighbourhood would also undergo a drastic change. The present smaller enterprises would have fewer chances to expand. The art and audiovisual businesses that were located there might have to give way to the office supply companies.

Not to mention the mobility problem: the arrival and departure of the cars of the members of Parliament, administrative staff, suppliers, the management of arriving and departing groups of visitors and so on. Moreover, the residents would be confronted for two decades (!) with enormous building sites.

The point was to draw up a proper management plan – and preferably as soon as possible – and to appoint a co-

ordination cell to provide proper guidance. The AQL wanted to be part of the coordination.

This immediately gave rise to a completely new culture of town planning action. After all, the 'classical' strategy – reminding policy makers of their political duties and responsibili-



► Integration should take place on various fronts. However, the European institutions constructed their own community facilities, which are still not accessible for the inhabitants of Brussels.

ties – had reached its limits. On the one hand, there was the strong suspicion that the Brussels' authorities did not necessarily put the interests of the Brussels inhabitants first. On the other hand, it had become obvious that the local authorities themselves were often powerless. In the same way that they had been unable to play an active role with regard to the buildings for the European Parliament, they also had to stay out of all other important decisions about the European presence in Brussels. ■

► Inhabitants and local businesses had to deal with the long period of building sites due to the construction of the Espace Léopold. Therefore, one of the major bones of contention was to limit the nuisance caused by the building site. This photo shows the tracks of the Leopold Station before they were covered over. © AQL (E. Bernard)



The contents and legal construction of the accord-cadre

On 30 June 1988, after three months of negotiations, the investors (and their contractors) and the AQL signed the accord-cadre (*framework agreement*). With their signature, the AQL also formally relinquished the case pending before the Conseil d'Etat, so that the permit for the CIC could be granted after all.

The AQL based their negotiations about the accord-cadre on the following principles:

- ▷ Each agreement is to be set down in a contract;
- ▷ This allows residents to build up contractual and legal guarantees in preparation of each consecutive step of participation;
- ▷ These legal guarantees will in their turn be distributed as an example for others and as case law.

But also:

- ▷ The material and financial interests of the residents and SMEs take precedence over broader visions and points of view;

- ▷ The identity of the neighbourhood needs to be reinforced; the quarter needs to acquire a 'winners' mentality'.

The accord-cadre consisted of nine pages and was drawn up in French. Its official description is that of a 'Protocol d'accord-cadre'. From a legal point of view, both descriptions are important. The document is a 'protocol' in the sense that it lists all legal documents of importance to complete the project successfully in mutual cooperation. This includes for instance the contract between the national authority and the investors that laid down the mutual obligations between those two partners. It is also a 'accord-cadre' in the sense that it sets out the conditions for the later – more detailed – financial or legal agreements for the further development of the neighbourhood, in the interest of everyone concerned.

The accord-cadre contained the following elements:

1. The setting up of a 'management body' that could manage the project in the short and medium term: first of all, the construction sites, but also the direct consequences for the area (the form and partners of this body were still to be decided).
2. That management body would be entrusted with the task of the design, the realisation and the management of the renovation of the residential blocks adjacent to the Espace Léopold.
3. The residents and businesses (both owners and tenants) that would have to leave the Léopold Quarter to make way for the realisation of the project would not be expropriated but assisted to new housing.
4. The actual management of the nuisance caused by the enormous building site of the CIC. This building site could only be reached via busy or very busy traffic crossroads (the Place du Luxembourg and the

Rue Belliard) or via four narrow streets (the Rue Godecharle, the Rue Wiertz, the Rue Ardenne and the Rue du Remorqueur), which were not only densely populated, but which were also the place of work of many small independent businesses. Major traffic problems lay ahead – specifically for the residents of the Léopold Quarter.

5. The promotion of local employment.
6. The promotion and support of the numerous artists living in the area.
7. The preparation of the signing of a management agreement about good neighbourly relations between the present residents and the 'future' inhabitants of the area: the European Parliament.

The agreement did not yet contain any specific measures for the design and organisation of the site itself, simply because the project was not concrete yet. The negotiations about

the requirements of the EU Parliament were still ongoing. In fact, additional technical studies have brought about modifications to the project. Moreover, the exact location of the different buildings was also determined later on.

However, the accord-cadre set down the most important objectives and provided the means (legal, financial, operational...) which were to be refined in function of the reality and evolution of the project.

The protocol signified that all related and previous agreements, in which the AQL or the investors were involved, would be integrated in the legal scope of the agreement. This was important for the AQL, because in this way they obtained information about the wider legal background of the project and the way in which the various authorities (apparently) were involved in it. A number of these points were bound to be discussed at a later phase during the concrete elaboration of the partial agreements. ■

▼ The 'anecdotal' stories behind the major investments sometimes made the local news pages. However, those stories were not the main concern of the Brussels' politicians. The hospitality offered to the EU institutions came mostly at the expense of the local population. © De Morgen 1994



Negotiating with investors and the authorities

In spite of its distrust of the authorities, the AQL expected that they too would take on their responsibilities during the various phases of the project. This concerned both the development of the project, as well as the supervision on the external effects and the consequences for the neighbourhood's everyday life. And this would also apply after the European Parliament had taken the buildings into use.

During the summary proceedings in 1988, the dossier revealed that a convention existed between the Belgian State and the investors concerning the construction of the CIC. This proved that the position of the authorities was not as neutral as they had claimed.

Both the investors and the AQL considered it important to formally involve a government agency in the accord-cadre. They preferred an agency that was active in the area. The Société de Développement pour la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale SDRB

(Brussels Regional Development Agency), appeared to be the obvious choice. The Brussels' Government had recently allocated new competences for city renovation to the SDRB (1988) and this agency had ambitious plans for a global and integrated approach. The SDRB would not only ensure the technical guidance for dossiers about city renovation for the entire region, but it would also play an active role as social coordinator.

Because of that double mandate, it was therefore an ideal partner in the accord-cadre. At the end of March 1989, the AQL, the investors and the SDRB signed a codicil to the agreement. The SDRB was to draw up the dossier de base (*basic file*) for the renovation of three adjacent blocks of houses. In addition, the SDRB would start immediately with a housing project on the vacant sites on the corner of the Chaussée de Wavre and the Avenue du Maelbeek, the so-called Linden project [see map p.71] ■

► Until the present the seminars and colloquiums organised by Editions et Séminaires are among the most interesting public network meetings for the real estate sector and the politicians. No colloquium could take place without the presence of an enthusiastic minister of the Brussels' government. © Editions et Séminaires.



Difficulties in putting plans into practice

The effect of the accord-cadre was soon put to the test. In 1989, a gas explosion hit several houses in the Rue Vautier. Two children lost their lives in the explosion. This was caused by a building site adjacent to the Espace Léopold, but not subject to the extra safety measure imposed on the contractors by the accord-cadre. This terrible event motivated the partners of the accord-cadre to carry on with their work, but at the same time, it also made them more careful. The long delay in disentangling the civil and criminal liability for the accident has without doubt prejudiced the putting into practice of the accord-cadre.

Suddenly the risks for the investors had become much more apparent. From then on, the committee was influenced not only by the major loss, but also by the bitterness about the slow administrative treatment of the accident and the compensation. For then on, there was



also a stronger demand for greater safety guarantees.

▼ AQL made an important contribution to the drafting of the master plan for the entire Espace Léopold. Together with experts and academics the first drawings of the promoter were professionally revised. The municipality of Ixelles laid down some of the results in urban and architectural specifications.

The two parties did decide quickly to recruit a secretary whilst awaiting the constitution of the

management body, as had been provided for in the accord-cadre. ■

The most important results from 1988 until 1998

- ▷ Residents from the Rue Godecharle and the Rue Wiertz who had to leave because of the construction work and who had not found alternative accommodation were provided with different housing. Investors provided for the guidance of a total of 137 people (owners and tenants, both residents and enterprises).
- ▷ For four years, two-weekly site meetings were organised to manage and limit the nuisance from the site in the area as much as possible. The residents were able to give their input to that meeting via the secretary of the accord-cadre.
- ▷ The AQL had an important input in drafting the master plan for the entire Espace Léopold. In cooperation with the experts, the urban planners professors Epstein and Tsiomis, the first designs of the promoter were revised. The municipality of Ixelles laid this down in town planning and architectural specifications in reference to the south side of the esplanade
- ▷ 45 Houses in the housing block between the Rue Jenner, the Chaussée de Wavre and the Avenue du Maelbeek, were built in cooperation with the SDRB (the so-called Linden project).
- ▷ Parameters were drawn up for the renovation and revalorisation of 7



blocks of houses around the Parliament and the esplanade. The basic principles were as follows: the safeguarding of the mixed functions (commerce on the ground floor), of the heritage and the internal areas, support for the existing businesses, and easy access to the Leopold

Park. For the block of houses Vautier-Wiertz this even resulted in the compilation of a basic dossier for a Plan particulier d'affectation du sol (PPAS) (*Specific Plan for Land Allocation*). However, the municipality of Ixelles never went beyond the approval of this basic dossier.

- ▷ A number of anti-speculative measures were taken. Originally, it had been the intention to found a true renovation company (together with the recently founded SDRB as catalyser) in order for them to purchase all available sites and plots and then to market them as renovated houses for the middle classes. However, this did not happen.

◀ The investors realised the Linden project in cooperation with the SDRB. According to the framework agreement 41,000 m² of affordable housing was to be constructed. Seven years after the EU Parliament had been taken into use, only 4,500 m² had been completed. © AQL (Lagasse)

As well as the previously mentioned Linden project developed in cooperation with the SDRB, SEL provided other housing projects via its subsidiary companies e.g. the Forte Die Marni project (between the Chaussée de Wavre and the Rue du Sceptre). Those apartments were marketed as more luxurious residences for the European public. Moreover, the Fathers of the Blessed Sacrament were convinced to keep their enormous courtyard garden, behind the church of the Blessed Sacrament, outside of the speculation carousel. The garden is still being used as a camping during the summer. The former hospital complex L'Oeuvre du Calvaire was also saved from speculation and was taken over by the Marie Haps School.

All these non-speculative projects have definitely had a cooling-off effect on the real estate market.

- ▶ This dossier has played a pioneering role particularly in the area of



construction site management. As a direct consequence of the gas explosion, Tractebel (shareholder in the Société Espace Léopold) drew up a register of the underground utility lines. This has contributed to improved coordination of the intervention by the various concession holders and later it was even converted into an ordinance setting out the coordination of building work on the public road. The need for construction site coordination was taken even more seriously in 1993 when the European Parliament held the first plenary session in its hemicycle at a time that the construction sites of the D3 were still fully active. It was essential that the Parliament did not suffer an electricity blackout (which however

happened repeatedly to the residents and businesses in the area; just a matter of priorities).

- ▶ The accord-cadre also had an indirect influence on the decision about a parking garage under the buildings of the European Parliament. At the time the building permit was granted for the CIC-project (1987), Brussels did not yet have any environmental legislation; this was only achieved in 1992. The application for the environmental permit for the parking of 2.300 vehicles was only submitted in 1994 at the time the buildings were taken into use. The European Parliament demanded the full use of the available parking space, whilst the Brussels Government on the other hand wanted to limit the car

traffic in that area. Difficult discussions ensued, not only on the political level but also again in court. As a partner in the accord-cadre, the AQL was once again directly involved in those discussions.

The regional authority – specifically Bruxelles Environnement (the administration for the environment) – obliged the European Parliament by means of the permit granted in 1997 to draw up a mobility plan, although the general obligation for Company transport plans was not implemented until seven years later. Here they followed a new approach as well: for the first time a phased permit was granted. The complete exploitation of the parking was phased in and also depended on specific conditions, like the drawing up of a Company transport plan, ‘avant la lettre’ as well as the setting up of an Observatory for Air Pollution. All those involved, including the residents’ organisations, were members of this observatory. ■

The criticism on the accord-cadre

The choice to work with a accord-cadre instead of the classical method of influencing the policy was of course an enormous adventure. Because the details had to be worked out along the way, it would demand major efforts to stay alert at all times for any undesirable changes of direction. The accord-cadre is like any other contract; after it has been signed, it needs to be implemented. For any important step that was taken afterwards, the accord-cadre served as the reference.

Of course, not everything that happened after the agreement was a direct result from it. The accord-cadre made it possible always to refer again to the ambitious objectives of

► **The main entrance to the Leopold Station was relocated from the Place du Luxembourg to the Esplanade. However, this is not really a vibrant public space. It is hoped that this will now gradually change by means of the organisation of a variety of events.**



the coordinated management of the various parties that were directly involved: the residents, the SME's and the professionals from the neighbourhood. Because of permanent watchfulness and the use of pressure, negative side effects were constantly being taken into account. This was first done by the investors, but later also by the government agencies like the IBGE.

However, this strategy was certainly not an obvious choice. Some organisations from the Brussels' civic society regarded it as synonymous with consorting with the enemy, 'the promoters'. Others saw it as a way of excluding the prime interlocutor for the residents, in particular the policy makers. Although the policy makers remained involved, the residents did not exclusively put their faith in them, but out of necessity, they also hoped for results from the private partners. ■

Ultimately the accord-cadre also fizzles out

Consistent compliance with the accord-cadre requires a sustained follow-up of the arrangements, during several terms of office. Each administrative act needs to be analysed not only to oppose it (if necessary) but also to integrate it into the structure of the acquired rights. Those acquired rights then constitute the foundation for managing the development of the neighbourhood in the future. This requires a commitment that goes far beyond the normal efforts of a residents' committee consisting of volunteers. It demands time, knowledge of the dossiers as well as a financial investment to be able to pay for legal specialists. The lack of these elements was the reason that not all aspects received the same level of

► AQL was aware of the fact that the implantation of the European Parliament would cause an urban and socio-economic metamorphosis in the neighbourhood. © AQL (E. Bernard)

follow-up. That was one of the reasons that Coordination Europe later demanded a 'coordinator for the contractual obligations' in the Comité de Suivi [see 3.1.].

The accord-cadre was to run for a period of 10 years and could be prolonged. The AQL started with ne-

gotiations to bring the agreement up-to-date and to renew it, but it was impossible to conclude those discussions. After all, the SEL had meanwhile submitted an application for a building permit for D4 and D5 without taking into account the previously agreed urban planning prin-



ciples of the professors Tsiomis and Epstein. This was a breakpoint for the AQL. The SEL did not want to revise its application however, and for that reason, the accord-cadre was not prolonged in the end.

Obviously, this was very regrettable. From the point of view of the residents, the maximum potential had not been reached by far. Therefore, a number of developments in the neighbourhood could no longer be directed in the desired direction – and what was perhaps even more important – a part of the results achieved earlier could not be retained, let alone be expanded to other (similar) situations in Brussels.

Meanwhile, the private partners are no longer willing to enter into a new accord-cadre. To enforce a new accord-cadre is not an option either, for the leverage, which the residents once used to force the investors to negotiate, has now disappeared.

Therefore, not all of the objectives set down in the accord-cadre

could be achieved. The separate legal entity that was to manage the global agreement (management body) was never realised. Originally, it had been the intention that the Fonds du Logement would take on a part of the housing programme. This too never happened.

Moreover, it soon became clear that the SDRB could not realise its city renovation ambitions. Instead of applying an innovative city planning approach, its role was reduced – under political pressure – to negotiator between the authorities and the private sector. The proposed social guidance for the residents never came to anything. Most of the SDRB renovation projects in the European Quarter took place outside the accord-cadre and without any consultation with the residents. Originally, the latter had imagined that the SDRB would be subservient to the agreement; however, the opposite was the case. The involvement of the SDRB was temporarily in doubt, but at the in-



sistence of the investors it remained a sleeping partner, among others to complete the renovation project Jenner-Wavre-Maelbeek (Linden and Linden II).

The scope of the Project Espace Léopold made us fear the worst, particularly if we consider other large-scale interventions in the North and South quarter. In spite of the shortcomings in its execution, the principles and the acquired rights of the accord-cadre ensured repeatedly that

▲ *The Place Luxembourg has become the place to be seen for the younger Eurocrats. This urban scene obviously appeals more to them than the empty Esplanade. However, you do not often find Brussels' inhabitants here. This exemplifies the fact that we can still not speak of and integration in that part of Brussels that lies outside of the EU Quarter.*

the area did not suffer from speculative inaction. That in itself is an important result. ■



4. IT IS ALL STILL VERY TOPICAL

From the end of the seventies Bral has closely followed the situation in the EU Quarter and our organisation has put together a vast archive about this dossier. That archive and our experience constituted the main sources for this publication.

First of all, we wished to present an overview of the means and strategies employed by the committees and the civil society organisations in the EU Quarter in order to become involved in the future of their neighbourhood. That wealth of information of what has been attempted and realised should not be lost. It may serve as a source of inspiration for residents' committees within the context of the EU Quarter as well as for others.

However, it was not the purpose of this publication to compare the various forms of participation to conclude which was the better or more efficient strategy. A true comparative analysis demands a different construction and presupposes a detached and neutral position. That is not the point of view that Bral wishes to present.

This publication is a piece of city history about the origin of the European Quarter in Brussels, about the struggle of the residents and the various power relationships. We feel that people know too little about this history.

It is necessary to evaluate and reflect in order to learn from experience and to be better prepared for future battles. In the various chapters of this brochure we discussed both the weak and the strong points of the various strategies employed by the residents. Here is a brief summary.

Could better results have been achieved?

Of course, everything can always be done better, but the illustrations prove that the residents and their organisations in the EU Quarter dealt with things in a professional manner. They employed a wide range of methods to put their interests on the agenda and to influence decisions. Their efforts and commitment have always been great, even though most of those involved were volunteers.

Were the interests and points of view of the quarter's residents and users (such as employees, entrepreneurs, commuters etc) able to influence some decisions effectively? Were the residents and users recognised as fully-fledged stakeholders and were they treated on the same level as the real estate groups (owners and project developers), the EU institutions and the various political authorities? The answers to those questions vary according to each dossier.

There are cases where residents have clearly influenced decisions: a campaign like *Sens Unique*, with its ex-

cellent dossier ensured that the Régie des Bâtiments (*federal Building Agency*) had to cancel its public auction. A major mobilisation like the one organised at the time of the impending demolition of the Leopold Station was able to prevent that decision. In addition, some building projects were adjusted in view of the reactions voiced during the commission de concertation (*consultation committees*).

“
Looking back the weak point lies mainly
in the consolidation of the obtained results.”

The situation looks different when we view the long term. During their actions and mobilisation regarding the *Stevin project* the residents obtained tremendous results: their own long-term organisation, the temporary management of the block of houses,

the elaboration of the financial plan, the charter concerning the rehousing conditions signed by all residents, their long-term involvement,... These actions could have set precedents for later similar actions. However, because the pressure on the politicians proved to be insufficient and in the end the promised security of tenancy was not realised, those interim achievements have come to nothing.

The residents and associations were certainly recognised as fully fledged stakeholders at certain moments in time, but looking back the weak point lies mainly in the consolidation of the obtained results. Even with an efficient strategy and very

Acquire a thorough knowledge of the dossier

If you are well informed about the dossier, you reinforce your negotiating position. You may make strategic use of the factual as well as the legal knowledge. However, this requires time and commitment. The complexity of dossiers and the lack of transparency demonstrated by the various actors mean that you need to search for information and you often have to try to make sense of it. By sharing and passing on knowledge you ensure that people remain involved and it makes groups less dependent on just a few individuals, for committees consist entirely of volunteers. Their efforts are not consistent, it is impossible to always ensure continuity. Moreover, the residents often have local expertise and information, which are more difficult to gather for professionals.

good consultation, you are still operating within a specific decision making structure. Moreover, the policy information and the decision making process in the case of important dossiers is very complex and non transparent in Brussels, even for professionals. Therefore, the possibility of exerting a lasting influence is very limited.

The authorities often limit their role to providing information about existing plans. The consultation with residents about spatial planning is insufficiently organised, unlike the social dialogue that exists between employers and workers/trade unions for instance. That consultation starts on the basis of clear agreements and each party has specific acquired rights. The situation is different in the case of consultation with residents. Except for the very limited, but legally required procedure of *enquête publique (public consultations)*, the residents do not have any generally recognised and legally protected rights. ■

Who decides at which moment ?

A logical precondition to be able to exert influence on decisions is to know who will take decisions about which issue and at which moment. Unfortunately, that is a major sticking point. It is almost never clear which parties are the responsible points of contact, both for the European institutions and for the Brussels authorities.

this aspect, it lacks a clear vision for the future, both for the short term and certainly for the medium and long term. Moreover, the various institutions of the European Union (Parliament, Commission, Council, and Committee of the Regions) have no joint strategy and carry out insufficient consultations. All this of

“
Haggling, not getting involved with the policy
of a partner, or obstructing someone else’s policy are
part of the political culture.”

The European Union is a relatively young institution, with cumbersome decision making chains, and it is still expanding its office park. For

course turns them into very difficult negotiating partners.

The distribution of powers in Brussels also ensures that produc-

Compiling and sharing sound analyses

It is important to carry out a careful analysis of an action or consultation process, as well as of the results obtained. This helps to construct a long term strategy, which makes for progress. Those analyses also need to be transferable, so that others will be able to use them. After all, residents, committees, activists and associations often start from scratch, while a lot has often already happened. It may be more efficient if you make use of and carry on from the experiences and acquired rights of others. Therefore it is necessary to not only transfer factual knowledge but also the analyses and strategic choices.

ing a good policy and therefore using valuable input by residents is very difficult if not impossible. The various levels of policy making have been constituted by different coalitions that moreover tend to change in composition at different moments

someone else's policy are part of the political culture.

The EU Quarter is an outstanding example of a neighbourhood where all levels meet. The quarter is located on the border of three municipalities. None of those municipalities focus

SNCB), the SDRB as well as the various regional administrations. Within this complex institutional landscape the required director/manager is missing. At the same time, none of them have sufficient authority to be able to enforce cooperation.

“ Within this complex institutional landscape the required director/manager is missing. ”

in time. Internal policy discussions are often more focused on the delineation of competences and territories than about the policies to be pursued. That fragmentation and political competition almost make it impossible to achieve a joint project. Hagglng, not getting involved with the policy of a partner, or obstructing

on the EU Quarter in their policy. The region (responsible for permits and general spatial planning), the federal as well as the European authorities are also involved parties (international treaties). Within that plethora of responsible and competent institutions, you also need to include the public transport companies (STIB and

The fear for relocation and a consequent major economic loss induces a tolerant attitude towards the European presence. Although the Brussels Region declares that it sets great store by the European presence in Brussels, there is no minister with specific competence for this issue. There is no single contact point for

Being present at all times

Try to be active and attend as many consultation meetings as possible. This is how you show your involvement in your neighbourhood. This applies to the large formal consultation structures as well as the many commission de concertation (*consultation committees*) for smaller projects. Even though the decisions are not really always taken during the roundtables to which the residents, their committees and federations have been invited, yet that attendance policy constitutes a source of information and a way to become acquainted with those involved. Residents are often the most faithful and active participants in organised consultation. Authorities more often fail to appear or come unprepared to meetings.

“The residents are no longer prepared to participate in consultations without guarantees.”

the institutions, and therefore there is none for the residents either.

Moreover, the internal divisions among the authorities and the lack of transparent decision-making reinforce the position of the private sector. We find that their building projects are in fact usually carried out, even though they may claim to be frustrated by the lack of legal certainty. Take for example the case of the Espace Léopold where one group controlled the development of that neighbourhood for over two decades. That means that private actors managed to maintain their negotiating positions during more than four legislatures in a widely varying political landscape.

It is clear that in this present context it is not the residents and their committees who hold the key to achieving high quality residents' participation. Nevertheless, their many years of efforts and experience in the European Quarter have made them demanding. They are no longer prepared to participate in consultations without guarantees. They have already heard many promises and have started consultations with a lot of energy and optimism. However, the result was not in line with their efforts.

It has also happened far too often, that the authorities adjusted the legal requirements along the way in order to be able to carry out certain projects. For the residents and organi-

sations the issue then was no longer only the project itself, but also the decision-making procedure and the (legal) implications thereof on the planning for the remainder of the area.

Therefore, it is always important to know which subjects will be discussed during consultations, which the breakpoints are for each party, who will take which decisions and at which moment in time and who has to supervise it all. This may appear to be a strict list of demands, but in fact those 'demands' only lay down some basic conditions for good governance. ■

Visibility and communication

In addition to sharing information internally, it is also important to provide wider and more general communication in order to foster solidarity among the public at large. Special attention should be paid to clearly communicate a well-balanced and understandable message to a large group as well as the various policy makers. There is strength in numbers and a larger group can exert more pressure. The new social media can play an important role in this area. Try to maintain that broad solidarity over a longer period of time. News has become very volatile and the attention span has become very brief, even for those who are interested. Therefore, you need to always be on the lookout for new methods to keep people involved.

Global management with an eye for detail

Although most of the examples from this publication may date from some time in the past, they still remain highly relevant.

After the extension of the European Parliament in the Rue de Trèves (permission was granted in 2002) it appeared for a while that things were more peaceful on the European real state front. It seemed that decisions had been made about the large projects and that mobility was now the major hurdle. The Master Plan for Europe was to lay down provisions for the further integration of the institutions.

However, after the Parliament is it now the European Commission, which has grand construction plans. The real estate developers are very keen to take advantage of this and they are clearly still very well informed about the requirements of the institutions. It gives us a very strong feeling of déjà vu.

During the mid nineteen eighties the construction of the European

Parliament had been prepared by private investors in the corridors of the discussion about the Study Brussels-Europe Area. At the real estate fair of Cannes (Mipim) in 2007, an architect and a Belgian Bank presented a tower block project located on the corner of the Rue de la Loi and the Chaussée

Master Plan Europe where not a word had been said about these tower block projects.

Meanwhile this concept has been developed into the so-called Projet Urbain Loi (City Project Loi): an enormous real estate project that in addition to many years of building site

“ They often minimise the management of those grand projects. Ultimately, it is the community who will need to solve the problems and bear the costs. ”

sée d'Etterbeek and a few months later the Commission requested a restructuring of its administration on that location. All this took place, after the public hearings about the project

nuisance will cause fundamental changes in the neighbourhood. The residents were only informed about this by the press. The first forum at which they were able to give their of-

Choose **the right battle**

Among the plethora of problem dossiers, committees mobilise to focus on specific projects. A reaction does not only need to be against a certain project; it is also possible to focus on how projects originated or on what the quality of the decision making process was. It is impossible to take action on all fronts at once. Therefore it is important to choose a feasible motive for action. This action may also illustrate the more general demands, like quality public spaces, mixed and affordable housing and multi-modal accessibility.

ficial response to that plan, took place exactly four years (!) after the declaration of the Commission, that is to say during the enquête publique (*public enquiry*) about the *RRUZ/Regional Regulation for Urban Development Zones*, the first official 'plan' setting out the *Projet Urbain Loi*. Therefore, it is not surprising that most reactions were negative.

The European Quarter remains a test site both for the real estate sector and for the authorities. Promoters launch their projects for increasing building density here whilst the authorities search for new legal instruments to provide those real estate developments with a legal framework. The authorities legitimise their goodwill towards the promoters by their concerns about losing major earnings. In their view the financing of the Brussels Capital Region might be endangered.

However, they often minimise the management of those grand projects, both during their construction (long

lasting building sites) as well as in reference to the long term consequences (mobility, changes in the population and lack of affordable housing). Ultimately, the residents will be the first to be confronted with the nuisance. The community will need to solve the problems and bear the costs. This is the leitmotif during all the actions by the residents' associations in the EU Quarter that were discussed in this brochure. ■

How to carry on in the future

By using mobilisation and grassroots action, it is possible to exert pressure and to create the required balance of power in order to enforce this debate. This means that it is necessary to appeal to creativity to mobilise people and their indignation about the state of affairs. Changing situations and new groups and collaborations between associations require their own approach. The past achievements of the residents in the European Quarter may serve as an inspiration for the future.

Very recently a number of factors appear to have a more positive influence on the climate for debate. The Agence de Développement Territorial (ADT), which was mandated to coordinate large development projects in Brussels in consultation with all public and private partners, will play a role in this matter. The future will tell the quality and impact of this tendency and whether it is going to last. ■

Alternate actions

A varied approach is effective. It is appropriate to change your strategy and/or means of action from time to time. Whether you involve yourself in consultation meetings, carry out a detailed examination of dossiers and elaborate strategies, take street actions or organise a cultural event, you address a different and therefore larger public at each occasion. You always pass on the message, but you do so in a different way. Active residents and their committees also need variety and creativity to combat boredom. When the residents' battle carries on for years, it must remain enjoyable in order to maintain the internal cohesion.

BRAL : BRUSSELSE RAAD VOOR HET LEEFMILIEU VZW – www.bralvzw.be [transl.: BRUSSELS COUNCIL FOR THE ENVIRONMENT]

IEB : INTER-ENVIRONNEMENT BRUXELLES ASBL – www.ieb.be – in broad terms the French-speaking sister organisation of BRAL

GAQ : GROUPE D'ANIMATION DU QUARTIER EUROPÉEN DE LA VILLE DE BRUXELLES ASBL – www.gaq.be – group of citizens in the northern part of the EU Quarter

AQL : L'ASSOCIATION DU QUARTIER LÉOPOLD ET EUROPÉEN DE BRUXELLES ASBL – www.quartier-europeen.eu – group of citizens in de southeastern part of the EU Quarter

Riverains Jourdan : group of citizens living on and around Place Jourdan in Etterbeek

Coordination Europe : the collaboration between GAQ and AQL supported by BRAL and IEB [see p.6](#)

ARAU : ATELIERS DE RECHERCHE ET D'ACTION URBAINES ASBL – www.arau.org a group of Brussels residents organised as a non-profit association, that analyses urban development projects

Hotel Central : In 1995 and 1996 a number of Brussels' residents, students and artists occupied the empty Hotel Central (nowadays Marriott Hotel) across from the Bourse in the city centre, to denounce the speculative vacancies in the centre of Brussels.

Fondation Sens Unique Stichting : At the end of 1996, the Régie des Bâtiments (federal Building Agency) announced the public auction of four plots of land in the European Quarter: the so-called Parc Anonyme, Comines-Froissart, Van Maerlant and a site adjacent to the Résidence Palace. A diverse group of Brussels' activists felt that they had to react to this and founded the 'Fondation Sens Unique Stichting' so they could react together to this intended auction.

(Collectief) BruXXel : Group of activists that originated during the Belgian presidency

of the European Union in 2001. The pioneers of this group were people closely linked to Cinema Nova and Citymine(d), who in turn had developed on the basis of Hotel Central and Sens Unique.

Espace Léopold : The name of the area on and around the former Leopold Train Station (nowadays the Luxemburg train station) that was developed in de mid-80s to welcome the buildings of the European Parliament. Roughly situated between Parc Léopold and Place Luxembourg. [see map p.71](#) [french: Espace Léopold / dutch: Leopoldsruimte]

Les Sentiers de l'Europe : In 1997 Brussels' minister for Urban Planning Hervé Hasquin launched the international competition 'Les Sentiers de L'Europe', in cooperation with EU Commissioner Erkki Liikanen, i.a. responsible for the real estate policy of the European Institutions in Brussels. The idea was to improve the image and the living quality in the EU Quarter. The emphasis was on the organisation and design

of public space. [french: LES SENTIERS DE L'EUROPE / dutch: DE PADEN VAN EUROPA]

BEA Study : BRUSSELS-EUROPE AREA STUDY [french: ÉTUDE EBE - ÉTUDE ESPACE BRUXELLES EUROPE / dutch: STUDIE RBE – STUDIE RUIMTE BRUSSEL-EUROPA]

SEL : SOCIÉTÉ ESPACE LÉOPOLD S.A. – the private consortium that carried out the development of Espace Léopold

CIC : INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS CENTRE the current Paul Henri Spaak-building, which is the building used by the European Parliament for its plenary sessions in Brussels [french: CIC – CENTRE INTERNATIONAL DE CONGRÈS / dutch: ICC – INTERNATIONAAL CONGRESCENTRUM]

SDRB : THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMPANY FOR THE BRUSSELS CAPITAL REGION since November 2013: Citydev [french: SDRB – SOCIÉTÉ DE DÉVELOPPEMENT POUR LA RÉGION DE BRUXELLES-CAPITALE / dutch: GOMB – GEWESTELIJKE ONTWIKKELINGSMAATSCHAPPIJ BRUSSEL]

ADT : AGENCY FOR TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT [*french* : ADT - AGENCE DE DÉVELOPPEMENT TERRITORIAL ASBL / *dutch* : ATO – AGENTSCHAP VOOR TERRITORIALE ONTWIKKELING]

PPAS : SPECIFIC PLAN FOR LAND ALLOCATION [*french* : PPAS – PLAN PARTICULIER D’AFFECTATION DU SOL / *dutch* : BBP : BIJZONDER BESTEMMINGSPLAN]

PRAS : REGIONAL LAND USE PLAN [*french* : PRAS – PLAN RÉGIONAL D’AFFECTATION DU SOL / *dutch* : GBP – GEWESTELIJK BESTEMMINGSPLAN]

MAPS :

- THE EUROPEAN QUARTER IN BRUSSELS : [p.11](#)
- THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS : [p.13](#)
- THE THREE OCCUPATIONS : [p.54](#)
- THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMANT AND ITS SURROUNDINGS : [p.71](#)

TIMELINE : [p.20-21](#)

HILDE GEENS (°1953) is senior staff member urban planning at BRAL. She has been working since the early eighties on the ‘European dossier’ and was deeply involved in all initiatives and actions described in this publication. To this day she follows closely the overall Brussels planning processes, and in particular the developments in the European Quarter.

Of course, the history of Europe in Brussels is a never-ending story. Europe is still growing and demanding more space in Brussels. Inhabitants of the European Quarter continue to make their voices heard. Heated discussions about the reconstruction of the Eastman Building in the protected Leopold Park – which will become the site for the Museum of European History – this time did not end up on the tables of the lawyers, but resulted in a dialogue.

This dialogue involves the European Parliament, the Brussels Region, Bruxelles Environnement, the Agence de Développement Territorial (ADT), the City of Brussels and the municipalities of Ixelles and Etterbeek. Even the Coördination Associative, representing the voice of the groups of residents that are involved in the EU Quarter takes part in the dialogue. Together they are now discussing an integrated and sustainable reconstruction of the Leopold Park and

its surroundings. Can we therefore conclude that the consultations that ended when the Comité de Suivi fizzled out in 2001 have now been given a new opportunity?

At least we note a number of positive elements. All partners are showing goodwill. Of course, the fact that few or no economically important real estate projects have been planned for this site facilitates the deliberation. The Leopold Park may be limited in size, but it represents a vast symbolic value, both for the European Parliament and for the neighbourhood. Once again, a great many parties are involved in this project (owners, users, managers, project leaders, various levels of government...).

This turns the Leopold Park into a training ground par excellence, a kind of laboratory to try out various kinds of collaborations, which may hopefully demonstrate their worth at a later date in the case of more com-

plex dossiers. This does not mean that things will be easy. Everyone will have to break their old habits. The message is to remove distrust and to take a constructive attitude. Moreover, the consultation should start in good time and be based on mutual respect.

However, there is no point either in being naive. At present, the residents are still no equal interlocutors. Residents and the groups and committees that represent them do not have access to the same extensive professional services as the real estate sector and the municipal or regional administrations. If they are really meant to play a significant role, there needs to be moral as well as financial support for the struggle of the residents. I hope that this publication may contribute to reinforce this point.

It is hoped that we shall not conclude in the near future that this new consultation has fizzled out because

the Coördination Associative lacks sufficient manpower and financial means. This publication with its palette of choices for actions by inhabitants provides sufficient proof that they have a great deal of dedication and professionalism.

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a livable city where everyone can live,
work and travel in a comfortable manner
that is at the same time environmentally
sound and affordable. With our members
and partners we organise actions and
lobbying. We disseminate insights about
our diverse city and try to collaborate on
an equal footing with as many partners
as possible. We raise awareness and give
advice to Brussels inhabitants, and sup-
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