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SHOULD I STAY
OR SHOULD I GO?

Urban sprawl, density, and a new planning agenda for Europe

MAY 2024

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FOREWORD

In January 2024, Belgium took over the presidency of the European Council of the EU for six months. In the Belgian federal system, urban policy is a responsibility that resides with the three regions: Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels-Capital Region. They take turns occupying the Belgian seat on the Council. Within the framework of the Belgian presidency, it is up to the Brussels Region, represented by perspective.brussels, to chair the work of the intergovernmental cooperation on urban matters.

This situation, in which a city-region chairs a Council is unique in Europe. This unique configuration, which allows Perspective to both be a representative of a Member State and at the same time be a planning agency on a city-wide scale, has enabled us to be active at multiple levels in the context of this presidency – by establishing the agenda for a presidency as a Member State, by acting as relay and spokesperson for European cities, but also by developing relations between European urban planning agencies.

Our priority is to put spatial planning and, more specifically, the topic of urban sprawl and qualitative density on the European agenda and to create a European platform for dialogue on these issues.

Belgium is one of Europe's most densely populated countries. It lies at the heart of the transnational macro-region of Eurodelta, which is home to just under 45 million residents and shares a common industrial past. The topic concerning the sustainable use of land is therefore of paramount importance for the three Belgian regions.

In this context, one objective of this presidency as far as urban matters are concerned is to recognise the fact that spatial planning, the territorial approach and urban governance are essential in order to achieve European objectives.

This publication draws upon 12 months of European cities, regions, metropolises, planning agencies and networks interacting and working together to showcase innovative projects, in which spatial planning plays a crucial role in responding to the challenges of urban sprawl and density with regard to three different dimensions:

› New ways of urban living and urban dwelling
› Combining a built environment with nature
› Planning tools to ensure the sound governance of the city

On 29-30 May 2024, we organised a seminar in Brussels to discuss these challenges and to envision a new planning agenda for Europe.

By means of 19 specific case studies, you will discover how, when faced with common challenges, strategies sometimes differ. Different approaches will be presented and data and ideas will be compared. We hope this publication will inspire you to put these ideas to work in your own local context and to envisage further collaborations on a European level between public agencies and spatial planning administrations.

Belgian EU presidency 2024,
Coordination team urban policy

INTRODUCTION
THE TRIANGLE OF HELL OF URBAN PLANNING

Demographics and the evolution of cities

Cities are made up of people. That is the reason why cities were created: they bring together people and economic activities in a small area. They are places where people live together, where cooperation and social relations take place, and where there is diversity. Supporting and even anticipating demographic change is therefore of crucial importance to the development of towns and cities. Urban planning takes a very different approach, depending on whether the urban population is expected to grow or shrink.

However, these developments are more complex than they may appear at first sight. In the 1960s, with the car industry flourishing, no one could have anticipated the sharp decline in Detroit's urban population that occurred a few decades later. In Berlin in the early 2000s, the city authorities were expecting the population to fall or even stagnate. In fact, the opposite was true: the city experienced strong demographic growth during the years 2000 and 2010.

Some of the factors behind demographic change are relatively easy to identify. Generally, births and deaths within the population change little from one year to the next (except in case of pandemic or human or natural disaster), and these parameters determine the population's natural balance.

More complex is the internal migratory balance of urban areas, i.e. the number of people moving in and out of the city (from and to the rest of the country). This internal balance is determined by many different factors, including the availability and price of land, the development of public transport and the development of housing. This balance is therefore partly determined by the policies pursued, rather than being an invariant imposed on the urban authorities.

Even more complex is net international migration, i.e. population movements from and to foreign countries. These trends are also linked to many different factors, such as geopolitical and international factors, the availability of jobs and the standard of living in the country of origin and the country of arrival, cultural and linguistic proximity, historical migration channels, migration regulations, and global geopolitical context. Net international migration can also be very difficult to anticipate.

In Brussels, this last factor is decisive and it is this factor that most significantly explains the demographic growth of the last 20 years, which is mainly due to the enlargement of the European Union and the development of its institutions. But who can predict how the composition of the European Union will change over the next 30 years? International migration can also evolve in completely unforeseen ways. In 2022, the population of Brussels rose sharply, when 11,000 Ukrainians moved to the city.
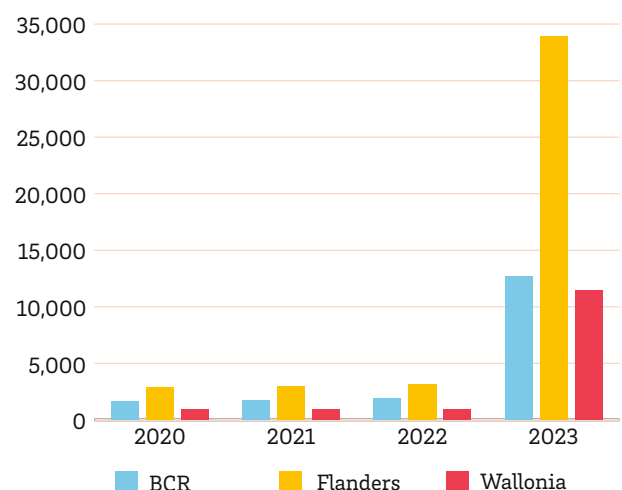
↑ Number of Ukrainian nationals by region, from 2022 to 2023
Source: IBSA 2023

This is of course an unexpected and exceptional development, but who can predict the unexpected and exceptional situations of the coming decades? Once again, these developments depend on many factors that are difficult to anticipate, such as European institutional developments, the level of European and global geopolitical stability, and the consequences of environmental and climatic instabilities. To take just one example: water stress in southern Europe could render certain areas uninhabitable in the coming decades, leading to new population movements. What's more, we know that populations on the move mainly settle in urban centres, at least initially.

Finally, housing needs are determined by conglomerations of people known as households. The composition of households also varies over time: as a result of changes in the composition of families, such as the increase in single-parent families, but also the emergence of new ways of living. Translating demographic change into household change is far from a simple correlation: here too, multiple factors come into play.

All this explains one of the first difficulties faced by urban planners. Urban planning is a long-term process, since the city develops as a result of the many iterative interventions that take place over time. Urban planners must therefore determine how the city will evolve over the coming decades, taking into account the uncertainty surrounding the factor that most determines the city's development: its population. In Brussels, as it is all over the world, we know that demographic projections never come true.

Climate change and planning

However, the demographic factor is only the first major challenge facing urban planners. The second major challenge facing all public authorities concerns the environment and the climate. This double challenge, on a planetary scale, will have a brutal impact, and is already having an impact on the habitability of territories, and first and foremost that of cities. As far as the climate is concerned, the IPCC's modelling predicts unmistakable changes, including in Brussels: we need to mitigate climate change by reducing its causes and by adapting the city to its consequences. As far as the living world is concerned, the answers are similar, but the processes and their consequences are more uncertain.

So what is the most important lever on which urban planners can act? The answer is simple: the location of functions. Where are we going to locate housing and the various urban activities? There are two opposing models here: that of the dense, compact city, intense in its use. And that of the diffuse, spread-out city.

Opposing models of spatial development

A diffuse city has ecological and social consequences, linked to the costs of urban sprawl. There is a growing awareness of the ecological cost of urban sprawl at the expense of natural and agricultural areas. The land artificialisation caused by urban sprawl is the source of several pressures on the environment: an increased risk of flooding and soil erosion, a loss of biodiversity, global warming, air pollution linked to transport, etc.

The diffuse city is synonymous with congestion, as its inhabitants travel long distances to work or to access essential services, and with isolation due to the absence of the benefits of compact urban living. A diffuse city, therefore, generates far more significant quantities of pollution and CO2 than a more compact city.

In Belgium, we are very familiar with this model of the diffuse city. Chronic under-investment in urban centres has resulted in the development of suburban housing and sprawling residential areas. This model has serious environmental consequences. It leads to a greater use of land (with its consequences for biodiversity in particular), increased mobility needs and lower energy efficiency.

Legend:
- 5 – 35 %
- 35 – 48 %
- 48 – 60 %
- 60 – 71 %
- 71 – 82 %
- 82 – 96 %
- Nombre de ménages < 75
- Petite et moyenne ceintures
- Canal
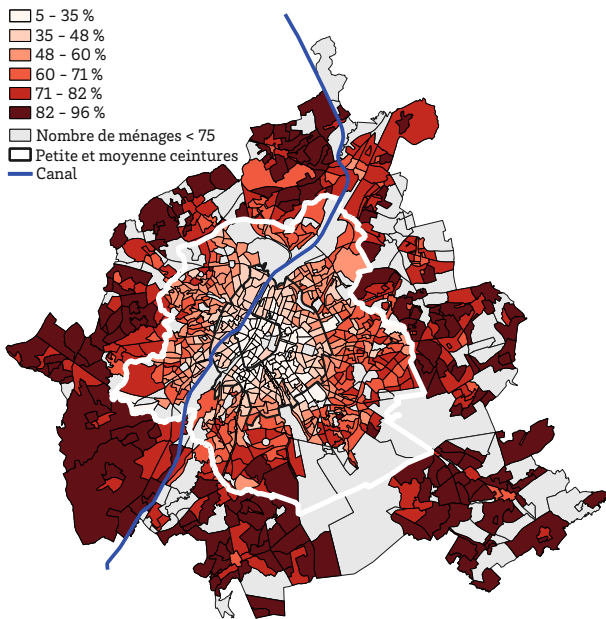
↑ Percentage of households with one or more cars
Source: Statbel (DIV, RN, BelcoTax), 2019, IBSA calculations

A recent study by the Brussels statistics department showed the marked difference in car ownership between the Brussels Region (where public transport is generally well developed) and its outskirts. The difference is striking: household car ownership rises significantly as soon as you leave the region. Let's not forget, moreover, that commuting to and from work accounts for about a quarter of household journeys[1]. The location of other activities (particularly shops, offices and schools) is therefore also a major determinant of mobility needs.

This way of planning and building cities has been under fire for years, particularly from environmental critics. A growing number of cities are looking for solutions that address the challenges of urban sprawl and for a different model of spatial development. The consequence of this is clear: the responsibility of urban planners is to combat urban sprawl, to favour compact cities and mixed neighbourhoods, and to develop housing and activities close to public transport hubs.

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1   *Journeys to work account for 13% of all journeys made by the people of Brussels (if we exclude journeys home), according to the Travel Behaviour Survey (ECD, 2021-22). This may not seem like much, but the figure should be at least doubled if the distance travelled is taken into account. What's more, if we take into account not just the journeys made by Brussels residents, but all journeys made in connection with the Brussels Region (Brussels residents + non-Brussels residents who come to Brussels), this represents 29% of work-related journeys and 49% of distances travelled (excluding journeys home, according to Beldam 2010).*

The importance of compact cities

The term 'compact city' is used to describe the combination of three phenomena: an attractive city, well-organised density and a mix of activities that characterise the quality of urban life. The compact city refers to an urban experience that encompasses all aspects of housing, lifestyles, communications, digital technology, uses of the city, amenities and demographic change.

The New Leipzig Charter, as a key European policy framework document for sustainable urban development in Europe, recognises indeed the compact city as an objective to be achieved by European cities.

A compact city is cost-effective for the citizens and for the community (networks and supply, social relations, environmental resilience...) especially as it is the result of the reuse of former urban spaces. The compact city was the urban development model that was used throughout history, before fossil fuels began to be exploited in a significant way and is probably the only model that is viable without them.

Not only for environmental reasons, but also because of its impact on social cohesion and the resilience of urban areas. For example, diffuse cities are less well prepared for sociological changes such as changes in household composition or the ageing of the population. The proof of this is that unpredicted events in life (such as separation) often result in a return to the urban centre, which is why there are more single-parent families in urban centres than on the outskirts. Similarly, it is easier for an elderly person to find the services needed for a peaceful old age in urban centres than in sparsely populated suburbs. A compact city therefore is of interest not only to the environment, but also – and provided it has also been designed with this aim in mind – for promoting links between its inhabitants.

Anticipating likely demographic trends and developing a compact city sounds like a complex but clear agenda for urban planners. But a third dimension is quickly added: the challenge of social cohesion. Indeed, while developing a compact city is an obvious response to the environmental challenge, it tends to make the social challenge more complex. If strict regulation of the territory makes it possible to concentrate housing in central areas, this is likely to have an upward impact on the price of land, and therefore of housing.

Today, in Western Europe, there are few major cities where residents are not facing difficulties in accessing housing. Housing has become a major issue for many local authorities, not only as a result of the increase in urban populations, but also and above all because of social difficulties.

This brings us to the heart of our triangle of hell of urban planning. We need to anticipate likely demographic changes and develop a compact city, while also ensuring cohesion and social justice within the urban whole. Untangling this triangle is not impossible, and regulating land use is the cornerstone of the responses we can identify.

Vertical rather than horizontal expansion?

There seems to be only one solution in order to meet the high demand for housing while respecting the objective of no net land take: the city of tomorrow can only develop on top of or within the existing city.

Reforming cities to make them sustainable and resilient therefore involves controlling urban occupation, as well as an in-depth renovation of the urban fabric.

Countering urban sprawl means promoting socially desirable levels of population density and reducing urban fragmentation while adapting to the population's demand for a better quality of life. Yet policymakers are struggling to shake off the idea that building on new land is the only way to develop the city. Rather than encouraging suburbanisation and suffering from urban sprawl, it would be better to make judicious use of areas that have already been urbanised and developed. However, common perceptions hold that urban density is often associated with overcrowding and nuisance.

A compact, dense city does not necessarily mean that it must be built at height. Between single-storey housing and high-rise towers, there is a whole range of housing options that can be developed and created. Specific attention must first be paid to unused spaces within the urban complex, particularly when they are close to public transport
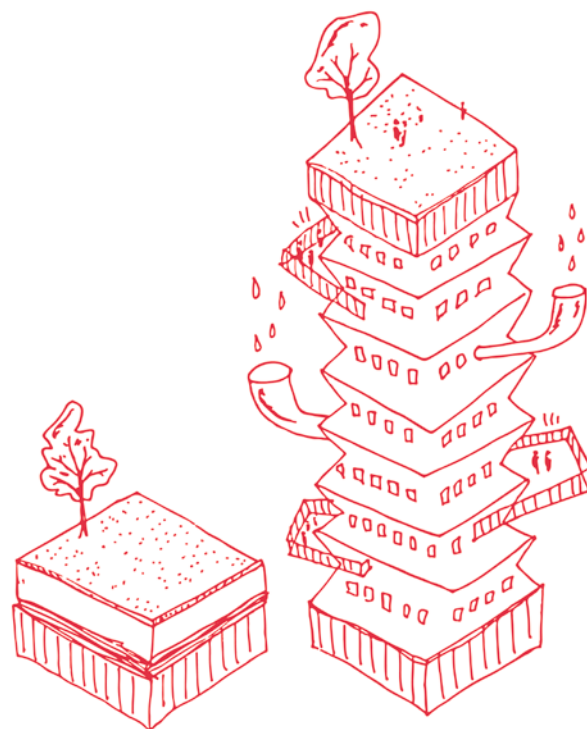
hubs. Attention must also be paid to urban connectivity and to ensuring that urban development projects provide an opportunity to connect neighbourhoods, blocks and residents. It also means paying attention to the forms that housing developments take: are there shared spaces? Are there interiors, corridors, communal rooms or spaces, shared gardens that will enable residents to meet and take ownership of their living space? What identity will be given to the buildings, blocks and neighbourhoods? These are all criteria that need to be taken into account if we are to move towards a density that is chosen rather than imposed, a density of quality rather than quantity.

Towards a new urban equation

Indeed, a dense, compact city is not enough to satisfy the need for quality of life. The notion of urban density, as envisaged until now and set up as a model for the sustainable city, is showing its limits in the face of the recurring environmental, energy and social crises we are experiencing. Traditional solutions for increasing urban density have yet to live up to their promise. Urban density doesn't mean congestion, or promiscuity, and the use of technologies is not required. It is a concept as variable as the number of players.

Tautological as it may be, the main asset of a city is the proximity between its different functions.

Over and above controlling transport distances, minimising the use of space as a raw material and maintaining a diversity of natural environments, density must be qualitative and must therefore take into account the well-being and health of the city and its inhabitants. We must move away from quantitative density and consider the resources required to ensure the best possible quality of life for all. This means identifying and activating various levers in order to contain urban sprawl, while promoting and fostering quality of life.

Because it calls for new parameters to be considered as part of a systemic approach, qualitative density requires new skills to be deployed in the field of urban design. Biodiversity and health must be placed at the heart of the design process and the quality of the living environment must be clearly stated as a central objective of the city plan. Expertise in psychology, history, design, behavioural sciences and so on will be helpful during the stage in which the project is being defined, as is already the case in urban renewal projects.

As already stated, densification does not always mean demolition or building. There are many areas of work to encourage desirable densification with multiple aspects:

In neighbourhoods that are already dense in terms of buildings and population, it should be possible to consider a process of de-densification. For example, heavily built-up areas should be de-densified to create open spaces and reduce heat islands. Sometimes, even the smallest operations can give rise to great effects! It also means taking into account the life cycles of buildings and considering their recycling as an opportunity to broaden the density spectrum.

↑ Source: Repenser la cour de récréation (2021)

Another dimension, still underdeveloped in cities today, is the pooling of spaces and infrastructures. Many functions can be appropriately mixed together. In Brussels, initiatives are being developed in this direction. Investments are being made in school facilities, particularly sports halls, so that they can be shared with local residents in the evenings and at weekends. A sports hall has been developed in a fire station and will also be open to the neighbourhood. Multi-purpose spaces are being transformed into study areas for students. The scope for sharing and multi-purpose spaces is still wide and the possibilities numerous. On another front, the temporary occupation of vacant spaces also makes room for creative and innovative initiatives, and helps to make the city more attractive by enhancing the value of spaces that do not immediately have a specific function.

Finally, it is possible to safeguard undeveloped areas by integrating all the dimensions of the city's fabric into urban project developments: living, getting around, and working, while striking a balance with preserving nature.

In terms of instruments, public decision-makers should reconsider density restrictions and review policies to control urban sprawl in order to encourage densification where it is most needed.

The challenges are many: technical, economic, legal, organisational, and perhaps above all, societal and cultural.

Rethinking density at multi-level scales

Urban sprawl is therefore a modern phenomenon that is marked by the scattering of activities across the territory and residential sub-urbanisation taking place not only on a local scale but also on a metropolitan scale. It has become a major concern for many cities, not only for large metropolises but also for smaller cities. By its very nature, urban sprawl is a wide-ranging problem, which therefore transcends administrative boundaries, whether local or regional. Inhabitants of dense urban centres are also consumers of space outside their cities. Daily travel patterns relating to work, study, services, leisure or recreation often transcend jurisdictions and create functionally interconnected zones, including the urban core, known as functional urban areas (FUA).

Qualitative density is, therefore, also a question of governance. Broadening the circle of stakeholders and considering the different scales of interdependence between territories are necessary conditions for its development. To combat the adverse effects of urban sprawl, we need to adopt a global approach to spatial planning and work at several levels, for example, by aligning policies that impact land use and by coordinating spatial planning at the level of functional urban areas.

This also includes addressing the issue on a European level, of course. Cities are key players in achieving the EU's various objectives with regard to the necessary transitions in terms of climate, biodiversity, and economic and social models. At the same time, cities are where the challenges in terms of income inequalities, employment and environmental challenges are most significant. Cities are also best placed to meet these challenges.

Although urban development is not an EU competence, a very large share of EU policies and regulation touch on spatial planning and land use, due to the integrated and cross-sectoral nature of urban and spatial development. In this respect, the strengthening of European regulations on land use is necessary, but it is also likely to exacerbate the paradoxical injunctions to which towns and cities are subject. While striving to achieve a balance between economic development and social imperatives, conflicts can arise from competing land-use demands, such as integrating housing developments with industrial zones and the preservation of biodiversity. In addition, population growth has exacerbated land-use pressures in urban areas, resulting
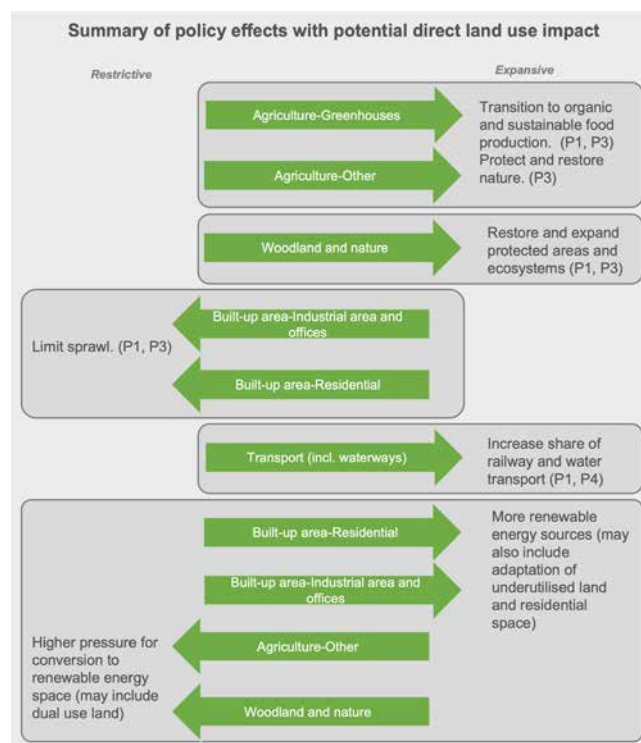
Source:
28.07.2023 / 2023–267, Bozhidar Ivanov, Kai Böhme, Kirsti Hagemann, Paola Marinović

in veritable housing crises on a local level. The demand for more and affordable housing versus the No Net Land Take by 2050 principle, illustrates a trade-off and potential tension between urban planning objectives and EU regulations that may result in implementation challenges. Concerns also exist regarding the inflexibility of EU regulations, with an accumulation of rules making prioritisation difficult and hampering place-specific implementation. This challenge is exacerbated by the contrast between short-term political agendas and long-term spatial planning goals and by the need to contextualise challenges within the broader socio-economic landscape.

Well-designed regulations, adapted to the urban environment, are essential for tackling significant challenges such as affordable housing, the energy transition and the limitation of urban sprawl. This consideration is not only necessary in order to meet the needs of cities, but also and above all to ensure the success of the EU policies themselves. Meeting the environmental challenge while promoting social cohesion necessarily involves taking urban areas into account and considering cities as allies and partners in the ability to meet these challenges.

While European and national regulations and policies have been designed to help cities achieve sustainable urban development, implementing them is often a challenge, and that is something to which the EU-level needs to be attentive. Ensuring that cities are involved in a proactive and anticipatory way can help mitigate tensions and enhance awareness of the territorial impact of policies. It is also problematic that planners are often unaware of 'the hidden world of (EU) policies' that impact planning. This calls for more effective information on EU policies to be made available to planning authorities, including with regard to concrete implementation issues.

The role and ambitions of urban planners

In this context, what role do urban planners play?

Decisions (at all scales) about the use of land and other natural resources in urban areas have an impact on the quality of life of residents and the sustainability of urban development. Public agencies in the urban planning domain are key players when it comes to making and guiding these decisions.

As multi-disciplinary actors and long-term centres of expertise, urban planning agencies operate with a willingness to work together on an area-wide basis to guide local strategies. Transversal, agile and flexible, urban planning agencies provide technical support to local authorities. They provide a neutral, professional forum for exchange, are informed about issues and are able to make connections, reaching out to a wide range of audiences. They also provide verified data, observation and evaluation resources and propose strategic and operational ideas, thereby contributing towards the decision-making process. They also have the ability to benchmark and create links with similar territories or with territories with same issues and fulfil a key role in the transmission of knowledge for the purpose of creating more sustainable territories.

However, the challenges mentioned above also raise questions about the relevance of urban planning. How should it evolve? What balance should be struck between robust tools and the need to adapt to an ever-changing and uncertain world? How can we prepare for uncertainty? What balance should be struck between short-term operational considerations and long-term vision? As the challenges become clearer and more intense, we are probably only at the beginning of the challenges facing urban planners. In this context, exchanging, sharing, disseminating, confronting and learning from each other is therefore probably more important than ever.

Antoine DE BORMAN
CEO perspective.brussels

PROJECT LOCATIONS

EUROPEAN CASE STUDIES

AMSTERDAM
Amsterdam's Strandeiland:
A green, social and sustainable island
providing homes for 20,000 residents

BERLIN
City-wide compensation management
in Berlin: Showing the positive effects
of tight collaboration

BRNO
An Integrated Development Strategy
to mitigate suburbanisation in the
Brno Metropolitan Area

GHENT
City architect of Ghent: Monitoring
the spatial quality and architecture

GENEVA
Think beyond borders: joining forces
to develop the Greater Geneva of
tomorrow

LEUVEN
Regionet Leuven: Rethinking the
mobility network to strengthen
density

LILLE
"PLU3": a revised planning tool
to bring coherence at the
metropolitan scale

LISBON
Food Transition Strategy
in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area

OSLO
Oslotrær (Oslo Trees)

SKÅNE
Regionplan for Skåne 2022-2040:
a polycentric regional strategy to
prevent wasteful use of land

TOULOUSE
Play ZAN, a serious game to facilitate
land sobriety

TURIN
proGIreg in Turin: Productive green
infrastructure for inclusive urban
regeneration

WARSAW
A vision of Warsaw's development:
The Spatial Policy to build a resilient
urban ecosystem

BRUSSELS CASE STUDIES

BE SUSTAINABLE
Facilitating the sustainability goals
by providing support to projects

CALICO
Care and Living in Community (CALICO):
Care, gender and intergenerational
encounters at the heart of a
collaborative housing project

**SUSTAINABLE
NEIGHBOURHOOD CONTRACT**
Improving neighbourhoods with local
involvement

PETITE ÎLE – CITYGATE
Unlocking density's full potential

OPERATION RE-CREATION
Greening school playgrounds

PAD HEYVAERT
Specific Master Plan
of the Heyvaert neighbourhood

TOULOUSE

LISBON
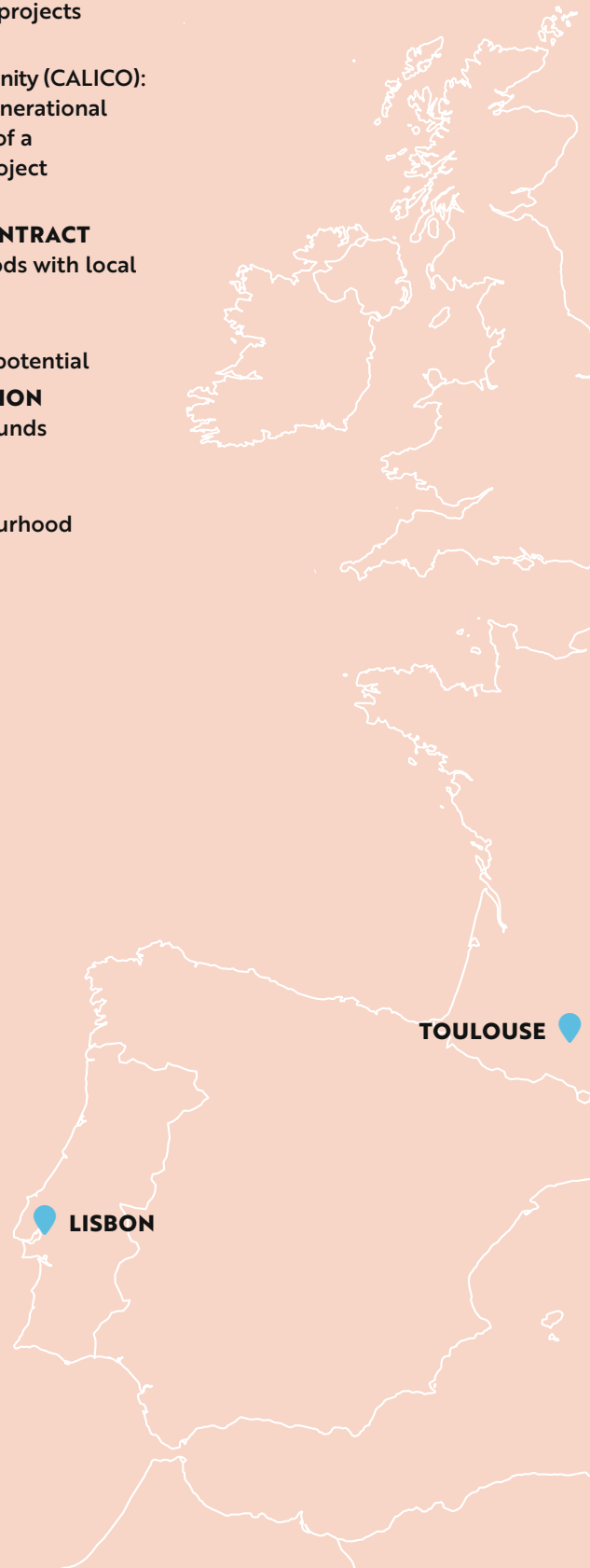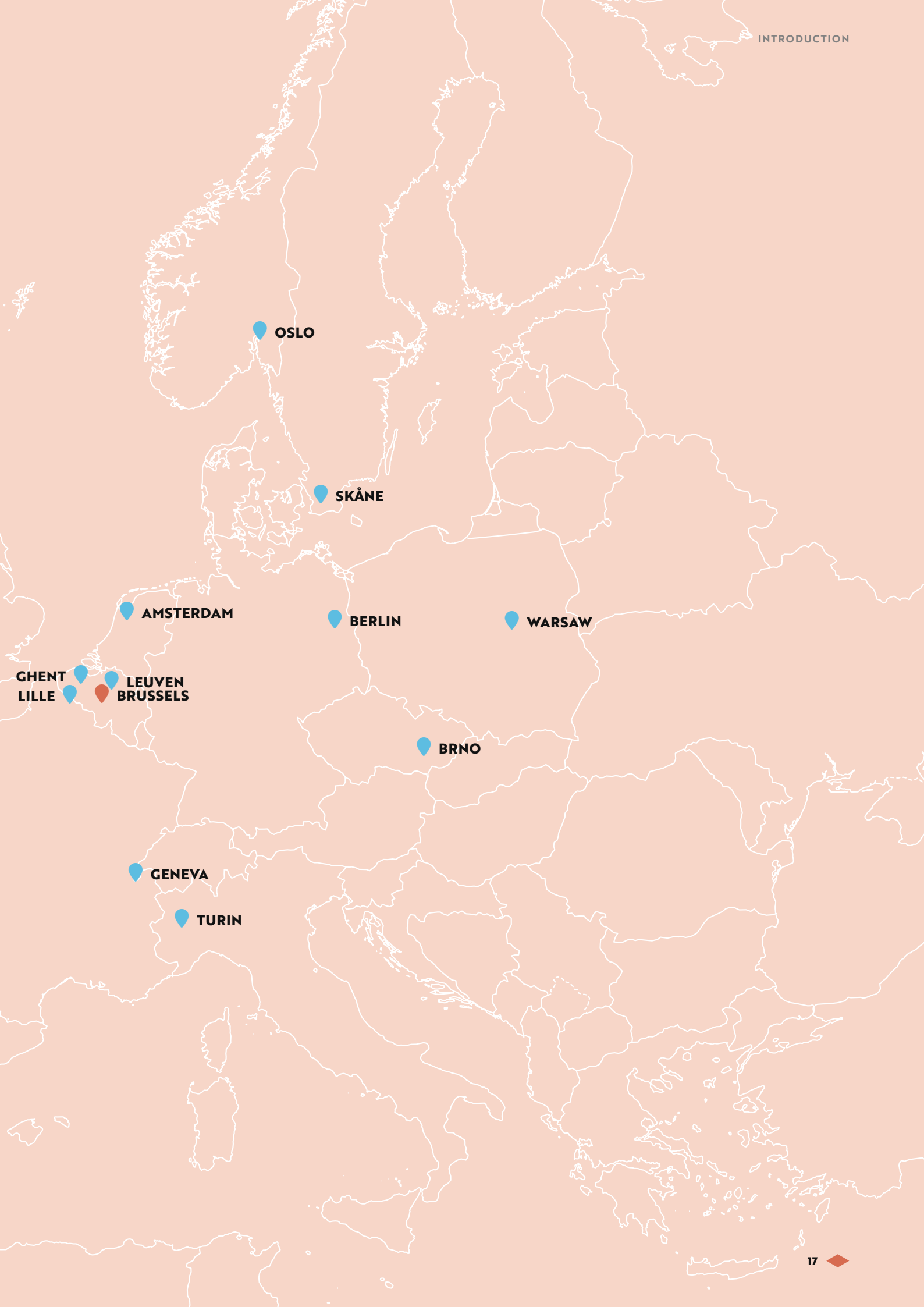
OSLO

SKÅNE

AMSTERDAM

BERLIN

WARSAW

GHENT
LILLE
LEUVEN
BRUSSELS

BRNO

GENEVA

TURIN

NEW WAYS OF URBAN LIVING AND URBAN DWELLING

Cities have changed over time due to various shifts in demographics, society, and the environment, affecting their layout, architecture, and how people experience urban life. The most notable and recent changes are the ones that came after the 2020 pandemic.

The pandemic crisis has accelerated trends that have arisen in recent years regarding the way in which work is organised. The changing way we work inevitably has an impact on office property in terms of stock, vacancy and conversion. The increase in teleworking has modified urban living patterns and has revealed deficiencies and needs in relation to infrastructure, such as high-quality green spaces, connectivity and suitable housing in some neighbourhoods.

These recent changes have highlighted a move towards sustainable transportation, with more people using bicycles and hence the urge to adapt traffic infrastructures in the city. This shift calls for an adaptation of public spaces to promote closer proximity to essential services and amenities.

Finally, the growing emphasis on circularity (of materials, of building cycles, of consumption) is also affecting urban development and is having a direct impact on land use. This encompasses our choice of materials, efforts to enhance energy efficiency, strategies for reusing spaces and buildings and approaches to managing existing infrastructure.

Such transitions can be seen in the way housing models have changed to accommodate denser ways of living, how monofunctional buildings and spaces are rapidly being retrofitted to provide mixed functions and how public spaces are being rediscovered.

These confrontations show the importance of planners, designers, architects and the profession of urban planning as a whole to help cities sustainably answer to these new challenges.
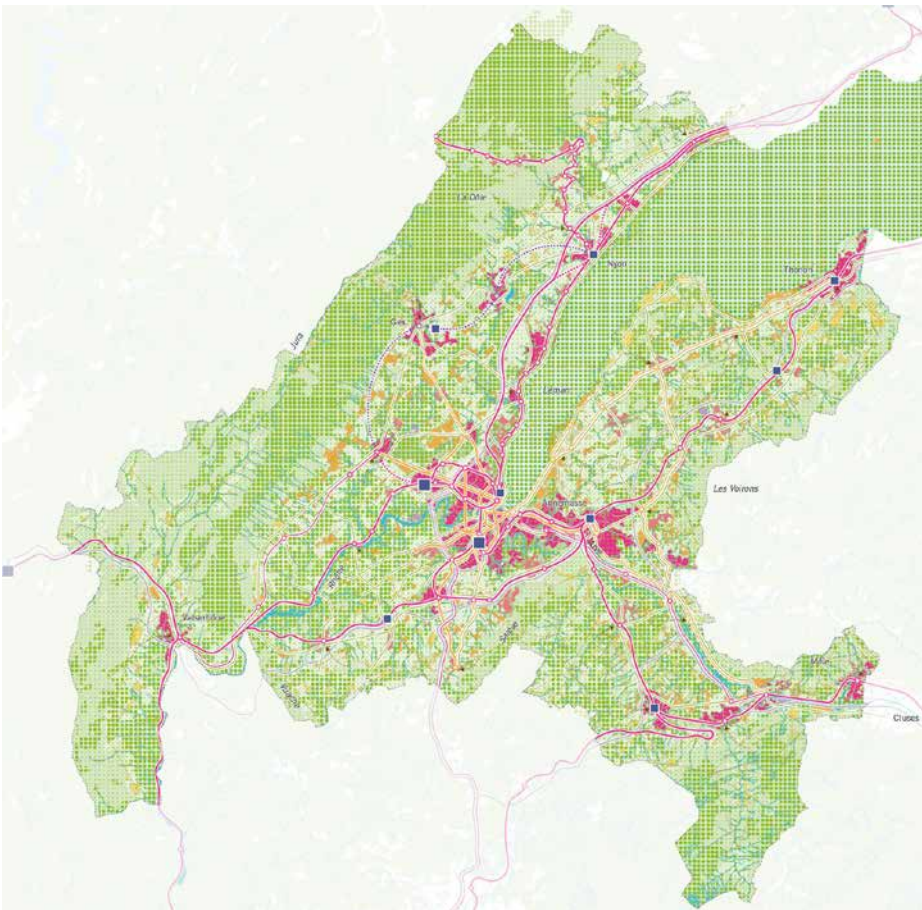
WARSAW

LEUVEN

LILLE BRUSSELS

GENEVA

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GENEVA

THINK BEYOND BORDERS: JOINING FORCES TO DEVELOP THE GREATER GENEVA OF TOMORROW

Context

The agglomeration of Geneva has more than a million inhabitants and metropolitan tensions are exacerbated by the border. As a result, jobs are concentrated in the canton of Geneva and housing in France. The need to structure the area is not new and cross-border collaboration led to a territorial project in the mid-2000s. This unique collaboration, now known as Greater Geneva, covers more than 200 municipalities and an area of 2,000 km² between Switzerland and France.

A new phase began in 2021 with the preparation of the Cross-border Territorial Vision 2050 (*Vision territoriale transfrontalière 2050*). It does not intend to be a regulatory document, but a process of dialogue designed to set a common course. This territorial vision, to be adopted in 2024, will serve as a basis for future planning in France, the canton of Geneva and the canton of Vaud and as a means of identifying future strategic projects.

In Geneva, the Cross-border Territorial Vision will provide input for the next cantonal master plan, including an adaptation of the legal framework. Given the scale of the transitional challenges, a complete renewal of the strategy is required, within which the predicted arrival of 300,000 to 400,000 more inhabitants by 2050 will act as a starting point. This approach is necessary in order to stop the urban sprawl and to reduce car use.

Impacts

During the working process and in order to ensure that the vision was developed in a manner that most closely reflected the realities of each municipality, Greater Geneva has been divided up into four major sectors: the Jura, Rhône, Arve and Chablais development areas. These four areas have enabled detailed work and exploration to be carried out on the ground with local players: associations, economic actors, local elected representatives and administrative authorities in charge of planning who work together to draw up the diagnosis and contribute towards the territorial vision.

The process began in September 2022 in Geneva, with the official launch in the presence of the political authorities and all the stakeholders involved. Three joint workshops followed, involving local representatives from Geneva, Vaud and France, as well as experts. Since October 2023, the global vision has been built on the basis of the numerous convergent proposals that have emerged. From the beginning, series of citizen workshops and public meetings invited the general public to participate in the debate on the Greater Geneva of tomorrow. Nearly 300 participants from both sides of the border were able to express their views.

During the process, two major converging strategies progressively emerged: *The primacy of the living* and *The multipolar and balanced agglomeration*. These strategies have made it possible to outline the spatial project and to define the principles on which actions can be initiated (Preservation, Reconnection, Revitalisation, and Regeneration, Networking, Circularity).

The past two years have revealed the complexity of the issue and the obstacles and contradictions still to be overcome.

Governance

A roadmap for revising the Geneva cantonal structure plan (*Plan directeur cantonal*) was drawn up between 2020 and 2021 within the cantonal administration. This process extended rapidly into a partnership management together with the Nyon Region and the French Genevan Metropolitan Cluster Region (*Pôle métropolitain du Genevois français*).

A system of horizontal cross-border governance, involving representatives of the local committees and political structures of the three partners, conducts the whole process. The project management is carried out by the administrative representatives of the various public policies. Of those representatives, a small team is responsible for the general organisation of the approach and for coordinating the working groups, the participative process, etc.

Recommendations

› Beyond borders, for cross-border cooperation: the shared territorial vision drawn up for Greater Geneva is seen as an essential prerequisite in order to successfully meet the latest challenges posed by the ecological transition.

› Territorial and urban planning: by organising human activities, spatial planning can make a major contribution towards the achievement of the objectives of the ecological transition.

› Integrating new challenges: the principles of a compact, multipolar and green conurbation, laid down more than ten years ago in the first Greater Geneva plan, are still relevant today, but the vision has to be recast in the light of new challenges to be met by 2050.

› Communication and civic participation: in the process of drawing up the cross-border territorial vision, communication and civic participation are crucial not only as a means of raising awareness of the process among all the stakeholders, but also of mobilising the various target groups and of defining and then implementing the changes required for the ecological transition.

Read more

https://www.grand-geneve-en-transition.org/

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Legende

— Te versterken regionale spoorlijnen

— Nieuwe corridors hoogwaardig openbaar vervoer - korte termijn

····· Nieuwe corridors hoogwaardig openbaar vervoer - middellange termijn

Hoogwaardig openbaar vervoer in stadsregio Leuven

© Regionet Leuven

LEUVEN

<div align="right">BELGIUM</div>

REGIONET LEUVEN: RETHINKING THE MOBILITY NETWORK TO STRENGTHEN DENSITY

Context

Leuven is a medium-sized city in Belgium with high-density urban development in the city centre and dispersed low-density housing on its outskirts and in surrounding areas where housing demand remains consistently high. Since the city's functional urban area extends beyond its administrative borders, fragmentation brings challenges to the governance of spatial quality. As far as improving access and facilitating polycentric cores are concerned, this fragmentation could lead to spatial disparity if planning documents did not include the larger scale of the functional urban area around Leuven. In collaboration with the city of Leuven, surrounding municipalities and the province of Flemish Brabant, Regionet Leuven has been established as a regional initiative that strengthens the principles of transit and bike-oriented development (TBOD). This programme has a clear goal to improve the public transport network and cycling infrastructure in its designated area, including by boosting the concentration and densification of future developments around the nodes of the renewed public transport network. This approach is designed to address urban sprawl, which is exacerbated by high housing prices in Leuven and an excess of building opportunities in the region. Regionet Leuven's role as a partner to a group of local government authorities is bringing about new inter-governmental collaboration between them that encompasses multiple policy areas.

Impacts

The focus on ensuring greater cohesion in spatial planning and enhancing mobility and access on the scale of the city-region has prompted the implementation of a more integrated approach to regional mobility in Flanders and has led to the deployment of so-called 'transport regions' in Flanders, the task of which is to incorporate a pre-existing layered mobility network within a proper regional mobility plan. The integrated approach towards mobility and spatial planning within Regionet Leuven is helping to facilitate polycentric development. Thanks to the good cooperation between the different local governments and the willingness to work towards a common result, efforts are being made to ease densification around the nodes of the network while reviewing building rights in areas that favour urban sprawl. Last but not least, adjusting the collaboration between local actors and adopting an integrated approach in the way that spatial planning is undertaken has also proved beneficial to other causes, such as environmental objectives and social inclusion.

Governance

The project is coordinated by the Provincial administration of Flemish Brabant in partnership with the city of Leuven and surrounding municipalities. Even though the position of the Province in the hierarchy is higher than that of the municipalities and other stakeholders, its role in the project more closely resembles that of a connector than a manager, thereby leading to the creation of a communal environment that benefits negotiations and cooperation. Since supra-local interference in spatial planning is often perceived as troublesome for local authorities, one of the main assets of Regionet Leuven is that it maintains the scale and identity of the local level but fulfils larger-scale objectives.

Recommendations

> Innovative governance: cities all over Europe often have to deal with issues relating to the fragmentation of governance. Leuven's borders effectively do not match its functional urban area and more collaboration is needed to pursue objectives that imply a larger scale. Metropolitan governance can help to tackle such challenges, but not every country has such a state structure. The lack of such metropolitan governance in Belgium has led to the innovative administrative arrangement known as Regionet Leuven, which fills the gap between the municipal and regional levels.

> Rethink mobility networks to influence smarter developments: by restructuring existing networks around potential polycentric cores, the dominance of developments led by an approach that exacerbates urban sprawl has been shifted towards transport and bike-oriented design (TBOD) that densifies in more strategic areas. This also improves accessibility to the nearby cores and the centre of Leuven.

Read more

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LILLE

"PLU3": A REVISED PLANNING TOOL TO BRING COHERENCE AT THE METROPOLITAN SCALE

Context

The Local Plan for Urban Planning (PLU) defines the development strategy and sets out the rules for land use. For the European Metropole of Lille (MEL), which has a population of 1.2 million, the PLU3, to be approved in June 2024, constitutes a single planning document for 95 municipalities. The profile of each municipality, ranging from 230 inhabitants to over 230,000 in the case of the most populous town, is very different. The scale of inter-municipal cooperation is broad, encompassing very urban, densely developed cities and rural towns and villages on the outskirts; almost 50% of the area is zoned for agriculture, i.e. around 31,000 ha.

In addition to the challenges of climate change, the MEL faces challenges inherited from its industrial past: for example, high-density working-class housing in need of renovation, major brownfield sites or pollution to be dealt with and a section of the population still experiencing social and economic difficulties.

The PLU integrates many metropolitan policies (water, mobility, economy, climate, housing, etc.) but must also propose concrete measures. For example, preserving drinking water resources, severely limiting urban sprawl, and integrating economic activities into the city.

Impacts

To achieve the national objective of zero net land take by 2050, PLU3 represents a significant step forwards in keeping with the steady effort to reduce urban expansion areas since 2000. In PLU3, the aim is to achieve 4/5 of housing needs within the existing urban fabric.

To optimise land use, a maximum density coefficient of 0.3 has been extended to the entire area. This new restrictive threshold will require significant efforts in rural areas. Around high-performance transport routes, a new regulatory tool will impose a density of 0.7 on a 500 m buffer.

A new specific regulation concerning 29 municipalities and 160,000 inhabitants in the catchment areas prefigures the ZAN of tomorrow: this territory will therefore become the first «zero extension» territory and renounces 500 ha of urban extension to protect water resources. The MEL is working with the municipalities to help them plan their development within the existing urban fabric.

Governance

The MEL does not use external service providers for the PLU: given the scale of the project and the regular need for changes, it is produced in-house.

For the political construction of the PLU3, the absence of a «single large central city» dominating its periphery requires ongoing dialogue with the 95 municipalities to reconcile the metropolitan vision with the local vision and to take account of the wide variety of situations.

On complex issues such as urban renewal and the productive city, joint construction workshops for local authorities have been devised in order to share the problems and design solutions to challenges shared at the metropolitan level.

Recommendations

› New regulatory tools need to be invented to meet the new challenges of nature in the city and productive cities, taking into account the value of the soil. Ensuring their adoption by local councillors can be challenging, but they are experiments worth sharing.

› Zero expansion does not mean zero development. The preservation of natural and agricultural areas is forcing local authorities to rethink their development model, whether in the centres of conurbations or more rural areas. A great deal of education and innovation is needed to support this change of model: co-construction workshops, case studies, the use of behavioural sciences, etc.

› Territorial coherence: on a metropolitan scale, in which the PLU3 leads to the creation of a single PLU for 95 municipalities, the territorial project now concerns all the communes of the metropolis and is bringing greater coherence to development strategies and urban planning policies.

Read more

https://plu.lillemetropole.fr/

https://diffuweb.lillemetropole.fr/PLU3/PLU3_ENQUETE_PUBLIQUE/SYNTHESE/note_de_synthese_PLU3_VF.pdf

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Warsaw

Warsaw

EFFICIENT INFRASTRUCTURE

RICH IDENTITY

MANY WAYS OF LIVING

A GREEN CAPITAL

WHERE EVERYTHING IS CLOSE

HEALTHY AND SAFE

FRIENDLY PUBLIC SPACE

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WARSAW

POLAND

A VISION OF WARSAW'S DEVELOPMENT: THE SPATIAL POLICY TO BUILD A RESILIENT URBAN ECOSYSTEM

Context

In order to prepare a new general plan and development strategy, City of Warsaw created a vision that defines the main rules of spatial policy in Warsaw, so that a sustainable development can be pursued up to 2050 using proper planning tools and solutions. Currently in its preparation phase, the policy is centred around ordering the spatial structure of Warsaw, most notably for the topics of housing, public space, green networks, mobility and infrastructure. The foundation on which the vision of Warsaw is based lies in data analysis on Warsaw that shape the directives of the document. The goal is to develop Warsaw further into a resilient urban ecosystem, in which qualitative density is key in order to avoid an unwarranted expansion/suburbanization caused by a predicted population growth...

A comprehensive approach with regard to the structuring of the city's aims to hold the balanced relations between the social, economic and natural spheres that shape our daily lives in high esteem and place these linkages at the core of qualitative livelihoods. Thanks to strategical concentration of facilities in local and district centres, citizens will be able to conveniently reach their daily services and recreational needs on foot while enabling rapid connections to other parts of the city by providing efficient public transport.

Impacts

As one of the core principles of this vision is to mix functions and protect natural space. This vision will serve to create an improved livelihood for its residents, in which everyday facilities and services can be enjoyed close to home. As a result, residential areas (local centres) will have multiple social facilities, retail and food services in the immediate vicinity, as well as green areas and recreational facilities will also still be located nearby. Meanwhile, the district centres can further also provide accommodation for offices and non-intrusive industries and can serve as a connector for public transport. Linking this vision to the green and blue networks of the city will enable natural areas to be protected, thereby improving the health and attractiveness of the city. As local communities will improve with regard to their sustainability, connectivity and access to nature, the city of Warsaw in its turn will benefit from improved spatial and architectural quality.

Governance

The main goal of the project is to prepare for demographic forecasts for the period up to 2050 and to the progressive climate change. It concerns the area within the city's administrative borders and protects many natural areas that are currently present in Warsaw. A team dedicated to this project within the Department of Architecture & Spatial Planning is working on documents that will indicate the city's future planning challenges and opportunities. Topics such as urban morphology, environment, mobility and architecture form the major points of analysis.

Recommendations

› Adapt and localise well-known concepts: the methodology of this vision and many of its core design principles, such as polycentric structures and the 15-minute city, blue green infrastructure and sustainable mobility are concepts that are universally transferable to other cities and have been proven to improve the quality of lives and access to more services.

› Building the future together: to maximise this goal and to answer not only to the needs of citizens but also to the sustainable development of the city as a whole, one of the key strategies has been to involve the public at all times so that a more effective understanding and improved participation and transparency can be achieved. Moreover, by integrating a diverse working group of members consisting of many different stakeholders at every stage of its development, the final product of this vision is a result of many actors working together and caring about the future of living in the city.

Read more

https://architektura.um.warszawa.pl/

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BRUSSELS

CARE, GENDER AND INTERGENERATIONAL ENCOUNTERS AT THE HEART OF A COLLABORATIVE HOUSING PROJECT

Context

CALICO is an intergenerational European co-funded housing project that addresses the issues of gender, care and anti-speculation in the context of the housing crisis in Brussels. The alternative proposed by CALICO puts living together at the heart of the project while highlighting care work, the effort to combat gender inequality, and governance by residents. This is a complex project that responds to numerous challenges in terms of public governance, the right to housing, social cohesion, social justice and local care. Its priorities involve care, access to housing, taking gender into account and integrating birth and the end of life into the heart of the community.

With a complex of 34 flats (purchased off-plan because of the project's time constraints), the project gives priority to the gender dimension and the social, cultural and generational mix. Given the inequalities in access to affordable, quality housing in Brussels, the CALICO project focuses on three particularly vulnerable groups: the elderly, women (single parents and women from single-parent families) and people from immigrant backgrounds. Two-thirds of the homes have been allocated to households that meet the conditions for access to social housing and half to households where the head of household is aged over 50.

Impacts

The consortium sought to co-construct an innovative solution in collaboration with future residents, based on the Community Land Trust model. In this model, the land is separated from the building and is owned by a public interest foundation, which guarantees that it will not be used for speculative purposes. Purchasers only buy the home at a price adapted to their income.

The 34 housing units and the community and service spaces were divided into three contiguous grouped housing units – or 'clusters' – managed at the launch of the project by three partners: the non-profit association Pass-ages, which aims to combine intergenerational housing and care for all; the non-profit association Angela.D, a feminist association working on access to housing from a gender perspective; and the CLTB, which developed a cluster combining acquisitive housing and social rental housing.

One of the innovative dimensions of the CALICO project is that it enabled the creation of two cooperatives (Vill'ages de Pass-ages and Fair Ground) for the acquisition of all the housing units made available to the respective target groups of Pass-ages and Angela.D within CALICO, and for the rental units developed by the CLTB.

Governance

This project received subsidies of 5 million euros from the European Urban Innovative Actions programme (ERDF). The project leaders were the Brussels-Capital Region, via Brussels Housing, and the Community Land Trust Brussels (CLTB). They brought together a consortium of seven other public, voluntary and academic partners to set up and monitor the project.

The CLTB owns the land for the entire project. They acquired ownership of the land thanks to the EU investment subsidy that formed part of the UIA project. The Brussels-Capital Region provided additional funding. The European investment grant covers about 80% of the value of the necessary and agreed investment.

Recommendations

› Participatory governance: future residents were also partners in the project, internal governance having led to the creation of a general meeting of residents and the setting up of various committees and working groups as part of a co-construction process. This collective form of management empowers residents by giving them a voice and enabling them to make decisions about their living environment. Within the collective management process, specific attention was paid to gender, in order to ensure that women's voices were heard and that the conditions were in place for their effective participation at collective events (for example, by providing childcare whenever meetings took place).

› Thinking about more egalitarian housing: the CALICO project includes several shared spaces: one of the flats has been converted into a communal space that is available to (and collectively managed by) residents; a local association occupies a space open to initiatives involving the neighbourhood and the semi-public garden is managed in partnership with the municipality.

› Building on a human scale: the limited number of housing units helps to alleviate the feeling of anonymity that can be associated with large blocks of flats. The collaborative spaces, not focused on commercial exchanges, help to create relays and activities and encourage sociability between residents.

Read more

https://www.cltb.be/calico/? lang=en

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BRUSSELS

PETITE ÎLE – CITYGATE: UNLOCKING DENSITY'S FULL POTENTIAL

Context

A large-scale reconversion project on a brownfield site is set to become Brussels' new exemplary project on the topic of mixed-use developments. Having previously been occupied by retail warehouses and industry, the strategic location of the site near the city's core, a station and the canal waterfront offers considerable potential. Due to its prime accessibility and its many strengths, it is ideally located for the construction of new housing and services and to begin the development of a new neighbourhood. Situated neatly between the Brussels Canal and industrial sites along an access road, the project aims to strike a balance between the different urban renewal projects and the reconversion strategies of the local area, to become an example in mixing social and functional uses.

This is why qualitative density has always been at the core of its concept. Housing (and social housing), education and productive activities are all incorporated into its design so that a coherent neighbourhood can be created with many facilities on the designated site. By reducing the land take of roads on the site, more space can be allocated to public space, greenery and active mobility, thereby promoting accessibility and a convivial environment.

Impacts

A city in a city is how the project could best be defined. It aims to go beyond the classical mixed-use development and embrace the diversity it offers to its future residents. The idea behind its design, namely, to open up its facilities, such as the school yard, to all of its residents is an innovative approach when it comes to offering more green spaces and recreational facilities to citizens as a means of providing added benefits to the neighbourhood. The aim of this is to create an environment in which even certain productive facilities can be found close to home. In principle, this design choice bears reference to the 15-minute city, but goes even further by incorporating many of the daily services in the immediate vicinity within the same development. Schools, shops and even industries will soon form an integral part of this development, paving the way for an innovative approach towards handling increased density.

Governance

Managed and developed by two government agencies, the project's objectives are all about striking balances. Since this is an area situated at the crossroads of different neighbourhoods and urban fabrics, there exists an overlap of multiple strategic plans and visions, which the management has closely monitored and integrated.

In order to prevent the site remaining unused during the planning and construction phase, the developers looked for solutions to provide the surrounding neighbourhoods with facilities on site. Through a programme of temporary occupations, existing rooms and outside areas have been turned into a climbing hall, a skatepark, art studios, etc.

Recommendations

› Utilise density to its fullest potential: many projects use density simply as an indicator, but what if it could also indicate how people experience their neighbourhood by making use of unique facilities? In Petite Île/Citygate, residents will have access to the school's recreational facilities and there will be a canteen and library on site to provide for other social needs. Industrial workshop spaces will also be built directly on site as a means of enabling mixed use and to acknowledge to the former use of the buildings and the local identity.

› Temporary occupation to accommodate local demands: something that has received great appreciation during the construction phase of the project was the adoption of a programme to provide temporary occupation in the premises. A climbing hall, music studio, gardening allotments and a skate park are some core examples that Petite Île/Citygate provided for as long as the projects' construction phase allowed.

Read more

https://www.citydev.brussels/fr/projets/citygate-ii

https://slrb-bghm.brussels/fr/chantiers/petite-ile

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GREEN, BLUE AND GREY: COMBINING A BUILT ENVIRONMENT WITH NATURE

The built environment and nature are often thought of as separate, incompatible or irreconcilable entities. In a context where climate adaptation and resilience are becoming necessities, cities are exploring how to combine the built environment and nature, in order to create new urban environments fit for future changes.

Looking at urban agriculture, nature-based solutions, water management and resilient open space offers some potential ways of creating nature-inclusive urban spaces. Urban planning has introduced various approaches as a means of fostering regenerative urban development, such as implementing sponge cities, incorporating green and blue corridors, and integrating nature into buildings. Moreover, efforts to restore the natural balance in urban areas include strategies to depollute soils and enhance biodiversity, countering the negative effects of industrial and human activities.

Improving blue and green networks offers many virtues in terms of restoring biodiversity and resilience to climate change, while at the same time addressing issues of crucial importance to city dwellers such as health, physical and mental well-being, improving quality of life by creating recreational spaces, reconnecting with nature, strengthening local communities and even improving food resilience.

Ongoing initiatives at EU level connect with such initiatives, e.g. the New European Bauhaus or the EU Mission: Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, which aims to deliver 100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030. Soon to be adopted or negotiated European legislation on nature restoration, land-take, soil quality and climate objectives, will significantly influence urban development practices. Responding to those new implementation imperatives will require approaches founded upon collaboration between different disciplines and between local government and urban actors.

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AMSTERDAM

STRANDEILAND: A GREEN, SOCIAL AND SUSTAINABLE ISLAND

Context

Amsterdam's last urban expansion is the creation of a new island in the IJmeer basin, named Strandeiland ("Beach-Island"). The vision for the Strandeiland extends beyond just housing; it is a commitment to create a climate and nature-inclusive environment and to revitalise nature. To fulfil Amsterdam's housing demand in a qualitative way, innovative approaches have to be found not only for locating space, but also to make them fit into the local context. Expanding the city on an island might appear a simple matter, but following the construction of the 'Afsluitdijk' (IJsselmeer Dam) in 1932 that separates the local bay from the sea, the water quality and biodiversity of the IJmeer declined, affecting environmental and living conditions. Amsterdam decided to make both challenges compatible and capable of being addressed within a single project, and also starting to invest in the revitalisation of the local natural environment while simultaneously expanding the city. The Strandeiland aims to become a sustainable, climate-resilient neighbourhood by 2040, in which the natural and urban life will nourish each other. To ensure that the demands for a qualitative neighbourhood and the natural revitalisation are met, the project is particularly cautious about minimising its land take area, and prioritising less invasive construction methods. By embracing the natural landscape in its design, a one-of-a-kind neighbourhood is created in the diverse Amsterdam.

Impacts

The design of Strandeiland started from its natural edges, ensuring that the water is always visible and accessible to the public from anywhere on the island. This serves to create a distinctive and cohesive island identity, in which the landscape determines the spatial framework. Since the island's landmass was completed, rigorous monitoring efforts have been ongoing. Substantial natural impacts, with both quantitative data and qualitative observations, have already proven a noteworthy increase in biodiversity, including a variety of species such as breeding birds, pollinating insects, bats and amphibians that are good indicators of healthy environments.

The sustainability aspirations are very ambitious and aim to achieve an energy-neutral or energy-positive, emission-free, and fully circular island. Meanwhile, following the polycentric design of the neighbourhood, amenities and shared mobility services are tightly integrated in the zoning plan, allowing for a mixed residential neighbourhood with easy access to other parts of the city.

Governance

As part of Amsterdam's Local Vison 2050, IJburg is managed and designed by the City of Amsterdam. The project is looking to add 20,000 new residents to the city in a diverse range of residential typologies. Its site management does not merely consist of providing residential functions and amenities. The aim of Strandeiland project is to provide an additional range of facilities that are in high demand. For example, providing a beach for citizens to enjoy and constructing robust public space, parks and natural areas. The ambition behind Strandeiland is for it to become a new and fully integral part of the city framework.

Recommendations

› Design that is complementary to the natural environment: Strandeiland serves as a unique and compelling case study that can inspire other cities and metropolitan areas embarking on pioneering projects of expansion or transformation. Even though it is set on an island, it stands as an exceptional example in the realm of sustainable urban development of which all its design principles are transferable. Its design is founded on a robust natural framework, to which other key objectives are added.

› Significance of interdisciplinary collaboration: Utilising different and diverse disciplines made it possible to achieve an intricately interwoven and transversal collaboration that gave rise to innovation in fields such as architectural design, mobility planning and recreational facilities. This integrated approach prioritises a holistic perspective, bringing together a wide range of expertise required, all of which contributes towards the crafting this high-quality, new urban district. It is a project for the whole of Amsterdam, not just on a local scale.

Read more

https://www.amsterdam.nl/projecten/strandeiland/

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LISBON

FOOD TRANSITION STRATEGY IN THE LISBON METROPOLITAN AREA

Context

Food policy is one of the main challenges identified by the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (AML) as part of its Lisbon 2030 Regional Strategy. In 2022, Lisbon presented FoodLink, a network for food transition in the Lisbon metropolitan area, bringing together territories, food-related initiatives and actors in the Lisbon metropolitan area. This network aims to move towards a sustainable, resilient and economically dynamic food system on a metropolitan scale. Lisbon is also involved in European food-related projects such as the Milan Food Pact.

The strategic importance of the food topic for the territory, combined with the prominence that food systems have been gaining on the political agenda, called for a dedicated food strategy to be developed by AML and its partners. The Food Transition Strategy is planned to become the territorial and intersectoral strategic instrument encompassing the entire food system across four dimensions: production, distribution, consumption and waste.

The Strategy was presented in June 2023 as the basis for an ambitious cross-cutting food policy on a metropolitan level. The Strategy aims to promote a sustainable, inclusive, resilient, safe, and diverse food system that will provide the entire population with healthy food, while minimising waste and preserving the environment. It has four axes: the organisation of production, the organisation of distribution, the organisation of consumption and the recovery of food waste.

Impacts

The Strategy is a helpful tool for the metropolitan area in order to gain a better understanding of what it wants to achieve in relation to food, as an important aspect of quality of life, and to grasp the various implications of an ambitious food policy on a metropolitan scale.

For instance, the Strategy has implications in terms of urban and metropolitan planning: the vision foresees that by 2030, around 15% of the metropolitan area's food supply can be secured based on sustainable production methods (organic production, integrated protection and agroecology), innovative solutions (water management for irrigation, reduction of phytopharmaceuticals and soil conservation and climate adaptation) and low-carbon distribution networks and proximity food circuits (which meet inclusion and food safety criteria). Urban-rural linkages will also be strengthened thanks to the Strategy.

The Strategy is now entering its next phase, which will involve defining a set of objectives and lines of action including concrete measures for implementation as part of public policy instruments in force and planned up to 2030, including a specified allocation of resources.

Governance

The preparation of the Food Transition Strategy was based on a participatory process involving governments, academics, economic agents and citizens (following the Quadruple Helix concept). The Lisbon Metropolitan Area (representing 18 municipalities) and the central government are the coordinators of the Strategy. The process is coordinated within the AML Spatial Planning and Environment Working Group and is complemented by regular consultation meetings with the FoodLink network (40 members).

During the construction phase of the Strategy, various stakeholders were consulted by means of participative events such as kick-off workshops, thematic meetings, and expert panels. The overall process was conceived as a collaborative governance scheme for the future implementation of the food strategy. Overall, the budget allocated by the AML for this strategy is €30,000,000.

Recommendations

› Rethink food systems: metropolitan areas are increasingly finding quick and efficient responses to today's societal challenges in a multi-crisis context. Cities are centres of demographic concentration, and their food supply is an environmental, economic, climatic and energy priority. For this reason, it is essential to rethink food systems from the global to the local context, to give them a strategic, integrated and collaborative dimension and to take their various components, from production to consumption, into account.

› Meeting global objectives: for Lisbon, formulating a Food Transition Strategy on a metropolitan level helped meet the objectives of the EU Green Deal, especially its Farm to Fork and 2030 Biodiversity strategies.

› Empower local communities and enhance territorial capacity building: the process of creating the Strategy, based on a quadruple helix approach, was designed to empower local communities and representatives encapsulating the metropolitan food ecosystem, while also having a direct impact on local communities (value local markets, engage with schools, develop a food culture, etc.)

Read more

https://www.aml.pt/en/areas-atividade/transicao-alimentar/

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OSLO

NORWAY

OSLOTRÆR (OSLO TREES)

Context

Oslotrær is a ten-year programme, aiming to increase the number of trees in all parts of Oslo's built area. It is responding to the need to strengthen the city's green infrastructure, improve the local environment, manage extreme rainfall, adapt to climate change and enhance citizens' mental and physical well-being. In addition to planting new trees, the programme seeks to strengthen how we recognise and understand how trees serve the ecosystem and to enhance community involvement and participation through involving citizens, local businesses, property developers and NGOs across the city. Summer jobs and part-time jobs for young people to plant trees are also funded, providing valuable work experience.

Oslotrær can also be viewed in an international context, in which cities are seeing the need to combat the decline of urban nature by increasing the number of trees and strengthening biological diversity. The cross-party support and collaboration in Oslo play a crucial part in prioritising trees in our long-term city planning and in ensuring that shared goals can be maintained whenever changes of government take place.

The project team in Bykuben, Oslo's urban ecology centre, facilitates broad participation with stakeholders, businesses, and residential groups, provides expert advice and digital registration systems using a GIS-app and integrates Oslotrær into the broader processes for city planning and greening the city.

Impacts

During the first three years, more than 14,500 trees were planted and registered using a GIS map. Digital tools for counting trees and mapping the tree crown cover have also been developed.

Oslo's participatory approach to planning has also been expanded as a result of the Oslotrær project, providing new arenas and networks to engage residents, schools, young people, local businesses, and environmental organisations in working together for common goals.

The programme has attracted widespread participation from residents, organisations and stakeholders in the municipality and the private sector. Involvement in tree planting has provided new spaces for new and innovative participation in urban development while spreading important environmental skills and awareness.

Some local projects have been designed to increase the skills and motivation of young people in deprived areas of the city, in collaboration with youth centres and horticultural experts.

Governance

The project is managed by Oslo's centre for urban ecology (Bykuben), which forms part of the municipal Planning and Building Agency and has an annual budget of €850,000. Key municipal departments take part in a coordination committee, enabling a good cross-sectoral dialogue. External partners include research and education institutions, planting and arborist organisations, local social entrepreneurs, residents' organisations and environmental groups.

Developers, landowners, land-management companies, and transport authorities are the main stakeholders. The municipality owns little land itself, so development depends largely on the private sector.

Recommendations

› Trees can often come into conflict with other municipal services and needs, such as fire and rescue services, cycle paths, housing construction, or underground infrastructure. It is therefore essential to broaden the cooperation, include tree planting in the initial stages of project planning, as well as to strengthen the legal protection of trees.

› Communication and collaboration are key success factors. It is therefore important to spend time from the outset getting to know and involving all the professional circles concerned, as well as identifying the challenges and opportunities together with municipal and private-sector participants.

› Tree planting is an arena for learning, mastering new skills, and for helping young people into employment, especially young adults who lack work opportunities, schooling, or networks. Oslotrær is also important for developing skills and recruiting skilled people in the locality who are crucial to implement future urban transitions (gardeners, arborists, landscape planners etc.)

Read more

https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/8a4116dacc784c239705d379ddf6787d

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TURIN

PROGIREG IN TURIN: PRODUCTIVE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR INCLUSIVE URBAN REGENERATION

Context

Mirafiori Sud is a district located by the river Sangone. It is a periph-eral, working-class area with approximately 40,000 inhabitants and a mix of social groups. It developed rapidly thanks to the automotive sector during the "Italian economic miracle" in the 1950s-1960s. Nowadays, the population has aged, many modernist buildings remain empty and the district has become less attractive as industrial production has come to a halt.

However, the area has a high potential for urban regeneration, with active local associations, a strong cultural and industrial heritage and large green areas.

Involved in the European-funded project proGIreg from 2018 to 2023 (Horizon 2020), Turin focused on the Mirafiori Sud district to test innovative, green and collaborative practices with local actors to regenerate the area. Nature-based solutions, urban agriculture and circular food systems were the three pillars on which the revival of the Mirafiori district was based.

The project was a turning point for Mirafiori Sud: several NBS interventions were implemented from 2018 to 2023. This involved experimentation on regenerated soil, the valorisation of historical sites, green walls/roofs and different types of community gardens across the district. Inhabitants, schools and local associations were heavily involved in the implementation and maintenance of those experiments.

With this project, Turin enhanced the recovery of green, blue and grey areas in the district, supporting the development of green and circular economic and social drivers. As a result, Mirafiori Sud is turning into a more liveable, green and attractive place – first and foremost for its local community.

Impacts

The most impactful aspect of proGIreg is the construction of a community of practice with regard to overcoming the difficulties of collaboration between the public and private sectors by means of new interpretive legislative approaches and the use of exper-imental administrative tools such as collaborative covenants.

Even though proGIreg is over, local actors and the city are building upon its success to increase the renewed appeal of the Mirafiori district and replicate its success in other parts of the city, to con-tribute to the development of other green and circular initiatives.

Other projects linked to nature-based solutions and circular food systems have started in the district (e.g. the Fusilli project), build-ing on the knowledge acquired during proGIreg. Young people and families from other city areas now come to visit Mirafiori, discovering its potential. In the long run, this is expected to stimulate qualitative density, as Mirafiori is turning into a safer, active district.

Governance

The EU-Funds and Innovation Office of the City of Turin sup-ported the project. Since the beginning different partners were also involved: research entities, NGOs and private enterprises. Local stakeholders and citizens participated in the co-creation, co-design, implementation and management phases of each of the different solutions implemented in Mirafiori.

In total, the project benefitted from €896,500 for the City of Turin via the EU Horizon 2020 programme and its strand "Produc-tive Green Infrastructure for post-industrial urban regeneration: nature for renewal".

Recommendations

The City is using lessons learnt from the project to continue to support and replicate such practices, in order to ensure long-term effects that will last well beyond the project timeline. Overall, the operation is an interesting case of nature-based regeneration and citizen-engagement effort in a peripheral urban area. Three recommendations come to mind:

> It is important to ensure strong involvement from local associa-tions, NGOs, grassroots organisations but also private businesses

> Clustering projects enables successful initiatives to continue receiv-ing support and be disseminated

> Need to build a long-term vision for impact beyond the project life cycle. This needs to be developed with the local community and lever on business opportunities in order to ensure co-maintenance, empowerment and economic sustainability.

Read more

https://proGIreg.eu/turin/

https://fusilli-project.eu/cities/turin/

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BRUSSELS

SPECIFIC MASTER PLAN OF THE HEYVAERT NEIGHBOURHOOD

Context

A Specific Master Plan is a planning tool used within the Brussels-Capital Region that establishes a spatial framework and rules in a specific perimeter to enhance the place-based approach. This instrument for spatial planning supplements the other regional plans and has earned an important place within the regional hierarchy of planning tools. It lays down rules in the perimeter for zoning, public space design, building regulations, mobility and heritage. For these plans, perspective.brussels is assigned as the managing authority and is also tasked with involving all stakeholders and providing participation moments for citizens. Currently, several of these plans are under way, so this case study specifically relates to the Heyvaert neighbourhood in Brussels because of its dense and diverse character. Being an industrious neighbourhood where a lot of new residents often find their first settlement in Brussels, it aims to improve the quality of life and the residential function of the neighbourhood while anchoring and renewing its many businesses to ensure a friendly, inclusive and mixed neighbourhood. Historically a neighbourhood with a lot of industries and warehouses, the neighbourhood had largely invested in this function, disregarding to an extent the quality of life and housing in the locality.

Impacts

One of the main objectives of this master plan is to open up the blocks so that more public space can be found in the neighbourhood. Previously, because of its many warehouses, the housing blocks were completely built up, leaving no space for other functions such as greenery, recreation or passages. Not only do these interior locations create an opportunity to strengthen the number of functions in the neighbourhood, but they also play an important role in providing secure and quiet areas in an industrious and well-frequented part of the city. Pedestrian links that are detached from the road arteries help to structure and streamline the neighbourhood for active mobility users. Meanwhile, a shift in economic activities has caused a move towards more sustainable, productive businesses in the neighbourhood such as upcycling, artisans and food services that use existing premises.

Governance

Managed by perspective.brussels, the Specific Master Plan is made up of three sections. An informative section to contextualise, a strategic section that defines the general mission and guidelines, and the regulatory section that establishes binding rules for developers inside the perimeter. Its chief ability is its capacity to overrule any other urban planning instruments in order to favour the place-based approach that the Specific Master Plan allows. A unique neighbourhood such as Heyvaert needs a tool adapted in line with regional objectives in this specific context. The master plan develops reconversion and renewal in a very precise and thought-out manner.

Recommendations

› Prioritising the place-based approach: As a means of improving the livelihood and future of a neighbourhood in the best possible way, a place-based approach can tackle challenges more specifically. No area is ever exactly the same with regard to opportunities and challenges, which means that 'territorially blind' programmes can fail to address vital assets in a specific area. This tool caters to Brussels' needs but is always in line with the local identity, so that solutions can be maximised for the people.

› Use planning tools to facilitate the sustainable transition: The Specific Master Plan touches upon regional objectives by fulfilling its mission and tackling local problems. In the Heyvaert neighbourhood, for example, residential areas and open spaces are sometimes negatively affected by the dominating industries, which has caused deficiencies in aspects such as energy efficiency, soil health and available green spaces. This tool is now enabling targeted interventions to be made to address these aspects, while still tackling its main goal.

Read more

https://perspective.brussels/fr/projets/poles-strategiques/heyvaert-porte-de-ninove/pad-heyvaert

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BRUSSELS

OPERATION RE-CREATION: GREENING SCHOOL PLAYGROUNDS

Context

Operation Recreation is a programme run by Brussels Environment with the aim of transforming the playgrounds of 19 Brussels schools into high-quality, mixed-use green playgrounds and resource areas, while bringing refreshing nature into the neighbourhood.

From an environmental point of view, planting on school grounds improves local soil permeability and water management. The islands of coolness thus created will increase Brussels' resilience to climate change and will benefit pupils and local residents during heatwaves.

The green schoolyards are also gradually strengthening biodiversity and the green fabric of the region, by creating semi-natural habitats for plants, insects and birds. They also limit the propagation of noise, an important asset that fosters the creation of a friendly environment.

With nature come other benefits and opportunities, such as boosting the well-being of users through contact with nature, using it as a resource for outdoor learning, the development of mixed play and relaxation areas and finally, the opportunity to make these green spaces accessible to local residents for activities outside school hours.

The programme offers financial support and comprehensive guidance from design to acceptance of the work. It also includes soil analysis, an infrastructure management plan and support in setting up a system for opening up the playground to extra-curricular activities and players.

Impacts

In 2021, schools were invited to submit an expression of interest to receive financial support and guidance for greening their schoolyard. A total of 62 applications were received and 20 schools were selected on the basis of geographical criteria, motivation, environmental potential, etc. The selected schools were divided into two groups. Only one school had to withdraw from the project during the course of the project.

All users of the school grounds were involved in the diagnosis and design, and will be involved in certain aspects of the work and maintenance. To this end, various tools have been created and used with pupils and teaching teams during workshops.

The work itself is getting under way in four schools. Six schools are in the process of being awarded their works contracts and will probably start work before the end of the year 2024. Nine schools have yet to launch their works contracts and will start work in early 2025.

Governance

In 2021, the Government of the Brussels Capital Region approved a budget of more than 5 million euros to turn the playgrounds of schools within its jurisdiction green.

Each school receives a subsidy of around €300,000 to manage their project and worksites. Some of them top up the funding themselves.

For a project of this scale to succeed, expertise in a number of different fields is required. Brussels- Environment has therefore put together a multi-disciplinary team made up of in-house experts (soil, water, nature, noise and environmental education) as well as architects, landscape architects and experts in the maintenance of ecological facilities, but also in civic participation and in environmental education.

Each project is based on a participatory design method: pupils, teachers, parents, headteachers, educators, ecologists, architects and the administration all work together to design «the playground of tomorrow».

Recommendations

› Enlarging the city's green space for the benefit of children does not have to happen solely in the public domain. School grounds also play a vital role in the development and well-being of children. Although each school is very different, improving resilience, green transitions and access to greenery are common objectives that have positive effects on cities and citizens. As schools around Europe are usually equipped with yards, they too can help to achieve this objective.

› Throughout the different phases of the project implementation, it is crucial to maintain user participation, from the project definition and the environmental diagnosis to the actual implementation.

› The support programme is an instrument that is easy to replicate and includes clearly identified types of support and stages that are not exclusive to one type of school building. In addition, tools to involve pupils and educational teams have been created and are available online. Thanks to all these resources, each European city can take up the programme and apply it to its own schools.

Read more

https://www.bubble.brussels/operation-re-creation

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# PLANNING TOOLS FOR THE SOUND GOVERNANCE OF THE CITY

Effective governance and urban planning tools are essential in order to enhance the quality of urban areas, curb sprawl, to promote compact and efficient land use, to allow access to affordable housing and to create sustainable communities.

With rising maintenance costs, pressure on the housing market and the complexity involved in financing land, urban authorities and planners are looking for new ways of governance and planning, are reinventing the usual forms or are inventing new tools that are better adapted to new paradigms.

Cities have realised the need to combine top-down and bottom-up approaches, in order to engage with stakeholders at different levels and foster the development of healthier, more resilient urban environments. Widening the circle of stakeholders, taking account of the different scales of interdependence between areas and opening up the urban fabric to new stakeholders form part of the strategies adopted. A plan that a large amount of stakeholders support and can use as a mutual reference is a powerful tool when carrying out a more sustainable and inclusive planning. Today, urban planning initiatives lacking civic participation, stakeholder engagement, or collaboration across different scales are doomed to failure.

Planners are inventing innovative tools to transmit ideas or integrate new knowledge and to help set targets and develop new planning models. These tools are becoming essential as a means of getting local authorities ready to achieve certain objectives that have been imposed. For instance, serious games are used to facilitate the acquisition and appropriation of planning tools, projects or territorial issues by adopting a playful and educational approach.

Finally, cities are also inventing dedicated tax and financial schemes complementing or extending existing regulatory actions, while creating a better way of sharing the value being created by urban renewal projects.

SKÅNE

BERLIN

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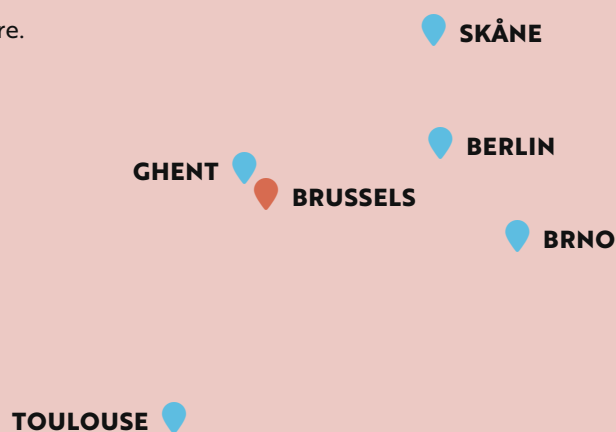
BERLIN

GERMANY

CITY-WIDE COMPENSATION MANAGEMENT IN BERLIN: SHOWING THE POSITIVE EFFECTS OF TIGHT COLLABORATION

Context

In Germany, cities are obligated by federal law to provide land and qualitative ecological measures for compensation when planning new developments. This rule applies when planning a new road, warehouses, a new neighbourhood, etc. This rule is known as the intervention-and-compensation regulation. Especially in a large city as Berlin, this regulation requires innovative thinking. Due to the lack of available land, finding adequate compensation for housing projects is a challenge and can cause delays in construction. At the same time, a loss of biodiversity in the city, flooding events and urban heat island effects emphasise the importance and insufficiency of green infrastructure.

Berlin has a particular governmental set up consisting of one central government and 12 local governments at district level. This makes identifying and assigning compensation land to a particular project rather challenging. Against the backdrop of rapid urban growth and a high demand for housing, land for compensation is a scarce resource and there is no overarching mechanism in place to allocate new land for compensation. Hence, the foundations were laid of an interdepartmental and city-wide approach to design an allocation mechanism that takes into account the interests of the districts, city-wide concerns such as housing provision as well as ecological and social concerns.

Impacts

Introducing a city-wide mechanism that monitors land has its challenges in Berlin. The city's administrative territory is divided between 12 local governments and the land there is managed within each local district. A mechanism on a larger scale therefore requires a renewed method of collaboration. Since there is both a wish and a necessity to increase the amount of land available for compensation, tighter partnerships across the local governments have now become a reality, opening the doors for increased collaboration on other topics as well, such as biodiversity and soil conservation. As a result of this initiative, broad searching areas for potential compensation have been identified analytically so the public asset holders can work together and collaborate in order to identify compensation land in areas previously off the radar for them. Housing demand is very high, so accelerating the planning process will be extremely beneficial to citizens.

Governance

The main driver of the case study is the Senate Administration for Urban Development, Building and Housing (SenStadt) together with the Senate Administration for Mobility, Traffic, Climate Protection and Environment (SenMVKU). Within SenStadt, the project is led by the Department of Urban Planning and Urban Development. This Department is able to have a city-wide, non-sectoral and neutral perspective in order to coordinate and moderate the process of designing the allocation mechanism, while the Department of Nature Conservation within SenMVKU is the superior nature conversation authority of the city state and plays a major role in allocating suitable locations for compensation.

Recommendations

› Improving collaboration by pursuing common goals: Operating on a city-wide scale in spatial planning is challenging in Berlin due to the specific nature of its governmental structure. That said, because all local governments have to respect the main federal or European objectives, innovative ways of cooperation need to be sought. Due to the urgent need for housing and to provide a good quality of life in Berlin, city-wide compensation management has worked well and has shown a lot of potential to increase collaboration on other topics as well.

› Find ways to reduce land-use competition: Both housing and nature compensation are in great demand, but the available land pools are so limited that both uses are at odds with one another. Enlarging the scale to the whole of Berlin will help to calm this tension and make it easier to provide housing in the city, while not losing out on compensation objectives.

Read more

https://www.berlin.de/sen/sbw/

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© Brno Metropolitan Area

BRNO

AN INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY TO MITIGATE SUBURBANISATION IN THE BRNO METROPOLITAN AREA

Context

The Integrated Development Strategy of the Brno Metropolitan Area (BMA) is the main document in the continuous strategic planning process on a metropolitan level. It is a single, complex and unique range document composed of four main areas: mobility, environment, public services, and development coordination. Part of the Strategy concerns the implementation of an Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) tool in the Brno Metropolitan Area. The Integrated Strategy covers the whole metropolitan area that comprises 184 municipalities.

The ITI is a territorial tool introduced by the EU in 2015 that addresses metropolitan issues requiring an integrated approach. It has a reserved allocation within the operational programme activities of the European Structural and Investment Funds. This tool makes it easier to operate territorial strategies that need funding from different sources. It also promotes a more participatory form of policymaking that engages stakeholders from different local and regional spheres.

Thanks to this tool, the BMA can financially support projects with a metropolitan impact and results that contribute towards the goals laid down in the strategy. The strategy includes a list of integrated solutions, including projects defined in specific terms. Each integrated solution contains a description of its integration and synergies and a list of projects and entities that will implement them.

Impacts

Creating an integrated strategy formed the starting point when identifying the challenges, opportunities, strengths and weaknesses of the metropolitan area. This process made it possible to identify critical areas of urban-rural cooperation and resulted in projects being put in place in strategic areas, such as sustainable mobility, revitalisation of territory, waste management, social housing and the coordination of strategic and spatial development. This work is helping Brno mitigate a trend towards suburbanisation while promoting more of the needs that exist in rural municipalities. It also links issues such as mobility and the availability of public services (pre-schools, etc.).

The process has resulted in enhanced political cooperation between urban-rural municipalities and stakeholders. The BMA now has a long-term shared vision in which operational cooperation on concrete projects will impact key sectors and citizens' quality of life. The strategy will allow the development of key infrastructures on a metropolitan level, including spinal infrastructures (road, P+R, bicycle and pedestrian transport) and the creation of a network of social and related services (including social housing).

Governance

The City of Brno, together with municipalities in its hinterland and other stakeholders, contributed to the development of the Strategy. The Department of ITI Management and Metropolitan Cooperation of the City of Brno oversees the implementation of the Strategy. The Steering Committee, a political platform without legal rights over the metropolitan territory, coordinates cooperation within the metropolis and the implementation of the ITI tool. Local representatives, regional representatives, NGOs, academia and organisations from the public and private sectors are also focusing on areas indicated in the strategy via specific working groups. The BMA benefitted from €300.000.000€ from the EU via the ITI tool.

Recommendations

› The innovative nature of the ITI tool lies in the integrated approach and in solutions applied across the entire Brno Metropolitan Area. The challenges in a metropolitan territory must be solved in collaboration with different stakeholders and involve several issues and complementary projects in one integrated solution. Integrated solutions improve development policy and planning in the metropolitan area as they often amalgamate several project proposals and actors standing behind them.

› Of course, there is pressure from managing authorities to focus on short-term impact versus the preparation of long-term strategic projects, and finances are always an issue. However, by focusing on stakeholder involvement, a detailed analysis of the territory and its projects, integrated solutions can lead to coordinated implementation, higher efficiency, and mutual synergies based on the consensus of multiple actors in the metropolitan territory.

Read more

https://metropolitni.brno.cz/en/

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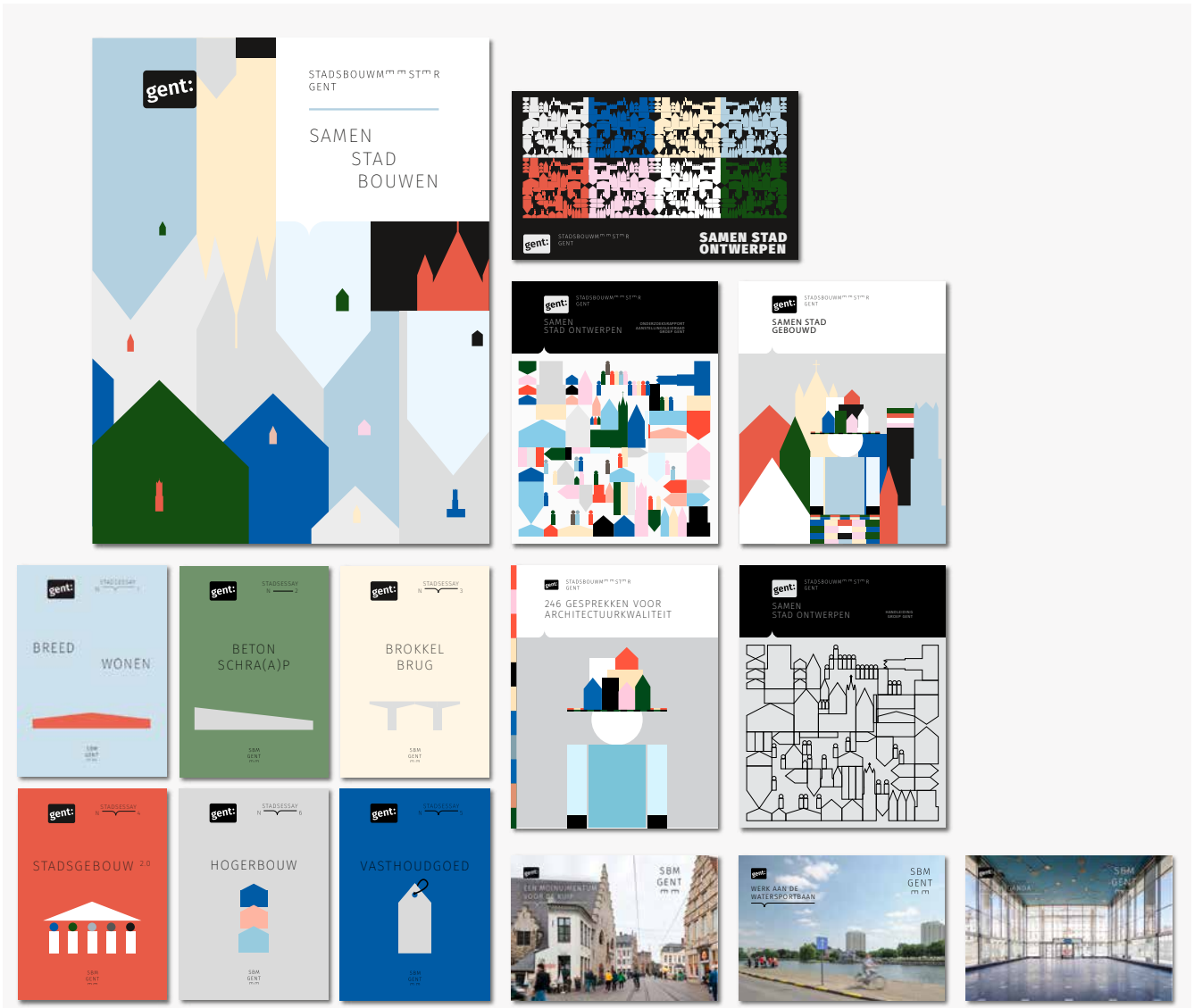
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GHENT

CITY ARCHITECT OF GHENT: MONITORING THE SPATIAL QUALITY AND ARCHITECTURE

Context

The City of Ghent appointed its first 'Bouwmeester' or city architect in 2017, an office that is relatively common in the Benelux. It is a neutral position, the task of which is not only to set the agenda on spatial quality, architecture and urban development in a city, but also to involve stakeholders, lead conversations and provide insights into spatial or architectural issues. The role of the 'Bouwmeester' is to look beyond short-term goals and instead think about the lasting impact of a project and its place within the city.

In large projects, it can often be a particular challenge to ensure a tight collaboration with(in) city administrations, stakeholders and clients. The city architect of Ghent put in place a system to resolve this issue and to improve communication with different parties. They see themselves as a host in a house with 5 well-structured chambers. Every chamber serves as a platform to get certain parties together and to make decisions together or to redirect a project. The focus for the city architect of Ghent therefore lies not in quality control, but in providing robust methodologies to guide spatial quality in a way that will benefit both the city and the projects.

Impacts

In Ghent, the city architect has brought about a shift in the local government's mindset, especially when it comes to the processes that determine spatial quality. Instead of being an isolated competence in the city planning department, it is now approached as a transversal theme that runs through each and every policy area. This shift has now led to successful interventions by the city architect in different phases of plans and projects (such as project definition and design tender) and across multiple domains of spatial planning (public space, urban development, social housing, etc.). By using the transversal approach to spatial quality, and by involving additional competencies in turn, Ghent has managed not only to develop more holistic projects, but also to gain more support for their projects, for example in the form of subsidies or an improved visibility and reputation.

Governance

Appointed in 2017 by the City of Ghent, the city architect takes on a role that cuts through multiple portfolios such as spatial planning, urban development, temporary occupation, heritage, sports and participation. Whereas previously, Ghent had an architecture subdivision within the Culture Department, which was therefore separated from urbanism and planning, the city architect is an independent and transversal entity. Consisting of a team of just four, which limits capacity but offers agility, the city architect has focused on changing the workings and agenda of the local government.

Recommendations

› The city architect of Ghent established a system of five 'chambers' to ensure closer collaboration between the different administrations that are involved in city planning or developments. Each chamber plays a role in guiding a project to its final development and adds structure and transparency to procedures that require a lot of stakeholders.

› While quality control is an important aspect of the city architect's tasks, the emphasis in Ghent lies upon the need for strong methodologies that can guide spatial quality. This makes requests for planning permission more standardised as the process is clearer for the project developer.

› Adequately analysing the lasting impact of projects can be difficult due to entrenched government administrations and political lifespans that are limited in time. As a neutral authority, the city architect is in a better position to discuss sensitive questions and lead spatial quality debates, thereby improving the framework to create long term analyses of projects.

Read more

https://stad.gent/nl/wonen-bouwen/stadsbouwmeester

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SKÅNE

SWEDEN

REGIONPLAN FOR SKÅNE 2022-2040: A POLYCENTRIC REGIONAL STRATEGY TO PREVENT WASTEFUL USE OF LAND

Context

The Skåne region in Southern Sweden is working towards the implementation of a regional strategy to enhance a more sustainable regional development by using polycentric growth.

Skåne, with its 1.4 million inhabitants, is one of Sweden's three metropolitan regions. Together with Copenhagen and the Öresund region, Skåne also forms a European metropolitan region with over four million inhabitants. Malmö, as the largest city in Skåne, is an obvious hub, but the region is not only dominated by a large city with surrounding countryside. Skåne is distinguished by having both a large city, several medium-large cities and a local structure with many independent localities, which results in a unique closeness between city and countryside.

The regional plan (Regionplan) for Skåne 2022-2040 enhances the concept of polycentric planning and divides cities and towns into different categories, from "centre of national growth" (largest cities) to the smallest strategic nodes (smallest towns/villages). If one takes a look at the functionalities and relationships between towns, they complement and enhance each other.

Polycentric planning practice is neither unique nor new. On the other hand, placed in the context of Skåne, with such a broad variety of towns and a well-connected public transport network, it creates a unique framework of spatial planning that includes both city and countryside and creates the conditions to develop as a sustainable and viable region.

Impacts

Regionplan for Skåne 2022-2040 is a tool that makes it possible to view urban planning in a broader and integrated perspective and ensure a more sustainable planning over time. By increasing the understanding of mutual dependence, Skåne can create a form of development, in which all parts are strengthened based on their qualities.

In that sense, the plan helps the regional actors to see themselves in a broader perspective and to build on the existing local structure with a clearly cohesive development within the cities to prevent urban sprawl and make maximum use of existing and new public transport.

A viable countryside is a prerequisite in order to be able to have your home, work and life anywhere in the region. The role of the countryside must be therefore increased, not only in relation to the urban but as an independent and central driving force. For this to succeed, inter-municipal collaboration is central, both between individual municipalities and within various sub-regional collaborations. This is where the regional plan becomes a tool for mutual understanding and planning that transcends municipal boarders.

Governance

As a large-scale plan involving a large number of stakeholders who need to agree, the project of the Regionplan for Skåne 2022-2040 was very hard to accomplish in the beginning. However, with an ambitious and strong communication strategy, site visits, meetings with politicians and convincing people of the importance and benefits of a strategic spatial plan for the region, it proved successful in the end.

The regional council, the board for regional development and the municipalities oversaw the development and construction of the plan, with all municipalities in Skåne, the state agencies, trade and industry, neighbouring regions and countries, universities and other regional actors contributing at different stages.

Recommendations

› Cooperation is crucial when creating a large-scale planning document and time needs to be taken for it to become embedded among the different stakeholders.

› Regional planning is something that is becoming more and more accurate as a planning level because of how we live, how we work, economic flows and climate issues.

› A strategic plan that a large amount of stakeholders support and can use as a mutual reference is a powerful tool when conducting planning activities in a more sustainable and inclusive way. The concept of polycentric planning has infused itself within the municipalities, which now take it into account when carrying out spatial planning projects.

Read more

https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/a35ec0bb48554692ad6684a253d79b6c/page/V%C3%A4lkommen/

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TOULOUSE

PLAY ZAN, A SERIOUS GAME TO FACILITATE LAND SOBRIETY

Context

In France, the Climate & Resilience Law passed in 2021 set a target of no net land take by 2050, with an intermediate target of reducing land consumption by 50% by 2031, compared to the period 2011-2021.

However, it is difficult for elected representatives and local authorities to get to grips with the idea of zero net land take. The objectives of the law are seen as an additional constraint and approached from an essentially accounting point of view. The aim of Play ZAN is to take a playful approach to possible changes in planning models that would take the new model outlined by the Climate & Resilience Law into account in a more effective way.

During a session of the serious game, participants are asked to make planning choices that incorporate the objectives of the Climate & Resilience Law. They take on the role of an imaginary local authority aiming to territorialise its development. Step by step, the participants simulate how to achieve a reduction of at least 50% in the consumption of natural, agricultural and forestry areas by 2031, and how to move towards zero net land take after 2031, while putting the issues of housing, economic activities, public facilities, the environment, etc. at the core of their thinking.

At the start of the serious game, participants are given a diagnosis, growth prospects and a sustainable planning and development project for the area. Participants are given a development scenario to work towards, which translates into a set of tokens that they must collectively position on the board (primarily involving the densification of the already urbanised and built-up areas) to localise their project and achieve their objectives. Event cards have an impact on the course of the game by adding hazards to be taken into account, such as drought or economic recession.

Impacts

The Toulouse urban planning and development agency can use the game as part of the preparation of urban planning documents or specific studies. The game is a tool that is proving useful from the earliest stages of planning projects. Since 2024, in order to open Play-ZAN to the other French territories, it has been possible to join the community and become a facilitator by following a dedicated training course provided by Toulouse's urban planning and development agency.

Governance

Developed by Toulouse's urban planning and development agency, the names, designs and rules of the Play ZAN serious game have been registered with the French National Institute of Intellectual Property. In order to guarantee the quality of the material, only Toulouse's urban planning and development agency is authorised to issue and make certified copies and to make changes and developments to the game.

Recommendations

› Take the time: A PLAY ZAN game session lasts around 2.5 hours and includes an introduction to the concepts presented in the game and the fundamentals of the Climate & Resilience Law and its consequences on zero net land take. The serious game is then played in groups of 8-10 people with a facilitator.

› Master your subject: the game session is animated by facilitators who are familiar with the provisions relating to net zero land take, and understand the Climate & Resilience law and its consequences on territorial development. Mastering the issues at stake will inspire trust and encourage productive discussion between participants.

› Clear, easy-to-read visual information: The game board is deliberately generic so that it can be adapted to all types of territory. It is also readable in both directions for participants all around the table. Information on land use, the potential for densification and change within areas, etc. all show on the board.

Read more

https://www.aua-toulouse.org/sobriete-fonciere-une-animation-pedagogique-pour-depasser-lapproche-comptable-du-zan/

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BRUSSELS

BESUSTAINABLE:
FACILITATING THE SUSTAINABILITY GOALS
BY PROVIDING SUPPORT TO PROJECTS

Context

The role of local actors involved in spatial planning or urban renewal cannot be overlooked when it comes to establishing future-proof neighbourhoods in the city. However, having an overview of all the knowledge, legislation and tools in place to accomplish the sustainable transition is not always a given for all of the parties involved. To bridge this potential gap, Besustainable was created as an initiative to provide local actors with these supporting services and inspirations so that the implementation of the sustainable transition is improved or accelerated. Any project that revolves around spatial planning, construction or renovation can apply for the Besustainable approach.

How does it work? Besustainable's toolbox is equipped with three tools to provide inspiring ideas and concrete solutions to help a neighbourhood project: the Quickscan that allows the user to easily perform a sustainability analysis of their project, the Compass that identifies benchmarks to improve the sustainability objectives, the Memento that inspire the user with concrete design choices through the use of other examples, an informative database and a list of relevant indicators to monitor. Users become more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their project and help to provide data on the sustainability of projects in Brussels.

Impacts

Keeping track of sustainability goals across multiple sectors and levels of governments can be a challenge and not every team or project may have the necessary capacity to secure this knowledge. Raising awareness of sustainability goals and providing guidance to implementing partners has proven to be a great help in accelerating the sustainable transition of neighbourhoods in Brussels. By enlarging, promoting and spreading the Besustainable network, a cross-pollination between different collaborators and sectors has established itself in Brussels and is setting a new standard for projects. Meanwhile, the more actors that get involved, the more Besustainable can add to its databases, thereby improving the service to their partners as their knowledge and inspirations grow. Finally, by collecting data, Brussels is able to have a clearer view with regard to reaching its benchmarks for the sustainability transition on a regional scale.

Governance

Besustainable works on the basis of applications. A project manager or developer who wants to receive aid from Besustainable can apply for the programme via the different tools and then request more in-depth aid from the facilitator. Afterwards, the facilitator will analyse the project in accordance with 10 dimensions that are linked to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and Brussels' regional policies. They will then help guide the project or provide advice to the project manager. Other services, such as helping with administration and providing training relating to the sustainable objectives, are also one of their competences.

Recommendations

› Create a transversal network of professional actors and city administrations involved in planning, developing and sustainability to promote collaboration and facilitate the sustainable transition. By enlarging this network and raising awareness, sustainability goals among actors become easier to achieve. By means of training, visits, networking and by utilising a local knowhow, the acting facilitator can raise awareness amongst the other actors and help cross-pollination to take root within the cities' multiple actors. These factors in turn will help improve the standard of projects and their sustainability.

› Build a local database that tracks projects and their key sustainability assets. For the actors involved, this database will enable them to learn and be aware of each other's projects, help to raise ambitions and make access to inspirations easier. Linking the tools to the database has allowed the facilitator to track the progress and trends in the city that relate to its sustainable transition.

Read more

https://besustainable.brussels/fr

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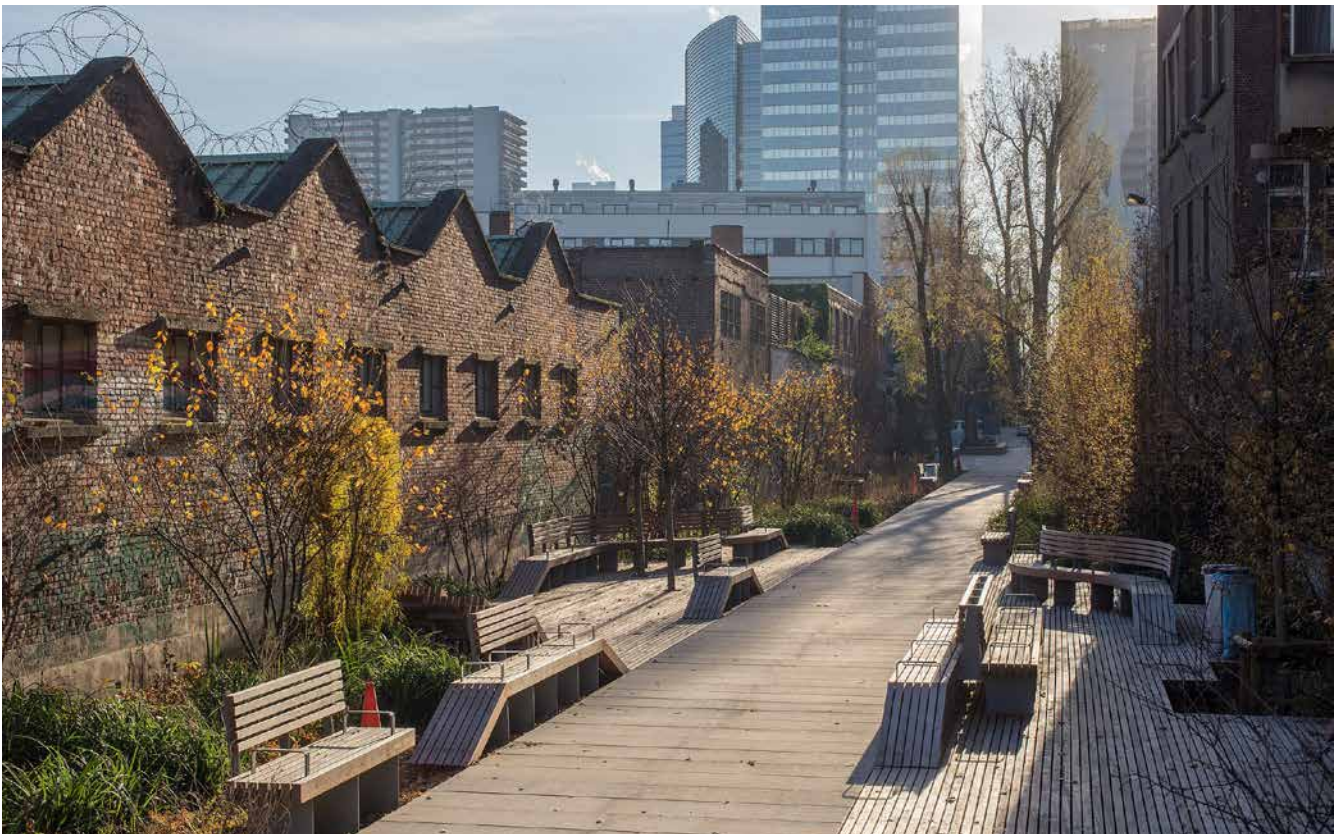
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BRUSSELS

SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD CONTRACT: IMPROVING NEIGHBOURHOODS WITH LOCAL INVOLVEMENT

Context

A share of people's wellbeing is related to their direct surroundings. In urban environments such as Brussels, the neighbourhood is a major indicator of peoples' livelihood and health. The vulnerability of a neighbourhoods is often linked to the state of local housing, public spaces, facilities, economic activity and to the natural environment that is in need of improvement. To reach out a hand to these residents, the Sustainable Neighbourhood Contract was founded to respond to these needs. It is a planning tool consisting of an action plan that is limited in time and space. The 'agreement' is concluded between three actors: the local residents, the Brussels-Capital Region and a municipality. Together, they define a programme that establishes which interventions should be carried out within a certain timeline and budget. While the programme's main mission is to strengthen neighbourhoods' life and resilience, they also serve two secondary objectives. An environmental dimension helps promote and accelerate the sustainable transition and a participatory dimension exists in order to ensure that local residents, organisations and businesses are closely involved in the projects and to provide socio-economic support through several activities, in particular aimed towards the young people.

Impacts

Thirty years of Sustainable Neighbourhood Contracts have given rise to monumental shifts in Brussels' image and in the lives of local residents. Having originally been conceived as a tool with which to counter urban flight and the deterioration of the building stock, the interventions it created such as affordable housing, nurseries, gathering spaces, cultural centres and public squares continues to directly improve the neighbourhoods' quality of life and attractivity with lasting effects. However, the long-term potential that these contracts bring to children, young people and families by building social facilities and opportunities cannot be overstated. Monitoring indicators such as the employment grade and residents' level of education proves that Sustainable Neighbourhood Contracts contribute to the benefits of local residents, while also tackling regional challenges. Meanwhile, the strengthening of local facilities, infrastructure and public space resulting from those contracts has helped to further densify Brussels in a qualitative way by responding to local needs directly where they are needed.

Governance

The Sustainable Neighbourhood Contracts can be carried out exclusively within the "urban renewal zone", a perimeter defined on the basis of statistical indicators. Each year, the regional government launches a call for applications from the municipalities, upon which two or three neighbourhoods are selected and allocated budgets. A Sustainable Neighbourhood Contract is defined to cover a period of ± 7.5 years. The first year is generally reserved for the appointment of an implementing partner, meetings with the local actors and setting up the programme, while the remaining 80 months are used for the implementation of the programme.

Recommendations

> Look for innovative ways of involving stakeholders that establish a different kind of partnership. The work to define the programme of a Sustainable Neighbourhood Contract is carried out with three parties, of which local citizens are one. They have a say in what needs attention, which facilities they need and what their priorities are to improve their quality of life. The word 'contract' is taken literally here as all parties agree on their requirements and commitments to make the programme work.

> Consider programmes that reach people's everyday lives and are manageable within the specified time period. While the time constraint of seven-eight years might seem like a burden, it is actually one of the core strengths of the programme as it encourages the delivery of very tangible results. Seeing the achievements being developed in a relative short time period is precisely why the programme functions so well and why the projects become concrete extremely rapidly.

Read more

https://quartiers.brussels/1/

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CRITICAL INSIGHT

How to put an end to urban sprawl?

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He is an acknowledged expert and author of numerous articles, studies and several books, in particular The Age of low tech (Bristol University Press, 2020) and more recently The Stationary city (La ville stationnaire, Actes Sud, 2022, [not translated]).

THE STATIONARY CITY:
A NEW NARRATIVE ON THE FUTURE OF URBANISATION?

The environmental impact of cities is enormous, both in their "fabrication" (resources, "grey" energy and CO_2 emissions from construction materials) and their "metabolism" (operation, flows of materials and waste and the mobility of people and goods, etc.). The construction and public works sectors consume around 50% of the steel, 20% of the aluminium, 25% of the plastics, nearly 100% of the aggregates, sand, cement...

We must also consider urban sprawl, which, since the 1970s, has been facilitated by the automobile, the dispersal of functions (housing, work, consumption, entertainment...) and suburban housing, leading to an increasing need for mobility and infrastructure. Over the past 40 years in France, artificial surfaces have grown three to four times faster than the population. At the current rate – 20 to 30,000 hectares per year – it would take "only" a few centuries to artificialize 100% of agricultural land, which of course will not happen... but each hectare of living soil that irreversibly disappears undermines future food resilience, knowing that due to the consequences of climate change, the increase in agricultural yields is no longer guaranteed.

Drawbacks of densification

Density has for several decades been considered as an ecologically efficient solution to the growth of cities. In the early 1990s, the works of Newman and Kenworthy began to become well-known, linking urban forms and car dependency: the less dense the cities, the stronger the dependency and the more difficult it becomes to organise efficient and economically viable public transport. At the same time, awareness was growing about the issue of urban sprawl. The logic that "the denser the city, the less it pollutes" therefore became well established, in a context where the development and attractiveness of conurbations was supported by public policies.

While densification allows for less land consumption, the balance is more mixed regarding the materials and energy that buildings incorporate. For an equal living area, an apartment in a small building certainly uses fewer materials than a single-family house: some of the walls, floors, and ceilings, as well as the roof, are shared... even if there is also a loss of useful space (10 to 15%) in the circulatory areas and communal areas. But as the number of levels increases, the favourable comparison is less obvious: deeper foundations, underground parking, lifts, additional technical devices (e.g. water booster systems)... Even if it is "eco-designed", a skyscraper continues to represent a massive expenditure of materials per square metre and a chasm in energy consumption.

A "threshold value" may well exist in the case of high-rise forms of urbanisation. Densifying by interlacing a territory covered with individual houses or wastelands with "small collective" buildings is obviously more ecological, from all points of view, than developing new suburban housing areas; but densifying by building towers is certainly less "green". Beyond a certain height (maybe around seven to ten floors?), a building cannot be "ecological".

Moreover, a dense city exerts an artificial influence well beyond its limits; it contributes to, or even encourages, urban sprawl. Households in the city centre consume fewer "square metres" for their housing and the immediate functions related to their social activity. However, the "servant spaces" of the city, whether these are of a technical, logistical, commercial, industrial, cultural nature, are relocated to the outskirts and dominate the urban peripheries. In metropolises, there is both densification and sprawl at the same time. This does not mean that we should not densify, at least up to a certain point. But the expected effects of densification in terms of optimising natural resources, energy, materials, and land deserve to be put into perspective – or questioned –, especially since densification is often the subject of strong opposition from the existing populations.

Limits of technical solutions

Some are betting on 'smart cities' that would optimise the functioning of towns. But for now, environmental 'use cases' remain few, unconvincing and anecdotal in light of the energy challenges: water leak detection, streamlining of car traffic, presence sensors for automatic lighting, shared parking facilities, electric cars connected to solar panels on roofs, or maybe, in future, networked rubbish bins for optimal collection... When compared to theoretical environmental 'benefits' that are rarely quantified, the 'costs' are very real and more immediate: the impact of the equipment and networks to be deployed, the energy consumed by data centres to manage the information storage... not to mention the dependence of systems on specialised and globalised supplies, the lack of transparency of algorithms and the use of personal data...

The innovation pathways leading to 'green' cement and steel, both of which are climate 'heavyweights' (and account for about 7% of global CO_2 emissions each), have been clearly identified but are quite limited, at least in the short term. Iron oxide can be directly reduced with hydrogen, replacing coking coal: the first industrial pilots are emerging in order to demonstrate the technical and economic viability of that method, but it will still be necessary to produce enough 'green' hydrogen, which will also be needed in other sectors, such as air and maritime transport. As far as cement is concerned, formulations can be optimised and less clinker can be used in various technical cases, but the industry is mainly counting on carbon capture and storage, which is still quite hypothetical for the moment.

The development of (a greater quantity of) naturally sourced materials – wood, straw, hemp, flax... – and "geo-sourced" materials – raw earth (adobe, rammed earth, cob bricks...), stone... – remains an option to reduce the carbon footprint of construction. In the case of wooden structures, technical progress has been spectacular in recent years, thanks to cross-laminated timber. However, if we want to replace reinforced concrete only with wood, it would not be possible to maintain the current construction volumes, not even by increasing forestry exploitation... and we are now obliged to take the effects of climate change, the weakening of forests due to rising temperatures, droughts, diseases, bio-invasions... and so on into account.

Optimise, exploit, and transform the existing infrastructure.

(Ultimately) relying only on renewable or nearly renewable resources will require significant "constructive frugality": to build better, we will have to build less. This could be considered as a provocative proposal as the population is still growing (slightly), by approximately 0.3% per year in France. But for every additional inhabitant, we are building two new housing units! This is due to two effects: firstly, the "decohabitation" (sociological changes and an ageing population have reduced the average household size from 3.1 people in the 1960s to 2.2 today); secondly, the trend in which populations are becoming increasingly concentrated in and around large cities and coasts, while, elsewhere, housing is falling vacant, as it is not (or no longer) in line with the needs (or desires) of the population, due to their condition, size, shape, location in cities or geographical zone.

We could make better use of the immense heritage that "we" own, in terms of housing, offices, facilities, and business areas. In the case of facilities and public spaces, we can envision greater sharing, versatility and optimisation of time-based uses and multifunctionality. There are already some weak signals: school classrooms that transform into tourist lodgings in the summer, company spaces welcoming clubs and associations in the evenings and on weekends, canteens that open to the city and become restaurants and gymnasiums that serve as covered markets...

In the case of housing, a portion of the vacant properties can be reinvested (3 million in France, with at least one third being accessible), a portion of the secondary and tourist residences put back on the market, particularly in metropolitan areas and along coastlines. But the largest, less visible source is under-occupation, which affects 8 million homes in France... Public policies could be expanded to encourage residential pathways, the adaptation of housing to different life stages and various "recohabitation" solutions (senior co-housing, intergenerational living, shared housing, hosting students in family homes, etc.)...

Building fewer new properties would also allow an increasing share of human, organisational and financial resources to be concentrated on rehabilitation and transformation, especially thermal renovation – the current pace of which needs to be increased ten to twentyfold to "maintain" the trajectory towards carbon neutrality in 2050.

Nevertheless, some geographical zones find themselves in a tense situation, including numerous instances involving inadequate housing or overcrowding. In order to fully mobilise the potential that exists at present, it is also necessary to rethink territorial planning, promote a gradual redistribution of populations, jobs, services, and commerce, as well as medical, social, and cultural offerings across medium-sized cities, towns, and villages. This more effective distribution would also align well with other challenges that form part of the environmental transition, such as moderating daily travel, transforming the agricultural system in the direction of sustainable, more labour-intensive practices, or the reterritorialisation, at different scales, of some industrial productions.

If fewer new properties are needed, stationary cities would stop eating land around them each year. Stationarity does not imply "freezing" the city, quite the contrary. In the 19th century, the economist John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) had envisioned a "stationary state" of the economy, achievable, positive, free from the injunction to growth but not preventing human, cultural, scientifical progress from continuing. Similarly, cities could continue to evolve, flourish, and beautify, by focusing on renewal, limited densification, the 'repair' of certain areas such as city entrances, commercial zones, or business districts. To realign with planetary boundaries, we will have to learn to focus on, take care of, and pass on our urban heritage.

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