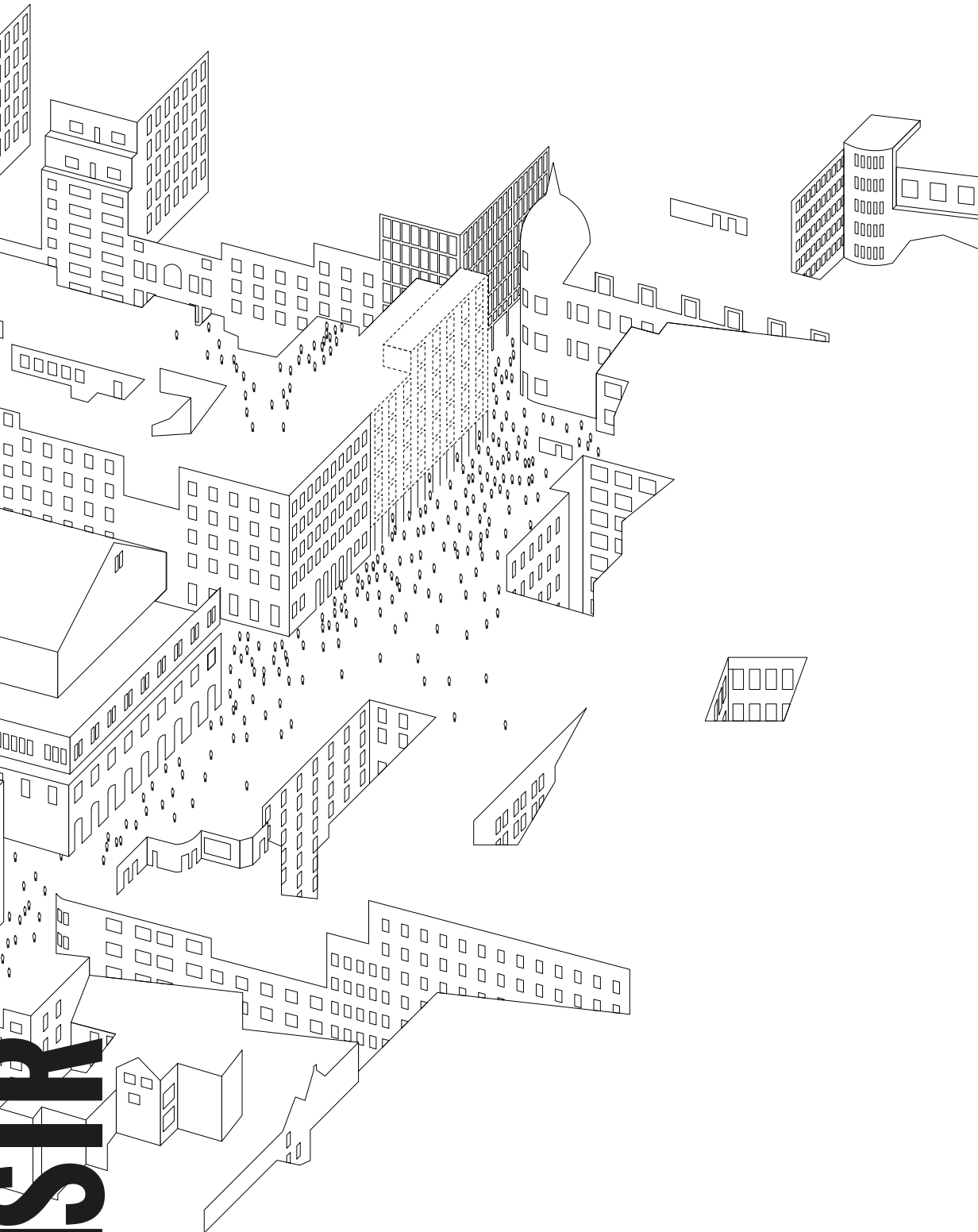# *Students Make the City*

BWMSTR

CONTENTS

STUDENT HOUSING AS ENGINE FOR CITY DEVELOPMENT

SVEN GATZ | FLEMISH MINISTER FOR CULTURE, MEDIA, YOUTH AND BRUSSELS

STEFAN DEVOLDERE | ACTING VLAAMS BOUWMEESTER

KRISTIAAN BORRET | BRUSSELS GOVERNMENT ARCHITECT

As the biggest and most diverse city in the country, Brussels with its 90,000 students and fifty schools of higher education also boasts the biggest student population. But there are specific circumstances why the city is not always naturally viewed as the biggest student city. Those who study in Brussels do not automatically come to live there for a variety of reasons, and apart from the campuses the city does not have any distinctive student neighbourhoods. The challenges for the future are no less significant, however. Brussels currently faces an estimated shortage of 9000 student rooms, and a further 10,000 students are expected in the city by the year 2020. The provision of 'qualitative and adequate student housing', which takes into account the issues of combining student accommodation with other forms of housing and other urban functions, and their management, and the realization of Pilot Projects with these in mind, have therefore been specified as concrete goals in the 2014-2019 Brussels Policy Memorandum from Sven Gatz, the Flemish Minister of Culture, Media, Youth and Brussels

The Pilot Projects are an instrument developed by the Flemish Government Architect to acquire fresh insight into how spatial-social challenges can be tackled. Design research approached as a way of preparing policy is linked to the realization of pioneering projects. The instrument has previously been deployed successfully in the domains of housing, care, agriculture, commissioned art and the development of contaminated sites. The 'Students Make the City Pilot Project' is the result of collaboration between Sven Gatz, the Flemish Minister for Culture, Media, Youth and Brussels, the Br(ik service desk for students, the Vlaams Bouwmeester Team, and the Brussels Government Architect.

The development of new student housing must, after all, amount to more than simply satisfying a need. It must not limit itself to meeting the needs and the possibilities of an evolving group of residents and the specific problems related to the management of small-scale and temporary forms of accommodation. The partners that have teamed up for the Pilot Projects see the construction of new student homes as an opportunity to activate neighbourhoods, make public space, and promote shared housing and mixed-use programmes. In other words, the 'Students Make the City Pilot Project' is aimed at buildings with added urban and social value. The goal is to complete three innovative Pilot Projects.

In the lead-up to this call, the study team URA Yves Malysse Kiki Verbeeck/Rebel Group was appointed in August 2014 to carry out an exploratory study. The aim was to examine the gains (social, economic...) that could be generated through innovative projects for student housing in the Brussels Capital Region. The results of this study, and of a debate with Flemish and Brussels authorities, developers, architects and students themselves, organized by the researchers on 10 February 2015, have been gathered in this publication. The opportunities available to Brussels — a unique international centre with a high concentration of universities, colleges and other knowledge institutes — to make the development of student housing an engine that genuinely drives innovative city development are illuminated and interpreted individually using a number of foreign reference projects. In addition, this brochure explains in detail the process behind the Pilot Projects, the criteria for applicant eligibility, and the process of application.

Now it's the turn of the principals of Brussels. It is our firm hope that this expert reconnaissance exercise and process of imagination will inspire the most ambitious among them to answer this call.

STUDENT IN THE CITY...
CITY IN THE STUDENT?

KOEN VAN RYCKEGHEM | DIRECTOR BR(ik — SERVICE DESK FOR STUDENTS

Brussels: the biggest student city in the country? Even with the official figures in mind – over 50 colleges of higher education and around 90,000 students – the statement raises many eyebrows. Is it ignorance, disbelief, or obstinacy? Let's just say it's indicative of the image of Brussels in Flanders and Wallonia.

If any love does indeed exist, it's a difficult love, complex, paradoxical and unreadable. Is it a region, or a city, or a city region? Is your view drawn to the architectural gems? Or do you stare blindly at the urban amalgam present everywhere in the streetscape? Is your language spoken there and your culture respected? One thing is certain: you end up in a potpourri of over 120 languages, and every walk leads to an encounter with cultures rooted thousands of kilometres away.

Brussels. For students it's either a hit-and-run place, or they feel the warm embrace of a love that takes them to its furthest corners. As one student testifies: *'My world, shaped in Flanders, opened up once I arrived here. So many languages and cultures, so many different neighbourhoods and communities. The centre of Europe too. Amazing. Brussels is my launch pad for the future.'*

Connecting students with the city is one of the strategic missions of Br(ik. A difficult mission when it concerns commuter students, but the threshold is lower for those in student rooms. Living in student rooms in Brussels represents a physical connection and is a first requirement in getting to like Brussels. The question is not whether you can take the student out of the village, nor whether you can take the village out of the student. Rather, the question is: can you bring the city to the student? And above all, can the city live inside the hearts and minds of the student? Br(ik firmly believes that offering a sufficient range of good-quality and affordable student accommodation creates an important lever in attracting students to the city and enabling Brussels to settle in their hearts and minds. First we build houses, then they build us.

Let's consider the term 'student accommodation'. At Br(ik we are fond of that term. It denotes much more than four walls and a roof. Ideally, it is a warm nest and a mini-community made up of fellow students. Studying hard, eating, partying, finding love. Outwardly, it's a window on the world such as you can only find in Brussels *(no offence, Flanders).*

The formerly Quartier Latin (1998), now Br(ik, went in search of walls and roofs for the students of Dutch-language colleges of higher education in Brussels. A sense of urgency drove the search, because there were too few rooms for students who didn't want to commute every day. Now we're writing a different story. Not that the shortage of accommodation has been solved – somewhere between 9000 and 12,000 units are still needed – but Brussels offers an unrivalled range of courses and opportunities in a pre-eminently international setting. *'Nowhere in Belgium are you as close to the future as you are in Brussels,'* says Joost Vandecasteele. That's a quote that we at Br(ik cannot improve, but we can try to bring students closer to their future and change direction.

In 2014 a splendid opportunity to change direction presented itself in the form of the Vlaams Bouwmeester Pilot Projects. Pardon? A Flemish Government Architect in Brussels? We altered our course slightly, and are now heading in a new direction. We stand here in support of a call to complete inspiring projects for student housing in Brussels. Flanders and Brussels hand in hand, and hopefully regional and local authorities hand in hand too. We are not aiming for just walls and roofs; we want much more. The pilot projects want to set a benchmark for student housing and add another feather to the cap of Brussels as a student city.

'It is an opportunity to make city, to activate neighbourhoods, to create public space, to promote communal living and mixed programmes, but especially, an excellent opportunity to look at a changing urban population through fresh eyes,' stated the former Vlaams Bouwmeester in 2013
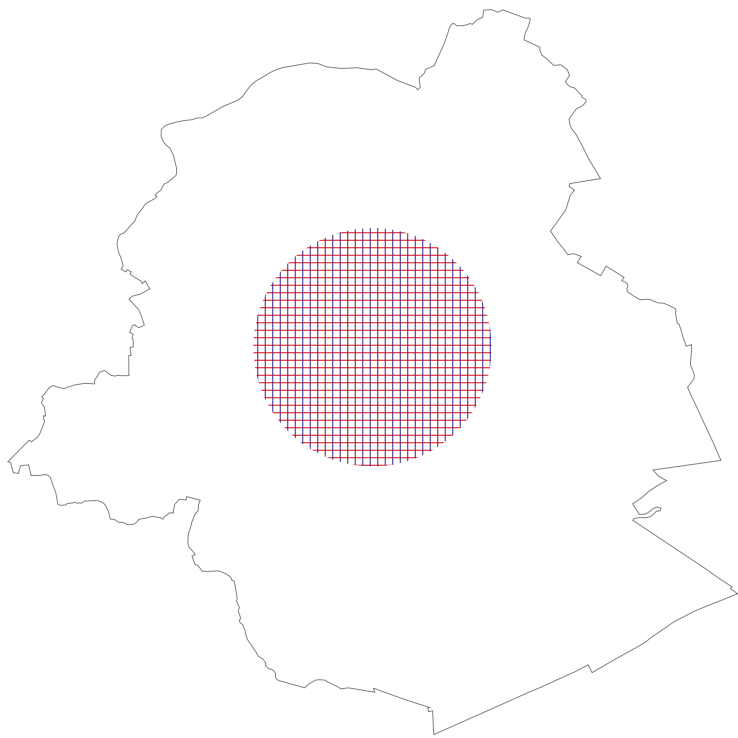
Yet another quote we cannot beat. More specifically, it's an ambition that makes us happy and offers us a chance to write history for Brussels as an international knowledge centre and living organism.

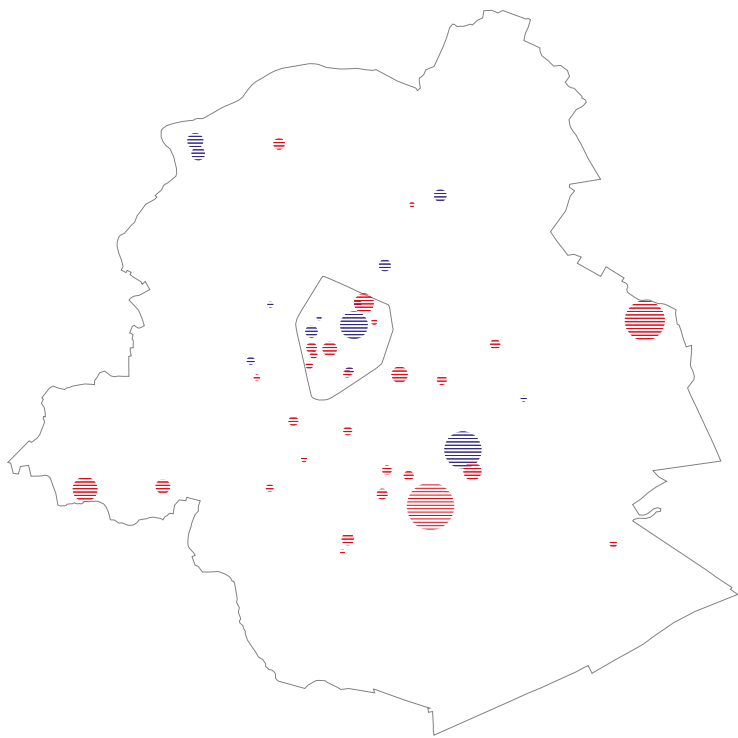Student in the city, city in the student, student making the city.

FIVE OPPOR- TUNITIES FOR BRUSSELS

URA YVES MALYSSE KIKI VERBEECK, WITH REBELGROUP

SPREAD OVER MORE THAN 50 INSTITUTIONS

FLEMISH COMMUNITY

FRENCH COMMUNITY

60%

IN A STUDENT HOUSE

40%

WITH (ONE OF) YOUR PARENTS

35%

FINANCIAL REASONS

65%

OTHER REASONS

STUDYING IN THE CITY

With over 85,000 students, Brussels is the biggest student city in Belgium. The presence of so many students is scarcely noticeable, however. Higher education is dispersed over more than over fifty institutes in the Brussels Metropolitan Region. In addition to some large campuses, there are hardly any distinctly student neighbourhoods. Studying in Brussels means studying in the city, at least at first sight. Br(ik is an organization that advocates this form of studying and living, in which students do their shopping at the corner grocery store and then travel to college by bike or public transport.

Nonetheless, the perception of the city does not work in its favour, and certainly among Flemish students there is a definite phobia about living in Brussels. A study conducted among university students reveals that as few as 60% of them effectively live in Brussels. For the city, however, it is crucial to try and tie these people to the city, so that they will continue to live here even after finishing their studies. The lack of 'student islands' in Brussels could prove to be a trump card in establishing a profile that sets the city apart from the more college-like character of 'real' student cities. Studying in Brussels could come to mean studying in the city.
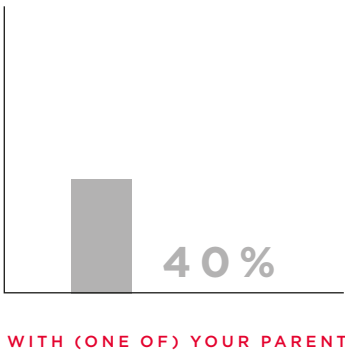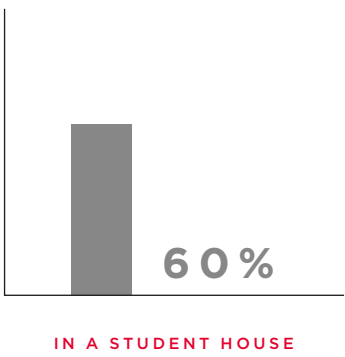
LIVING IN THE CITY

The restricted visibility of higher education also translates into housing. The majority of students use the traditional rental market — individually or collectively — to secure a family home or apartment, thereby putting pressure on the affordability of family homes in the city. At the other end of the spectrum, developers are currently building a thousand student flats here and there around the city. There are, however, serious doubts about the future of these student blocks. Will these homes really be affordable? A significant portion of students indicate that they cannot find accommodation because of the high cost.
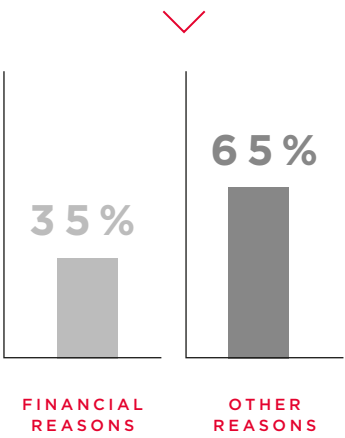
Who will take responsibility for the management of these complexes once all units have been sold individually? Are the planned projects well located for students? Are they even intended for them? Accommodation is a decisive factor in the wellbeing of students. There is currently an estimated shortage of some 9,000 student rooms in Brussels, and a further 10,000 students are expected in the city by 2020. These challenges should provide a reason to focus on high-quality and innovative student housing that capitalizes on the existing qualities of Brussels.
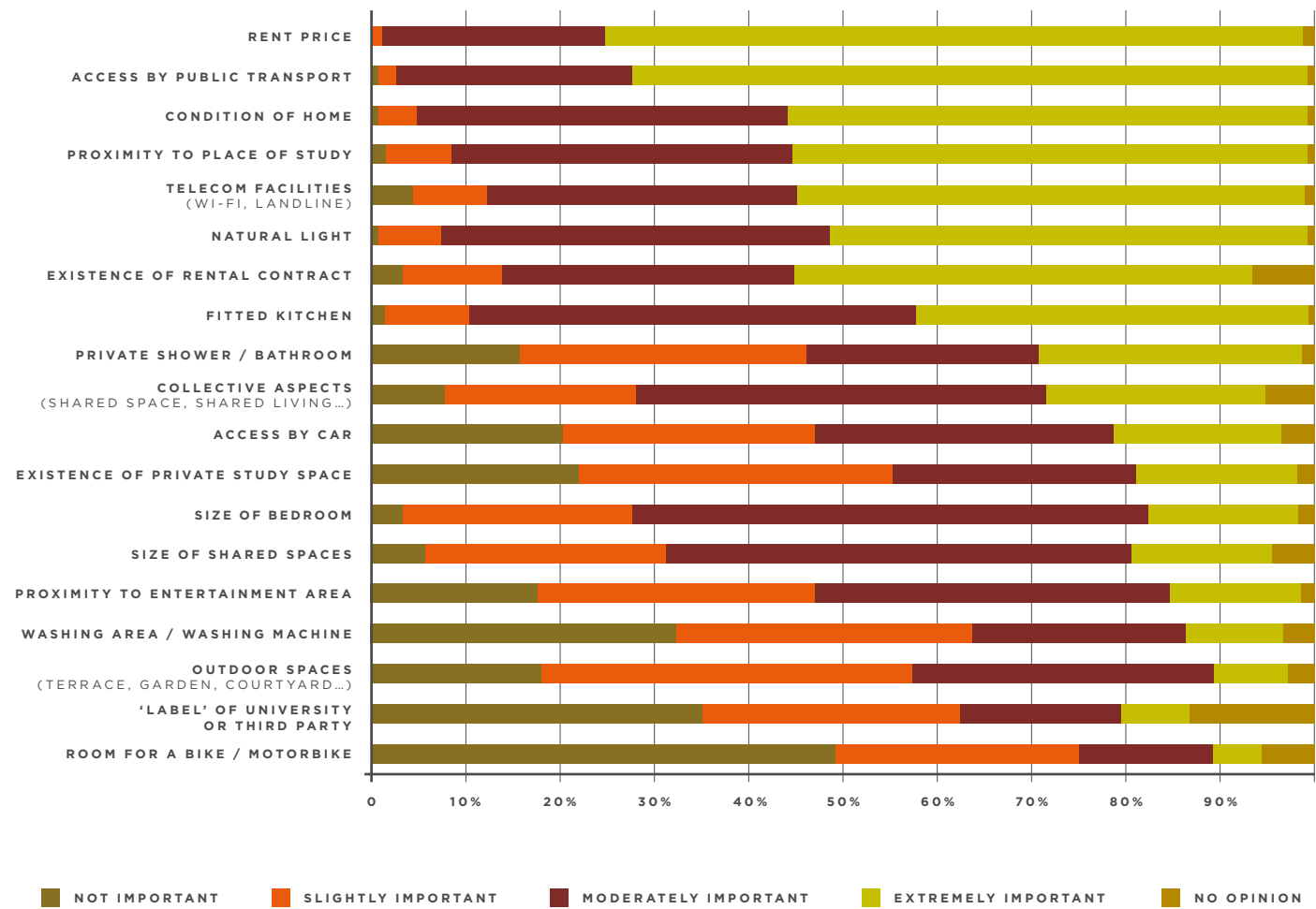
The most important criteria for accommodation are the rental price, proximity to public transport, and presence of collective spaces.

ELISA DUNDERS
PROJECT HOLDER ADT/ATO,
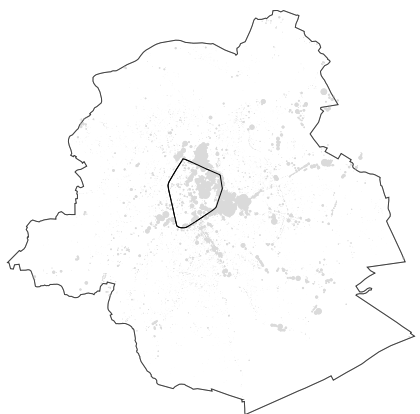BRUSSELS CAPITAL REGION

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS (%)

- SHARED HOME (APARTMENT OR HOUSE)
- UNIVERSITY HOUSING
- INDIVIDUAL HOME (STUDIO)
- INDIVIDUAL HOME (APARTMENT OR HOUSE)
- HOME OWNED BY YOU OR FAMILY MEMBER
- LIVING TOGETHER AS COUPLE / (STUDIO, APPARTEMENT OR HOUSE)
- PRIVATELY RENTED ROOM

WHAT DO STUDENTS CONSIDER IMPORTANT?

- RENT PRICE
- ACCESS BY PUBLIC TRANSPORT
- CONDITION OF HOME
- PROXIMITY TO PLACE OF STUDY
- TELECOM FACILITIES (WI-FI, LANDLINE)
- NATURAL LIGHT
- EXISTENCE OF RENTAL CONTRACT
- FITTED KITCHEN
- PRIVATE SHOWER / BATHROOM
- COLLECTIVE ASPECTS (SHARED SPACE, SHARED LIVING...)
- ACCESS BY CAR
- EXISTENCE OF PRIVATE STUDY SPACE
- SIZE OF BEDROOM
- SIZE OF SHARED SPACES
- PROXIMITY TO ENTERTAINMENT AREA
- WASHING AREA / WASHING MACHINE
- OUTDOOR SPACES (TERRACE, GARDEN, COURTYARD...)
- 'LABEL' OF UNIVERSITY OR THIRD PARTY
- ROOM FOR A BIKE / MOTORBIKE

■ NOT IMPORTANT ■ SLIGHTLY IMPORTANT ■ MODERATELY IMPORTANT ■ EXTREMELY IMPORTANT ■ NO OPINION

WHERE ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES?
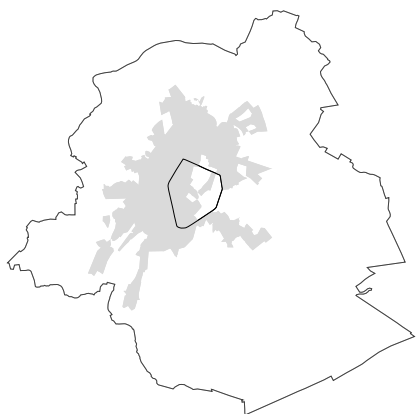
If Brussels wants to take up this challenge, it must take its student population into account when defining its policy. In the government agreement the region has earmarked ten strategic development nodes. These are places where students could, in the future, play a key role as pioneers who set in motion a new sense of dynamism. What matters is that they are treated as a separate group and that their presence is welcome. The same applies at the smaller scale of neighbourhood contracts. There are certainly places where it is logical to allow students to form part of new, mixed programmes realized by the community.

In addition, there is the issue of vacant office space in the city. The specifically small-scale programme of student rooms with shared facilities could easily be accommodated inside vacant office buildings if they are converted. Office buildings that have become uninteresting for the current market often have an ideal scale to be turned into cost-effective student housing. The rigid structure forms a challenge and could lead to surprising spatial qualities, but the key is to identify this potential and provoke change through inspiring model projects.

In terms of typologies, there is an urgent need for innovation. Reference is rather frequently made to traditional models of student housing where occupants study and live in one room. Research has shown, however, that today's students are looking for accommodation with plenty of shared living space such as communal kitchens, relaxation areas and so on. Yet the market is still based on the construction of individual studios sold individually as investment vehicles. Developers are open to the idea of more collective facilities, but the regulations do not always permit them to do this in a cost-effective manner. Here lies a major opportunity to review both the law and the typology.

Like the sustainability meters we have today that take into account multiple environmental factors, we could develop a smart comfort meter for student housing.

STEFAN DEVOLDERE | ACTING VLAAMS BOUWMEESTER

How can we ascribe validity to Brussels as the biggest student city in Belgium? The city possesses remarkably strong qualities, such as its unique international centre, as well as its concentration of universities, colleges and other knowledge institutes. From the discussions we can conclude that student housing could benefit from new forms of living linked to city development, and that there is a pressing need for an ambitious overall plan and a coordinating authority to profile Brussels spatially as a knowledge city.

10 STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT NODES

VACANT OFFICE SPACE IN BRUSSELS

AREA FOR CITY DEVELOPMENT
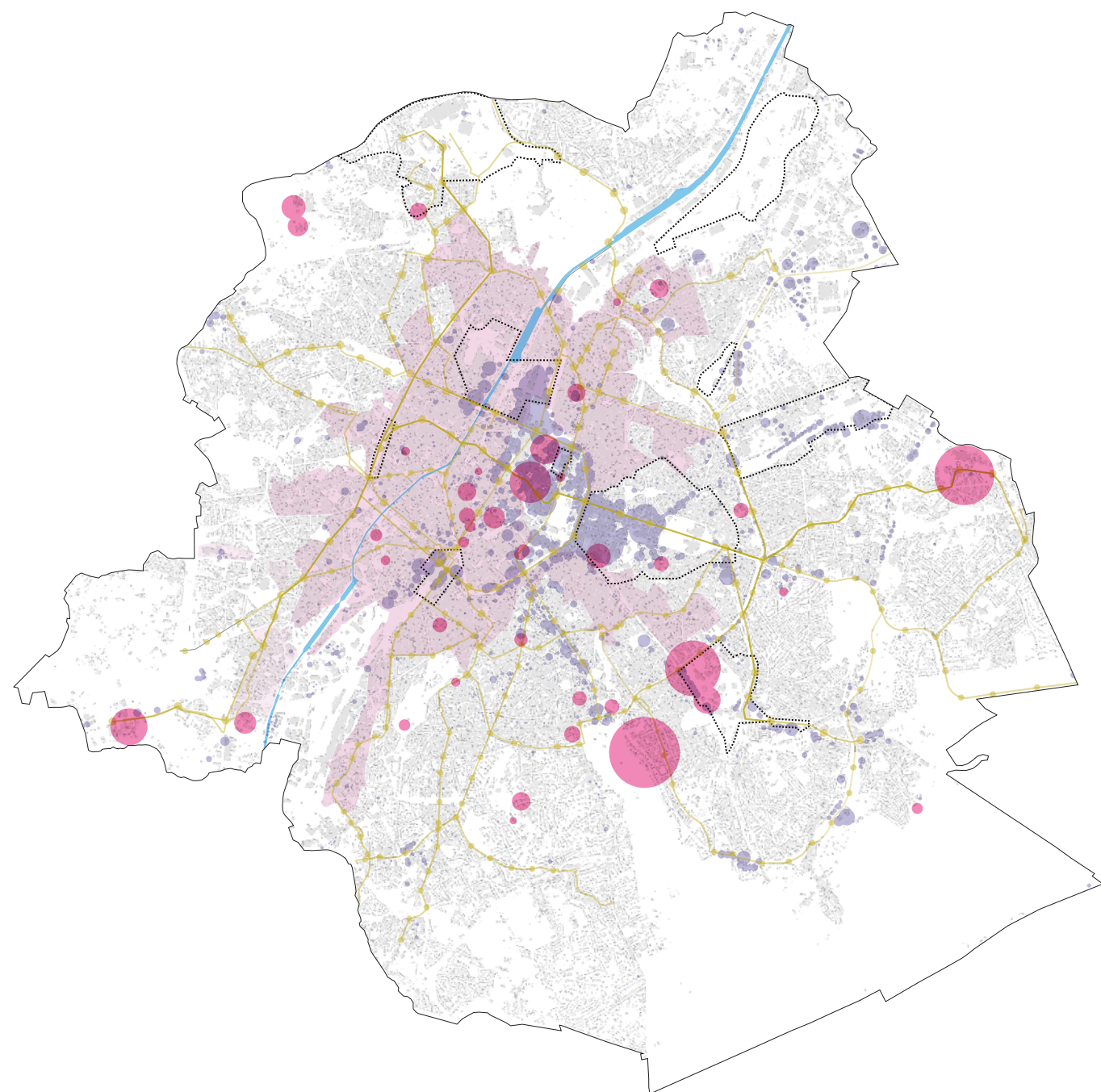
INSTITUTES OF HIGHER EDUCATION
PUBLIC TRANSPORT
ZONE FOR URBAN RENEWAL
VACANT OFFICE BUILDINGS
PRIORITY DEVELOPMENT NODES

#1
Making the City
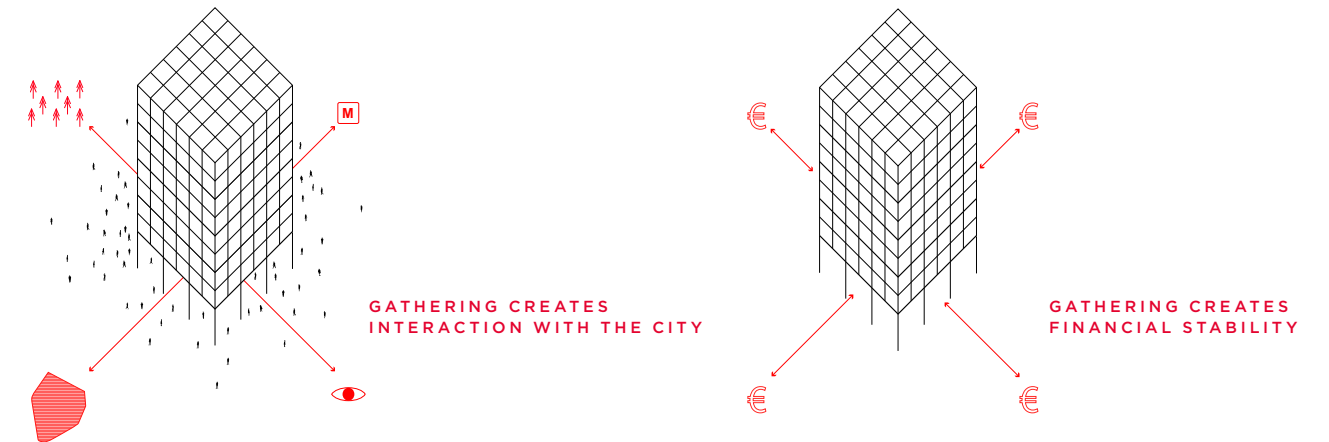
GATHERING CREATES
INTERACTION WITH THE CITY

GATHERING CREATES
FINANCIAL STABILITY

The Brussels Metropolitan Region has a strong tradition of neighbourhood developments, which always focus on integrated projects with numerous goals. For some neighbourhoods, student housing schemes could be an interesting addition, because they are typologically easy to insert and ensure greater socio-economic diversity with the neighbourhoods.

These concern infill projects with a predominantly small-scale character. Under no circumstances may a student housing project become an isolated project in a neighbourhood. Additional functions must be attuned to the needs of the neighbourhood, focused on encounters and interaction. Such needs might include small restaurants, crèches, laundrettes, bicycle workshops, repair cafés…

Students form a population group with tremendous urban potential. Their desire to become part of the community and the intensive rhythm of student life enables specific, 'parochial' places to be integrated into student projects: spaces that belong to the students, but that are deployed to enrich the city. In consultation with the building management, students could take responsibility for the space they use. To this end, good management and smart programming are crucial.

Depending on the scale and siting of a project, specific functions could be sought for the ground floor and other parts of the building. However, the aspiration of openness and interaction does not mean everything is open. By devoting attention to the correct definition of perimeters and functions, we could find a good balance between accessible and interactive community facilities and private, concealed zones for accommodating students.

Student housing offers an opportunity to make city, to activate neighbourhoods, to create public spaces, and to promote shared living and mixed-use programmes. But most importantly, it offers an excellent opportunity to view the changing city population in a new way. For the government, 'making city' here means investing in the creation of an urban population. By integrating students well into city life, we could ensure that some of them will want to remain living in these surroundings. Creating additional student housing is therefore not a goal in itself but rather it must function as a factor that enhances the establishment of an urban residential environment for young people who choose for the city.

If we want student housing to contribute effectively to neighbourhood development, we must adopt a two-pronged approach: spontaneous and supervised.
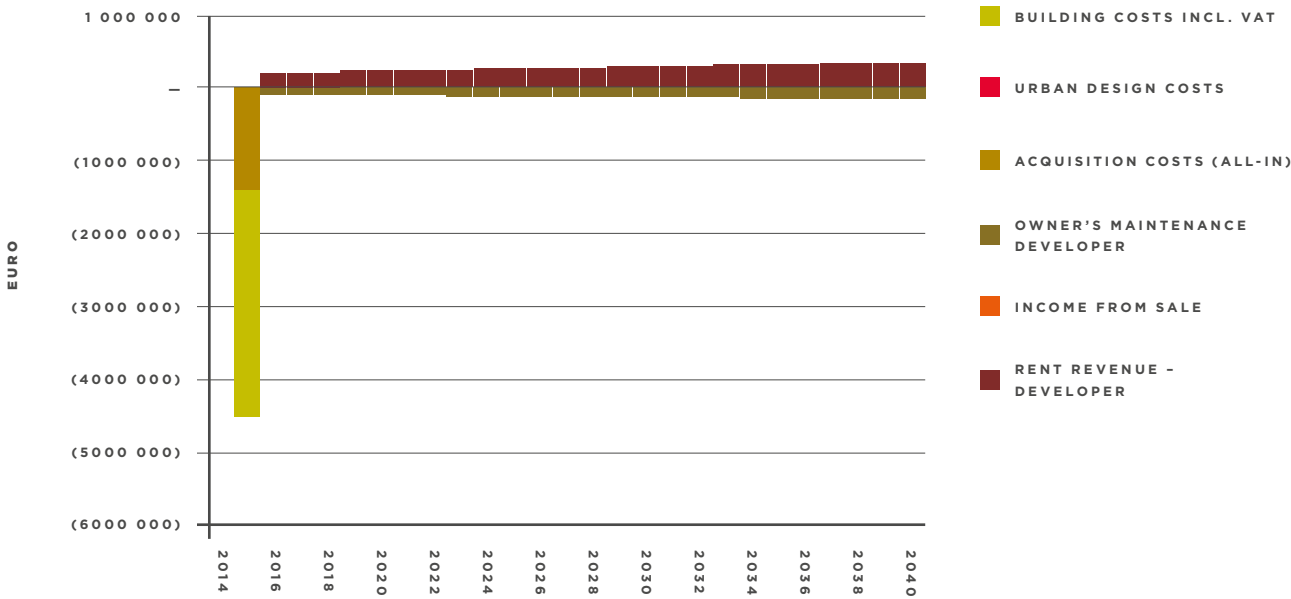
KOEN VAN RYCKEGHEM
DIRECTOR BR(IK

CALCULATION

In a small city-centre project for student housing, the addition of a commercial ground floor can, depending on the location, generate significant added financial value. In the above-mentioned example, a commercial ground floor with a rental income of 5,000 euros/month creates an additional land value of almost 1 million euros on a prime city-centre site. So a multi-occupant building with commercial functions therefore creates added financial value!

INVESTOR'S RETURN : 6,00%

LAND VALUE : 1 850 000

ACTUAL MARGIN OF BR(IK : (11 845) EURO PER YEAR

Legend:
- BUILDING COSTS INCL. VAT
- URBAN DESIGN COSTS
- ACQUISITION COSTS (ALL-IN)
- OWNER'S MAINTENANCE DEVELOPER
- INCOME FROM SALE
- RENT REVENUE – DEVELOPER

ACQUISITION : 1 850 000 (NO VAT)

MANAGEMENT : 10,00% EXCL. VAT

STUDIES : 12,00% EXCL. VAT

UNFORESEEN : 10,00% EXCL. VAT

PROFIT : 15,00% EXCL. VAT

COMPILATION				CONSTR.	OPERATION		REVENUE
	Number	Area	Gross/net	Costs/m²	Costs	Landlord	Rent/unit
STUDENT HOMES	50	8	1,2	1400	40/unit/month	BR(IK	250
COLLECTIVE SPACE	1	145	1,19	1400	40/unit/month	BR(IK	-
2 APARTMENTS	1	171	1,22	1400	40/m²/year	BR(IK	800
CAFÉ	1	57	1,72	1000	40/unit/month	BR(IK	500
SHOP	1	158	1,00	1000	40/m²/year	PRIVÉ	5000
SMALL GARDEN	1	20	1,08	100	40/unit/month	BR(IK	-

REFERENCE
WEESPERSTRAAT
Herman Hertzberger

This Amsterdam project, for which Herman Hertzberger won the competition while himself still a student, is an exercise in drawing public space as deeply as possible inside the building. In addition to a public plinth containing a student restaurant and café, offices for the student association and a bookshop, the first floor features an outdoor gallery that forms an extension of the street: a meeting point in contact with the city. On the roof the students have a pavilion with a meeting room and shared kitchen.
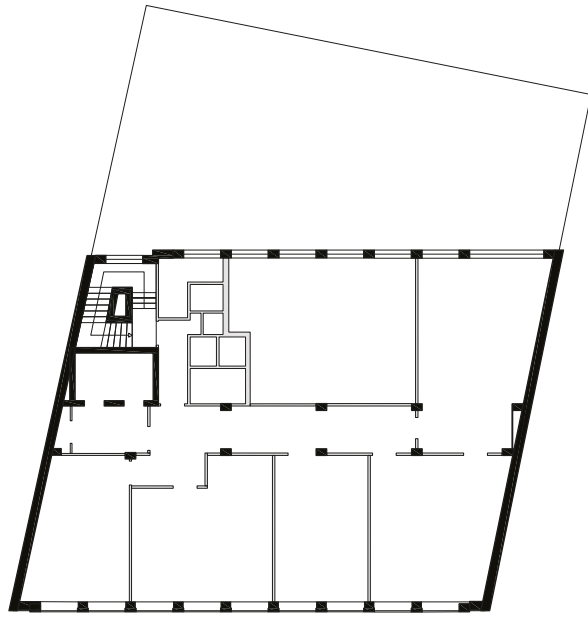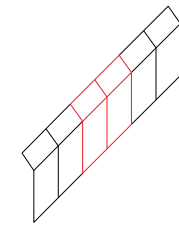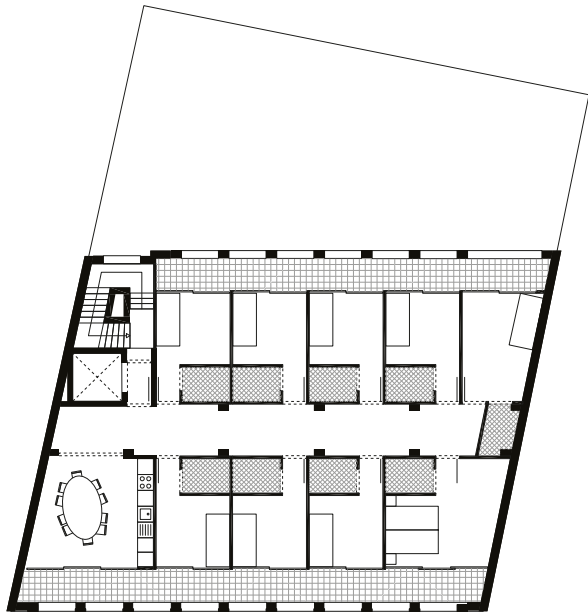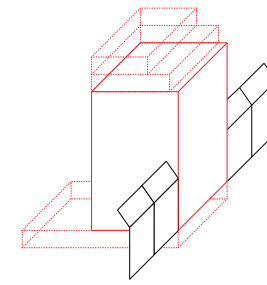
#2

Targeting reconversion

PURCHASE OF
TERRACED HOUSES

DEVELOPMENT OF
MAXIMUM ENVELOPE

CONVERSION INTO
STUDENT HOUSE

TYPICAL STUDENT HOUSING FLOOR
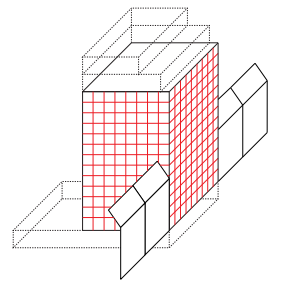
Brussels suffers from a high vacancy rate in office buildings throughout the region. This vacancy level is not structural everywhere. In well-located office districts, it is generally a matter of frictional vacancy that is absorbed by the market. Structural vacancy dominates in areas with inferior accessibility by public transport, poor typological adaptability and outdated appearance.

In Brussels this typically concerns office buildings developed over the past forty years along residential boulevards such as Louizalaan and Koningsstraat/Paleizenstraat in Schaarbeek, as well as along many streets within the central 'pentagon' in Brussels. These office buildings were generally developed by joining together two or three middle-class houses. In addition, the ground floor was rented for a café/restaurant or shop, while each of the levels above provided office floors of 200 to 300 m². These are more difficult to rent out: small companies increasingly opt for flexible solutions such as co-working, while for bigger companies, joining together a number of small floors is typologically uninteresting. Since vertical circulation lies to one side of the building, conversion into housing is not obvious.

Targeting reconversion into student housing means that one social need (problematic vacancy) could alleviate another (shortage of student housing). The typical 'problems' of buildings of this kind — circulation in a difficult position, recessed floor above the cornice, ground floor that is difficult to programme, and big building depth — could lead to surprising spatial qualities for student housing. The key is to break free from the rigid structure, and to seek solutions at the scale of the whole building.

Shared facilities could lead to greater flexibility here. Recessed floors perhaps do not lend themselves to be easily turned into rooms, but such attic levels are fantastic as shared work or living spaces. Experimenting with additional facilities in the difficult parts of a building would allow the rest of a renovation to be kept simple. So students rent a smaller room on a floor and get a roof-level studio and a shared garden, previously a car park, thrown in for free.

ATO has been commissioned to work with the Brussels department of urban development to draw up a registry of available sites and transformable buildings within the region. I think that this could ultimately become a tool for realizing such reconversions.
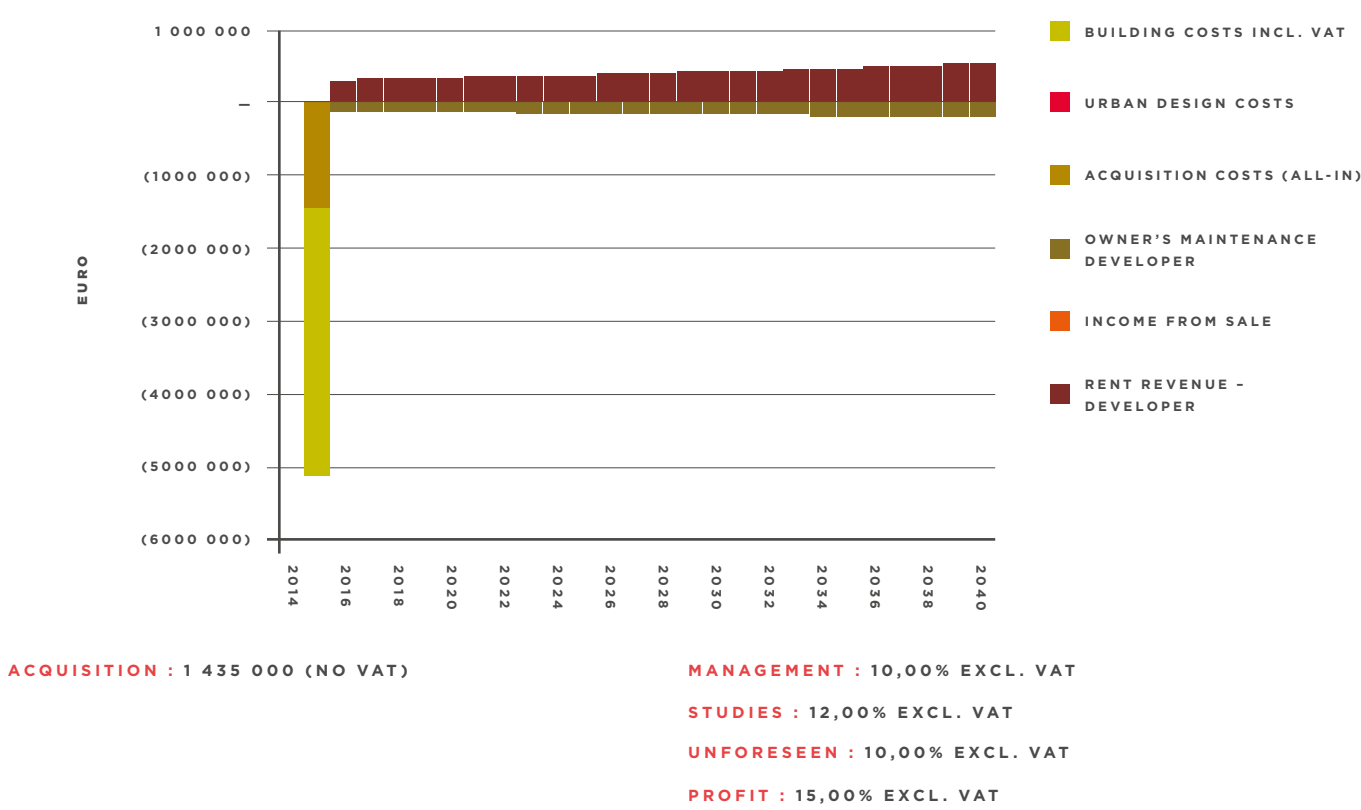
ELISA DUNDERS
AGENCY FOR TERRITORIAL
DEVELOPMENT (ADT/ATO)

CALCULATION

In the reconversion of office buildings, feasibility should be ensured by closely monitoring costs. Moreover, the value or purchase price of an office building and the reconversion costs are a trade-off. On the one hand, the value of the office building should be sufficiently low, on account of its unsuitability to be rented out as office space and the difficultly of converting it into obvious functions such as apartments. On the other hand, cost-effectiveness is ensured by seeking maximum surface area efficiency, for example through the clever use of the original grid structure.

RETURN

INVESTOR'S RETURN : 6,00%

LAND VALUE : 1 435 000

ACTUAL MARGIN OF BR(IK : (13 735) EURO PER YEAR

- BUILDING COSTS INCL. VAT
- URBAN DESIGN COSTS
- ACQUISITION COSTS (ALL-IN)
- OWNER'S MAINTENANCE DEVELOPER
- INCOME FROM SALE
- RENT REVENUE – DEVELOPER

ACQUISITION : 1 435 000 (NO VAT)

MANAGEMENT : 10,00% EXCL. VAT

STUDIES : 12,00% EXCL. VAT

UNFORESEEN : 10,00% EXCL. VAT

PROFIT : 15,00% EXCL. VAT

COMPILATION				CONSTR.	OPERATION		REVENUE
	Number	Area	Gross/net	Costs/m²	Costs	Landlord	Rent/unit
STUDENT HOMES	63	17	1,65	900	40/unit/month	BR(IK	350
COLLECTIVE SPACE	1	112	1,53	700	40/unit/month	PRIVÉ	2500
2 APARTMENTS	1	120	1,00	100	40/m²/year	BR(IK	-
CAFÉ	1	38	1,76	500	40/unit/month	PRIVÉ	100
SHOP	1	220	1,38	500	40/m²/year	BR(IK	1000
SMALL GARDEN	1	110	1,00	200	40/unit/month	BR(IK	-

ARCUEIL | RÉSIDENCE ÉTUDIANTE
Trévelo & Viger-Kohler

An existing office building in Paris was converted into student rooms by TVK. The concrete structure was preserved and partly expanded, thus creating space for outdoor circulation along terraces that also provide meeting areas for the students. The monolithic block was opened up to create a living environment in contact with light and air.
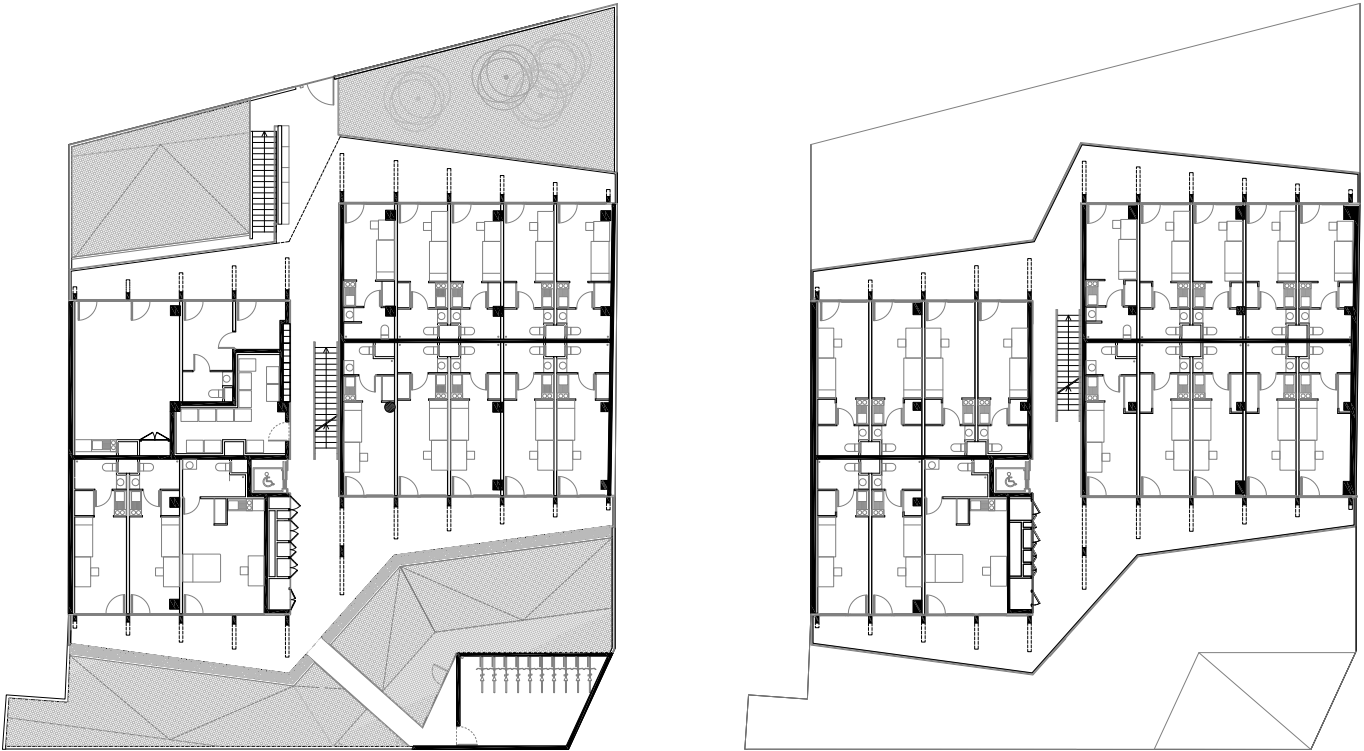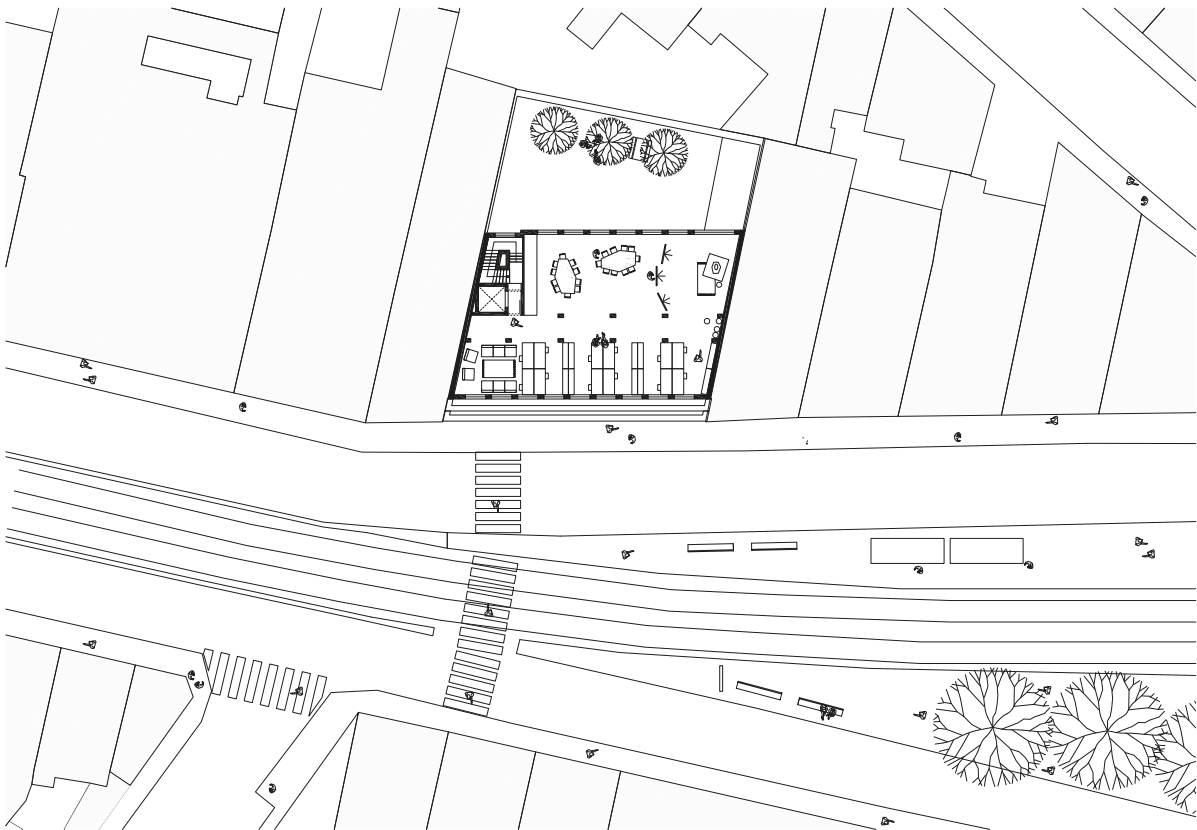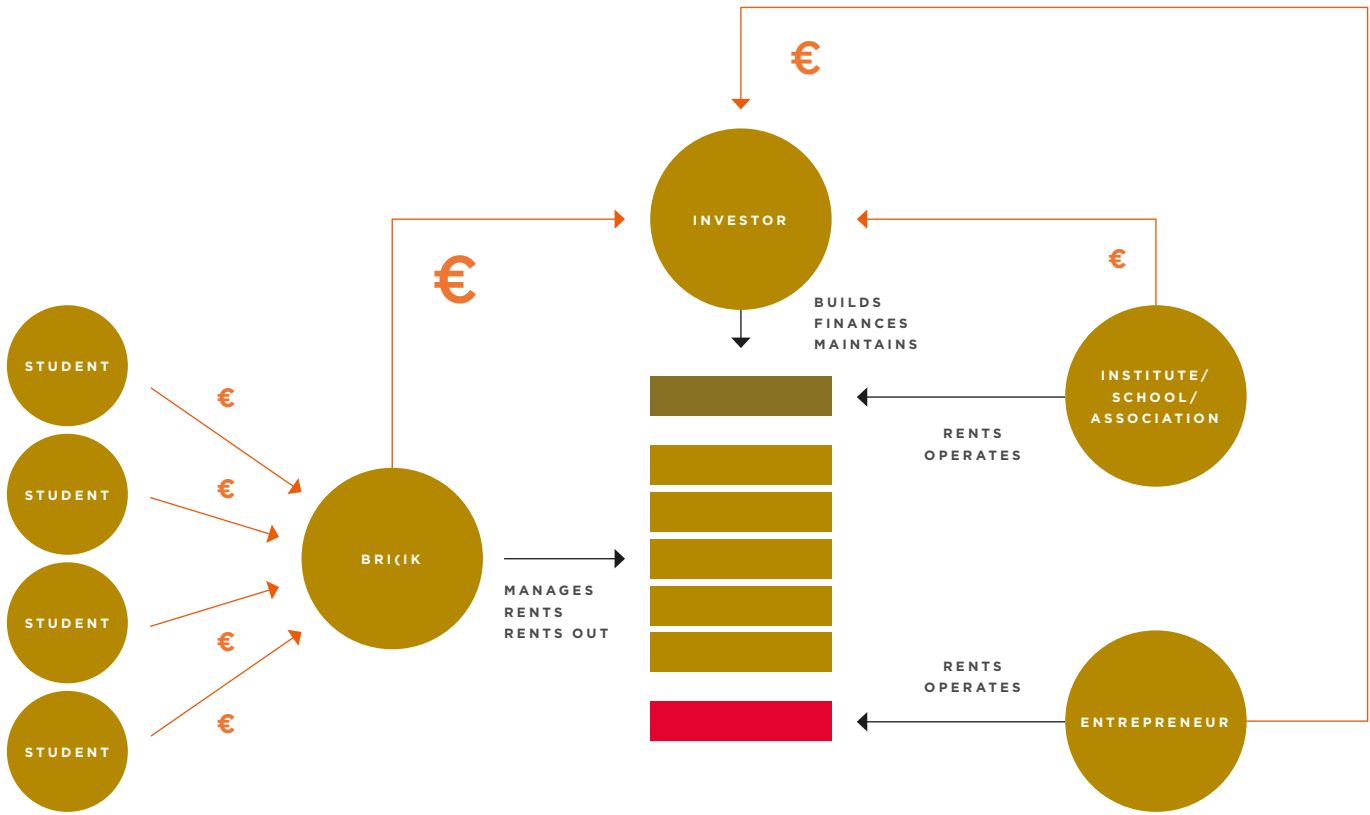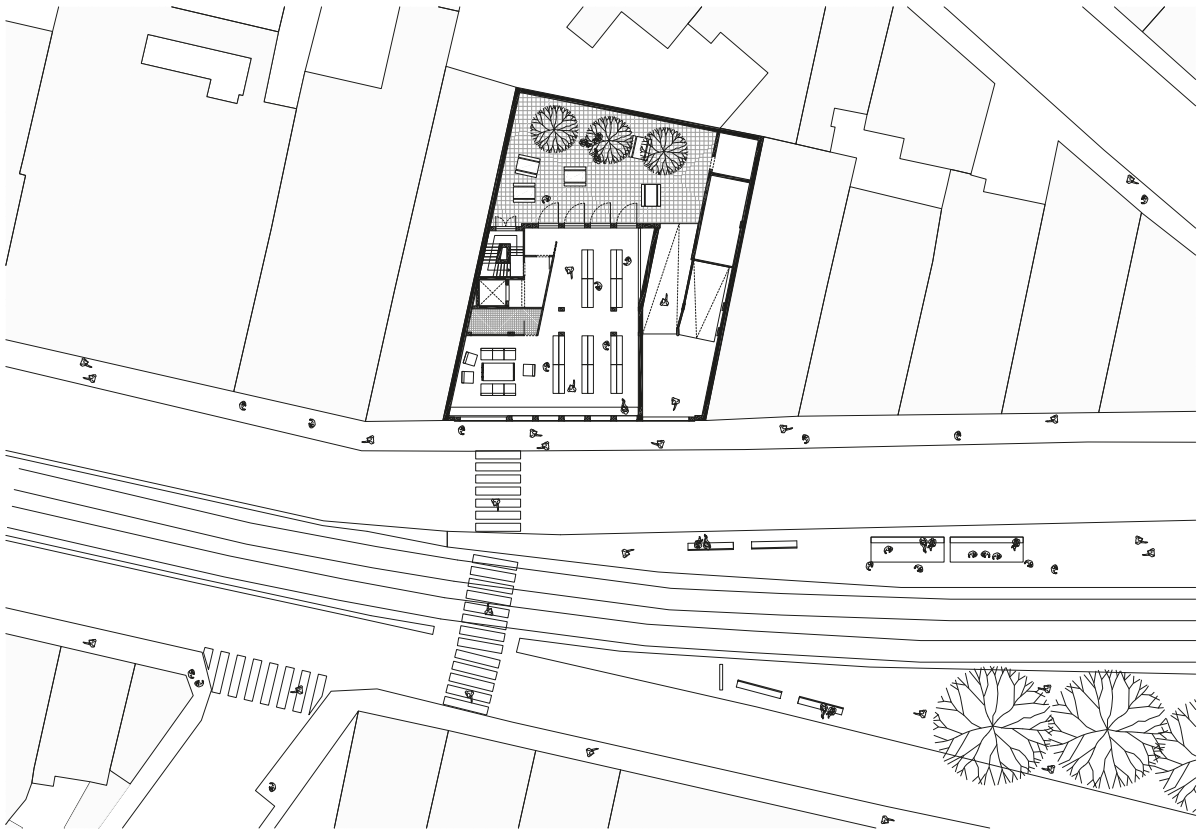
#3
Searching for partnerships

INSTITUTE AND DEVELOPER WORK TOGETHER ON A PROJECT RIGHT FROM THE CONCEPTION PHASE

STUDENT HOUSE AND NEARBY INSTITUTE AS LINKED ENTITIES

A number of large Brussels institutes of education are currently developing their own student housing schemes through public-private partnerships. In addition, private developers are building various projects here and there around Brussels that include student flats. The smaller institutes now seem to miss the bus. They do not possess the financial clout to initiate projects of their own, nor can they exert any influence on what the private sector offers.

Student flats being built by developers are often intended to be bought by private individuals as 'smart investments', initially for their own children when they study, and later as a source of income. That ignores the complex issue of management. We must look for developers/investors who are willing to commit themselves to a project by keeping it in their portfolio for the long term, and where the rent risk is partly or completely transferred to universities or colleges, or to intermediary organizations such as Br(ik. Especially in neighbourhoods where there is not yet sufficient social control, building management plays a crucial role: it is not just about the use of space but also about guarantees for the municipality and the neighbourhood in the long term.

Focusing on partnerships could result in synergies. A developer reduces the risk of a development by allowing institutes to contribute to a project right from the start. That could lead to the development of more interesting typologies, in which the possible sale to any other target group except students is no longer a factor. In their turn, the institutes are able to influence developments, which they could not realize at their own expense, and mould them to meet their needs.
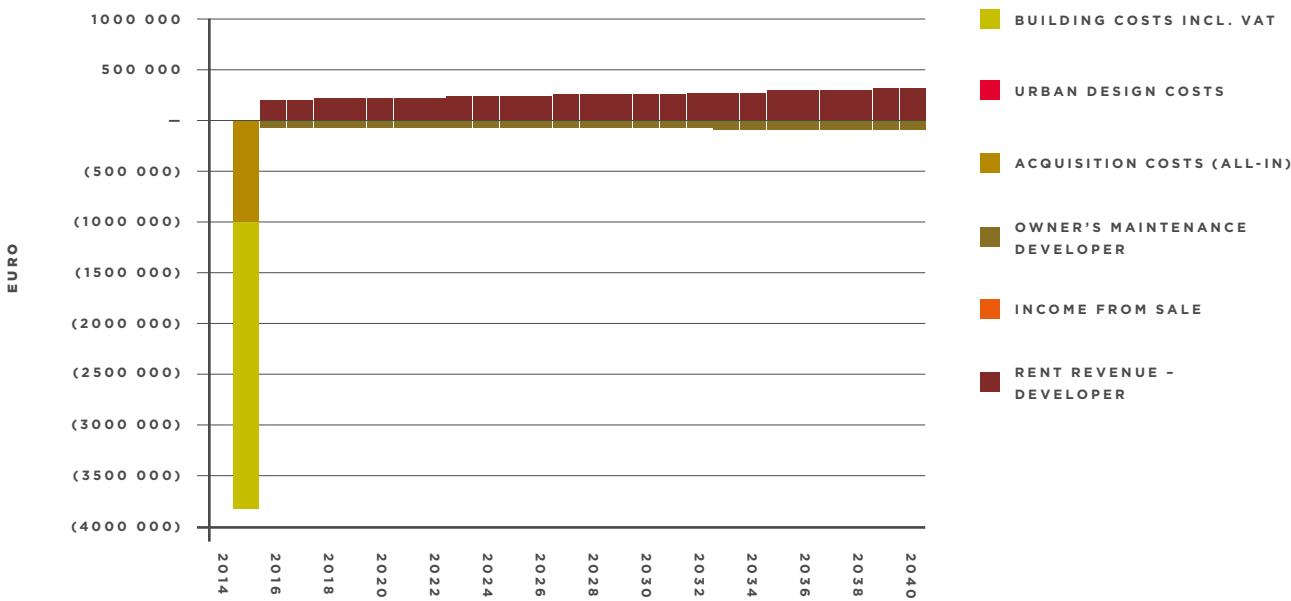
CALCULATION

If the land value is low or can be kept low, for example because the land is in the hands of a public authority or is made available within the framework of a neighbourhood development project, space could be created to develop community facilities. This could occur in partnership with a nearby educational institute, Br(ik or an association, which could result in a financial win-win situation: the involvement of Br(ik or educational institute provides an additional rental outlet, which could completely eliminate the market risk. Furthermore, community facilities (a drawing room, study room, small library, café…) enhance the appeal of what's on offer. There is an optimal division of risk: the construction and maintenance risk lies with the developer-investor, while the market risk is partly or completely covered by the institutes and organizations such as Br(ik.

RETURN

INVESTOR'S RETURN : 6,00%

LAND VALUE : 80 000

ACTUAL MARGIN OF BR(IK : (53 545) EURO PER YEAR

Legend:
- BUILDING COSTS INCL. VAT
- URBAN DESIGN COSTS
- ACQUISITION COSTS (ALL-IN)
- OWNER'S MAINTENANCE DEVELOPER
- INCOME FROM SALE
- RENT REVENUE – DEVELOPER

ACQUISITION : 980 000 (NO VAT)

MANAGEMENT : 10,00% EXCL. VAT

STUDIES : 12,00% EXCL. VAT

UNFORESEEN : 10,00% EXCL. VAT

PROFIT : 15,00% EXCL. VAT

COMPILATION				CONSTR.	OPERATION		REVENUE
	Number	Area	Gross/net	Costs/m²	Costs	Landlord	Rent/unit
STUDENT ROOMS	50	8	1,20	1400	40/unit/month	BR(IK	250
COLLECTIVE SPACE	1	145	1,19	1400	40/unit/month	BR(IK	-
2 APARTMENTS	1	171	1,22	1400	40/m²/year	BR(IK	800
SHOP	1	215	1,72	1000	40/m²/year	BR(IK	3500
SMALL GARDEN	1	20	1,08	100	40/unit/month	BR(IK	-

GATE 15
BOB361 ARCHITECTS

A hybrid programme that integrated a monumental 17th-century house was realized in the complex urban context of Antwerp. The programme consists of student housing with particular attention for foreign students, a multipurpose event hall, meeting rooms, and a co-working space operated by the university.
The venue also houses a helpdesk for undocumented migrants in the city of Antwerp. An open space in front of the building transforms the narrow street into a comfortable 'hangout' for students and local residents. Because the building client AGVespa entered into dialogue with the occupants right from the conception phase, the result is a mature, multi-tenant building that finds its place effortlessly in the city.
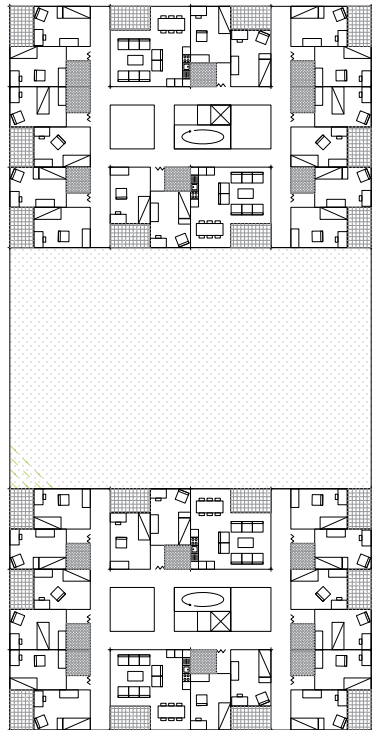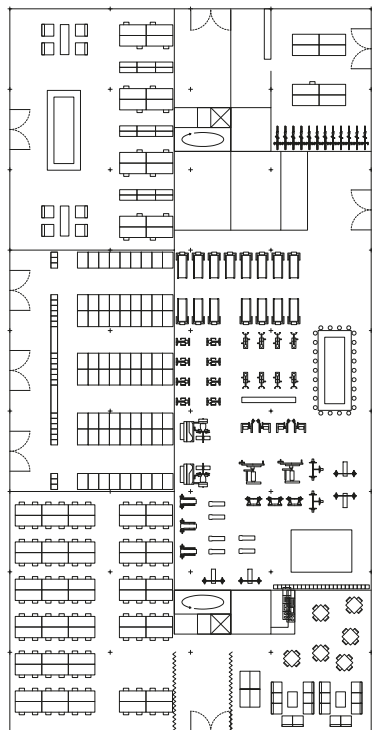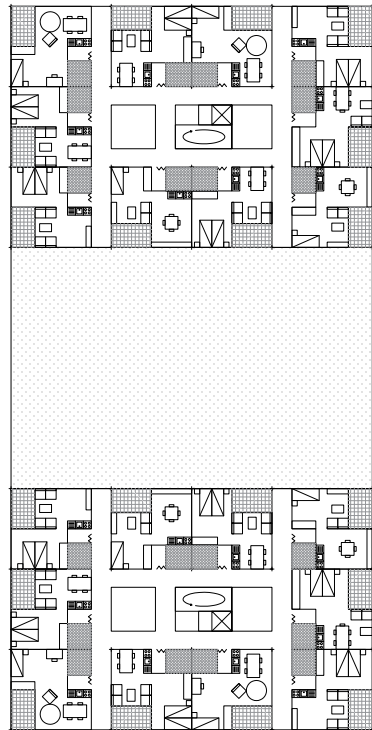
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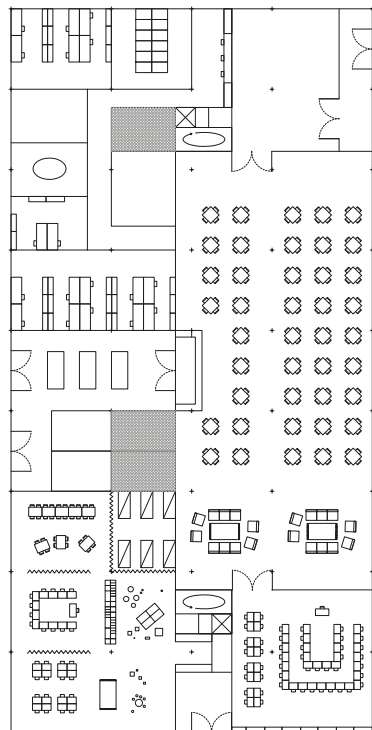
Student housing as pioneering settlements
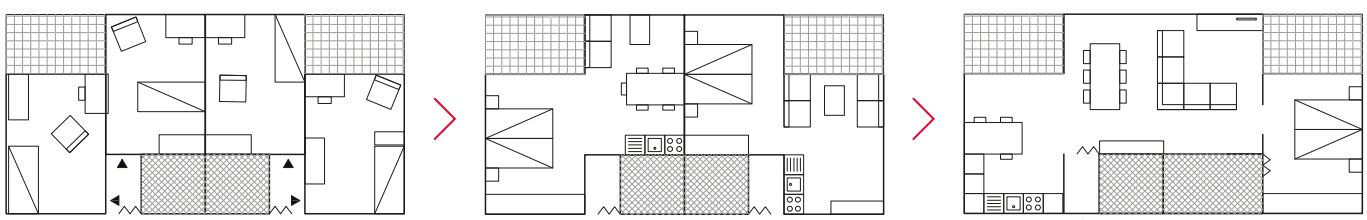
STUDENT ROOMS   STUDIOS   SERVICE FLATS

In the Brussels Metropolitan Region, a number of large-scale area developments are under development, among them Thurn & Taxis, Abattoir, Josaphat, Reyers... Former, mostly fenced-in and mono-functional (economic) zones are hereby transformed into multipurpose, integrated city neighbourhoods. Within these zones, residential development is a point of special interest: the first developments take place in a sort of wasteland, which means that their (future) added value is not always obvious to buyers or residents. Selling prices are therefore usually low for these first developments. However, students do not place any long-term demands on an area. For this target group, basic comfort for a fair price is the most important criterion.

On the other hand, construction that envisages future change is becoming increasingly common practice. This has both economic and ecological advantages: explicit consideration of the transformation of a new project at the end of the economic and technical lifespan of its first use increases the reuse value and reduces the ecological footprint of a project. After all, concrete or steel building shells have a high energy value and require a lot of transport for their construction and demolition.

Consequently, student housing should evolve into an infill within a flexible and intelligent city structure. After all, the profile of the city dweller is gradually shifting, and the typical family structure is making way for new forms of accommodation. In other words, the student flat module of about 25-30 m² should be more of a unity of thinking and designing than an absolute built result. In this way, student flats could potentially be turned into flats for singles or seniors, hotel rooms, office flats and so on.

Explicitly taking the above-mentioned principles as guidelines for defining a development with long-term prospects means that student housing schemes could be deployed as pioneering settlements within projects of this kind. They could be based on the development of student accommodation for a maximum period of twenty years. Depending on the value development and depreciation of the student rooms, redevelopment into better-quality and permanent housing could take place at a certain moment.

Moreover, the necessary attention must be devoted to community services so that students can feel at home in their neighbourhood, start to play a social role there, and avoid becoming isolated. If sufficient other non-resident use is also made of the site (offices, production, leisure, etc.), these facilities could be transformed into living space and developed at an early stage.

A smartly organized building is so flexible that it could also accommodate other population groups.

YVES MALYSSE | URA

You actually apply for a building permit for a structure, and then determine your programme according to commercial considerations.

JO HUYGH |
PROJECTMANAGER ABATTOIR NV

GROUND FLOOR PLAN, STUDENT HOUSING   GROUND FLOOR PLAN, FLATS FOR SENIORS
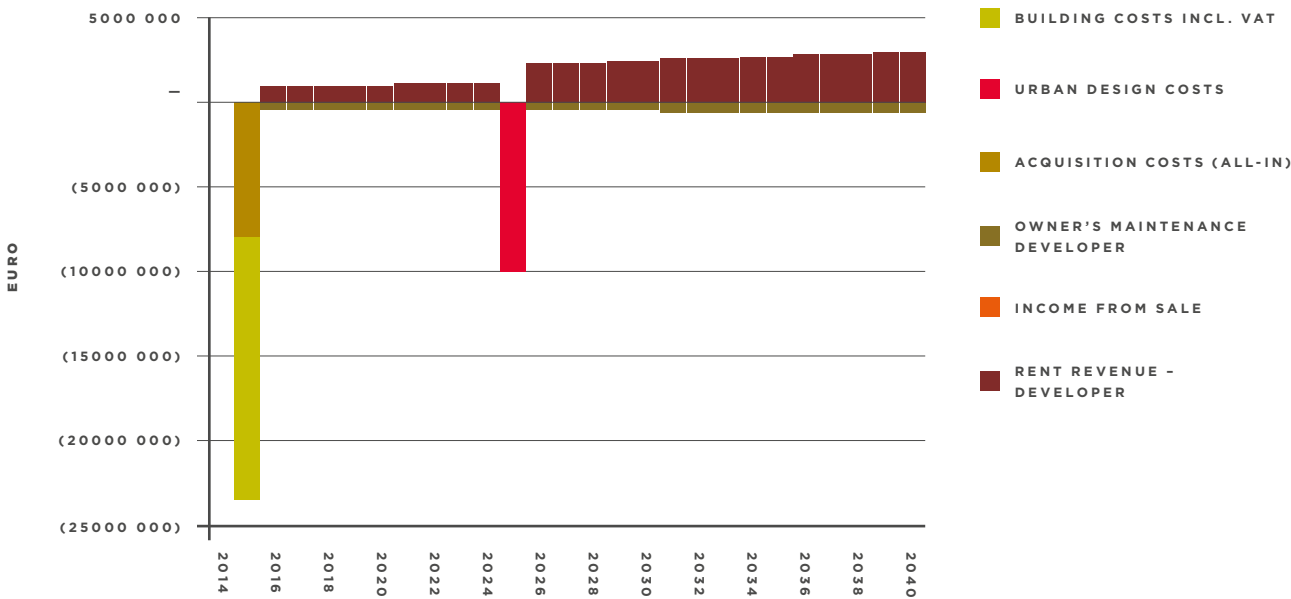
CALCULATION

In larger area developments the elaboration of a property needs to be creatively tackled over time, enabling the optimal development of value and returns, both for the property itself and for the area development as a whole. The development of student housing schemes as pioneering settlements ensures immediate returns and provides an initial group of residents upon which local facilities can build. In addition to other services, the development of these amenities ensures that the area comes to life. A project in which 'low-budget' student rooms (€250 rent per month) are operated for nine years before being converted into luxury studios generates more land value than a project in which more expensive student rooms (€350 rent per month) continue to be rented out.

RETURN

INVESTOR'S RETURN : 6,00%

LAND VALUE : 8 000 000

ACTUAL MARGIN OF BR(IK : (40 320) EURO PER YEAR

Legend:
- BUILDING COSTS INCL. VAT
- URBAN DESIGN COSTS
- ACQUISITION COSTS (ALL-IN)
- OWNER'S MAINTENANCE DEVELOPER
- INCOME FROM SALE
- RENT REVENUE – DEVELOPER

ACQUISITION : 8 000 000 (NO VAT)

MANAGEMENT : 10,00% EXCL. VAT

STUDIES : 12,00% EXCL. VAT

UNFORESEEN : 10,00% EXCL. VAT

PROFIT : 15,00% EXCL. VAT

| COMPILATION				CONSTR.	OPERATION		REVENUE
	Number	Area	Gross/net	Costs/m²	Costs	Landlord	Rent/unit
STUDENT HOMES	224	25	1,34	1000	40/unit/month	BR(IK	250
COMM. GROUND FLOOR	1	1391	1,17	700	40/unit/month	PRIVATE	23183
STUDIOS	140	40	1,34	700	40/m²/year	PRIVATE	800
COMM. GROUND FLOOR F2	1	1391	1,17	200	40/unit/month	PRIVATE	46367

TIETGENKOLLEGIET
Lundgaard & Tranberg

The main principle of the Tietgenkollegiet was to realize an exemplary student housing project. To this end, a Danish foundation made a site available on the edge of Copenhagen, in an area still undergoing development. In its form and arrangement, the building appears as an isolated structure, but it also acts as an anchor for the continued development of the master plan. The intelligent linking and strong emphasis on collective spaces and additional facilities such as meeting spaces, a bike workshop and a large courtyard mean that the building offered a good-quality living environment in a landmark structure right from day one.
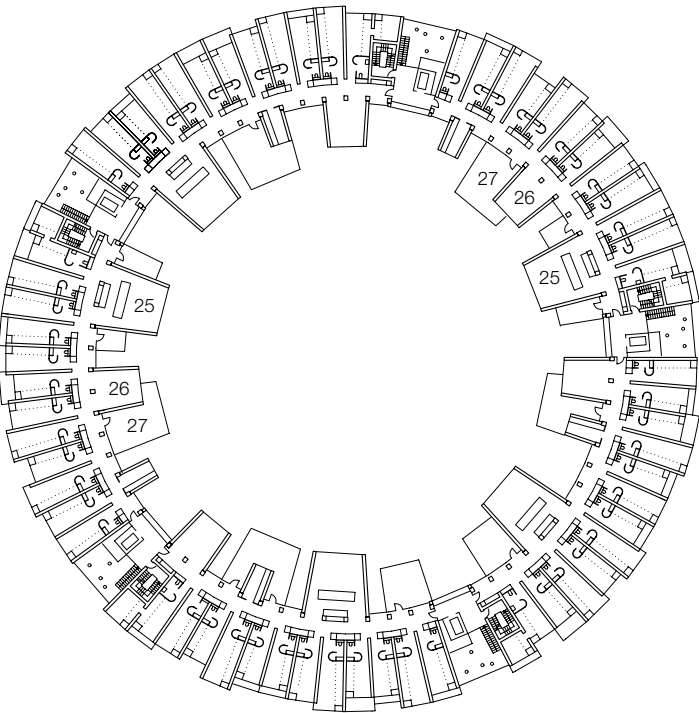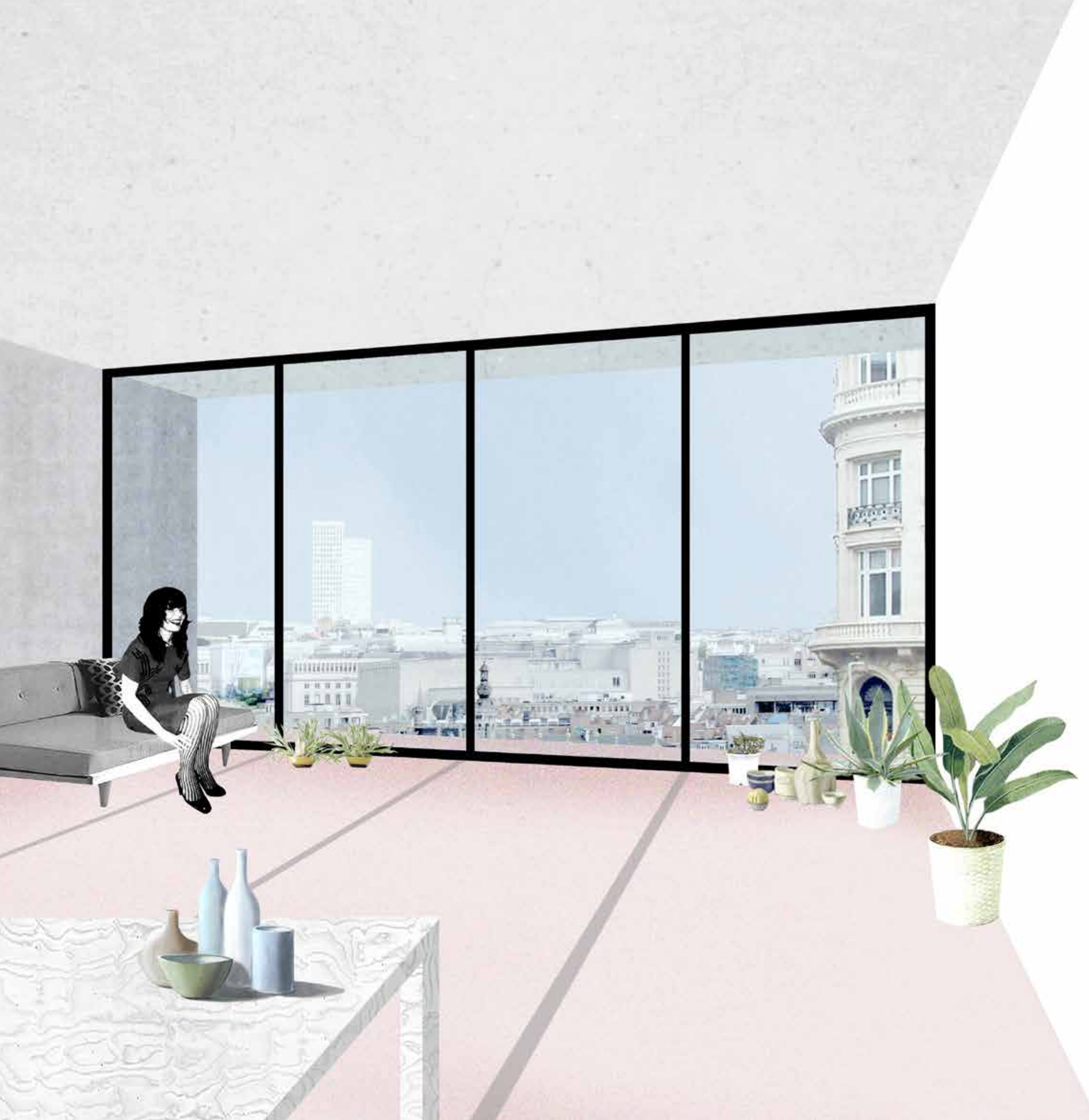
#5
Switching smartly
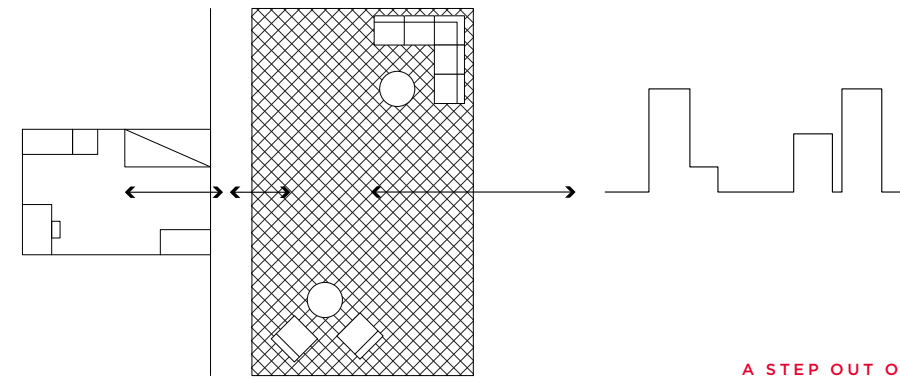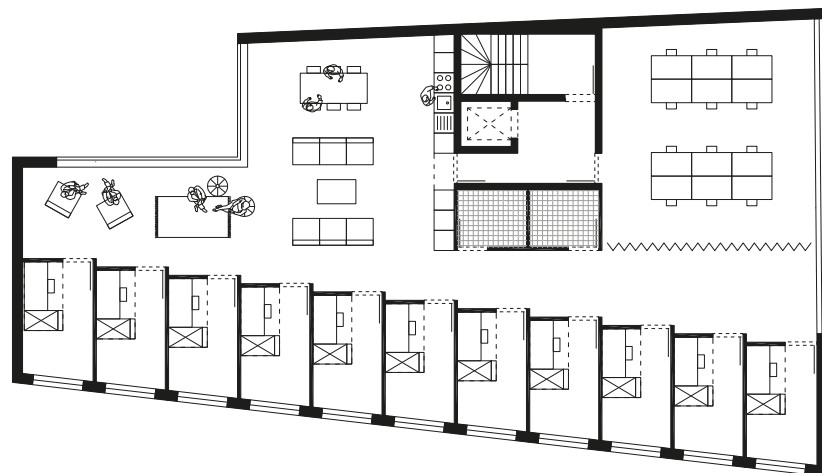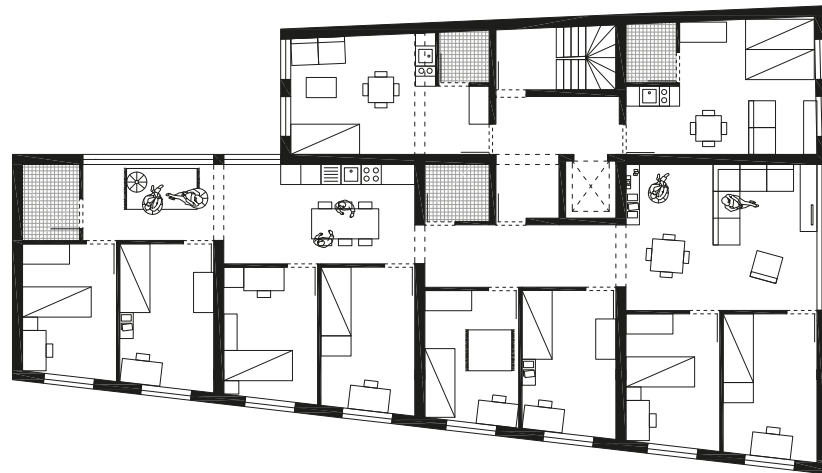
A large number of students today have a house or apartment. The tendency towards shared facilities translates into the emergence of new programmes such as communal study and work spaces in libraries, school spaces or separately rented study rooms. Students seek one another out to counter the effects of individualization, extreme digitalization and the constant flow of information that confronts them. Studying in the presence of others also acts as a form of self-imposed social control. This renewed interest in one another is a phenomenon that could also propel the evolution of student housing away from standard arrangements. No longer can we define the standard student so unambiguously. A large number of students remain in the city for nine or ten months, while others use their room as if it was their own home. In addition, internationalization in education means that foreign students staying for short periods are becoming more commonplace. All this means that we must deal in a much more flexible manner with the number of rooms, as well as their size, in student housing schemes.

To date, the student room is too often viewed as a separate unit in which a person sleeps, lives and studies. This space could be made smaller if the reduced size is compensated for with quality shared facilities. To this end, existing regulations need to be amended, since they stipulate a minimum of 12.2 square metres per room irrespective of the quality of shared spaces.

A MINIMUM CELL WITH MAXIMUM SHARED SPACE

The new collective spaces are shared by the students, but they could also be opened up as study or working spaces for other students or city dwellers. A need for a meeting place in the city centre? Why not use the study space inside the student housing complex around the corner? Together with the right combination of facilities, these spaces could grow to become genuine city buildings where students and other city dwellers encounter one another. By searching for the specific qualities that students require and that differ from what cohousing offers them, we could ease the pressure on the housing market and tie students to the city in a lasting manner.

Today's student is a social animal. The correlation between who the new student is and what he or she requires is absolutely vital in a difficult city like Brussels.

DAG BOUTSEN | KU LEUVEN

It would be interesting if rooms could deviate from standard square metre sizes depending on the shared space they adjoin. People should judge the quality of a project rather than simply its size.
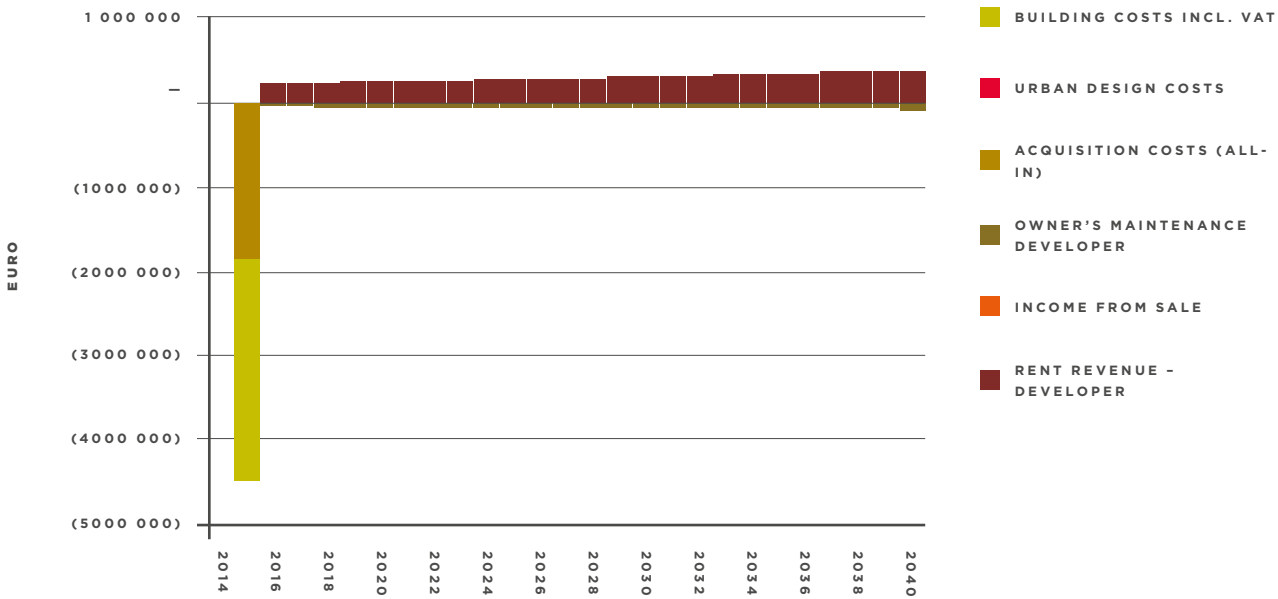
TONY VAN NUFFELEN | TEAM BMA

CALCULATION

Smart spatial connections mean that smaller units with greater user comfort can be created. The rent price per room therefore does not need to be much lower than for a standard room with little shared space, which is precisely what the market is calling for today. Moreover, any reduction in rent level could be compensated for by the lower unit price of the shared space. After all, students will want to furnish this space themselves, so basic finishes are sufficient. In an ultimate scenario, this oversized collective space could even generate additional income by being rented out during certain periods.

RETURN

INVESTOR'S RETURN : 6,00%

LAND VALUE : 1 850 000

ACTUAL MARGIN OF BR(IK : (11 845) EURO PER YEAR

- 🟨 BUILDING COSTS INCL. VAT
- 🟥 URBAN DESIGN COSTS
- 🟧 ACQUISITION COSTS (ALL-IN)
- 🟫 OWNER'S MAINTENANCE DEVELOPER
- 🟧 INCOME FROM SALE
- 🟥 RENT REVENUE – DEVELOPER

ACQUISITION : 1 850 000 (NO VAT)

MANAGEMENT : 10,00% EXCL. VAT

STUDIES : 12,00% EXCL. VAT

UNFORESEEN : 10,00% EXCL. VAT

PROFIT : 15,00% EXCL. VAT

COMPILATION				CONSTR.	OPERATION		REVENUE
	Number	Area	Gross/net	Costs/m²	Costs	Landlord	Rent/unit
STUDENT HOMES	50	8	1,2	1400	40/unit/month	BR(IK	250
COLLECTIVE SPACE	1	145	1,19	1400	40/unit/month	BR(IK	-
2 APARTMENTS	1	171	1,22	1400	40/m²/year	BR(IK	800
CAFÉ	1	57	1,72	1000	40/unit/month	BR(IK	500
SHOP	1	158	1,00	1000	40/m²/year	PRIVÉ	5000
SMALL GARDEN	1	20	1,08	100	40/unit/month	BR(IK	-

SVARTLAMOEN
Brendeland & Kristoffersen

The location of this project, a site along the edge between an industrial area and an old neighbourhood in Trondheim, prompted the architects to focus fully on the community character of the design. The traditional division between the corridor and rooms is abandoned here. Instead, the corridor widens to become a collective space that connects all rooms. Owing to this generous gesture, the rooms themselves could be limited to sleeping cells: life is lived in the living space, and in the many shared spots created by the insertion of the two volumes.

PROJECT SEQUENCE

PROJECT SEQUENCE

PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3	PHASE 4	PHASE 5
strategic exploration	call for projects	design of project dossiers	design research	realization

2015   2016   2017

exploratory research team URA/Rebel

3 clients

3 project directors / experts

3 design teams / project

3 designs

quality control group
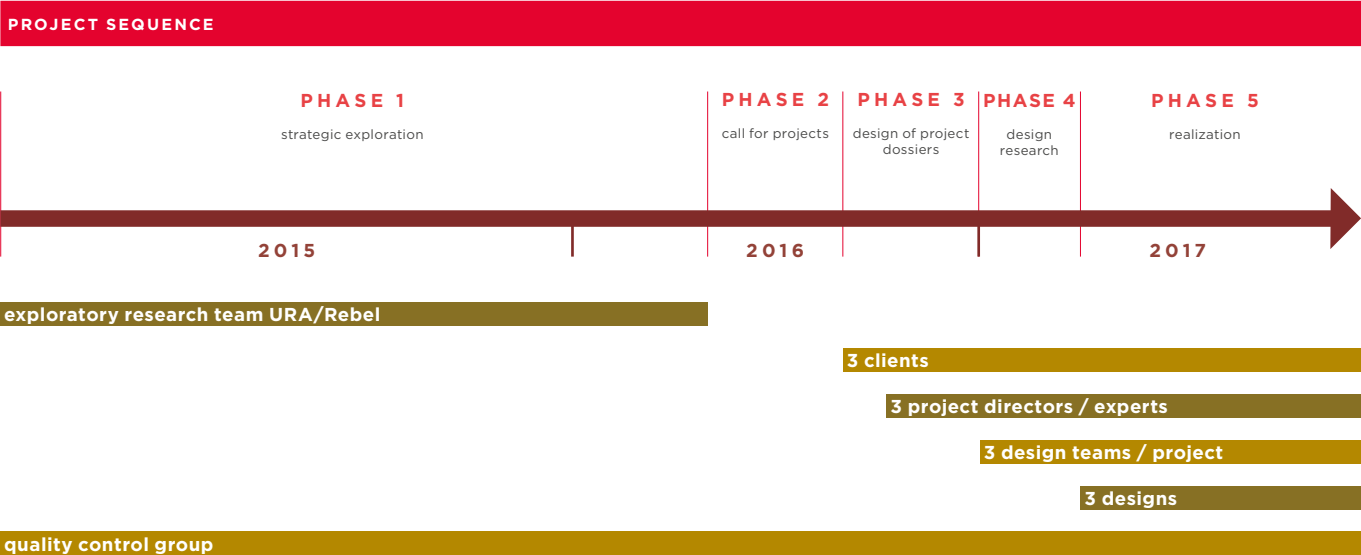
The timing for the further elaboration of the pilot projects as well as their realization is indicative and project-based.

PHASE 1 STRATEGIC EXPLORATION PHASE (AUGUST 2014 — APRIL 2016)

During this phase the spatial potential was charted, design research was conducted into various themes and the framework of the call for projects was established.

PHASE 2 CALL FOR PROJECTS (MAY 2016 — AUGUST 2016)

The second phase starts with a call to initiators/principals who want to realize a spatial project and want to elaborate other possible ambitions from the strategic exploration for concrete locations. Provided they make it known before 30 June 2016, a number of interested parties can claim assistance in elaborating their proposal further. The call itself closes on 31 August 2016.

From the submitted proposals, three pilot projects will then be selected.

A project director will be appointed for each of the selected projects. Additionally, the teams can, if so desired, consult a team of experts according to prescribed conditions.

PHASE 3 FORMAT FOR PROJECT DEFINITION AND DOSSIER (SEPTEMBER 2016 — DECEMBER 2016)

A project team works on each project. This team elaborates the project definition and compiles the project dossier.

At the same time, designers will be called upon to carry out design research and/or develop a master plan. A design team is then selected for each project.

PHASE 4 DESIGN RESEARCH (JANUARY 2017 — MARCH 2017)

Each design team develops its design research for one of the selected projects in close cooperation with the project team. Feedback is regularly provided to the Quality Control Group, which follows the entire process.

PHASE 5 DETAILED DESIGN AND REALIZATION (FROM APRIL 2017)

The willingness of principals to realize the concepts from the design research and master plan phase, whilst respecting the project ambitions and spatial qualities, is crucial in this phase.

PHASE 6 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Successful innovations and lessons arising out of the pilot projects can be deployed as innovative elements and influence further policy on student accommodation in Brussels.

PILOT PROJECTS AS INSTRUMENT

Pilot projects are an instrument developed by the Vlaams Bouwmeester Team to deploy design as an instrument in preparing policy. Today the Vlaams Bouwmeester Team runs pilot projects devoted to health care, collective housing, commissioned art, productive landscape and the development of contaminated areas. In each case it works with dedicated partners within the specific policy domains. Each pilot project programme commits to projects that can and dare to venture beyond borders. The Vlaams Bouwmeester Team views the current programmes as a first generation of pilot projects.

Pilot projects are intensive research and development projects that examine pressing social issues or sectors that urgently require thinking out of the box. They lead to innovative building projects that effectively realized. Pilot projects not only critically review existing methods and frameworks, but also generate appealing images and concepts with the aim of inspiring other initiatives and projects.

Pilot projects make use of design research that does not present an ideal yet unattainable future, but instead explores the possibilities of an area or challenge. Design research has the potential to bring together various interested parties by means of visual material and discussion. In this way, it tests the limits of current regulations and detects bottlenecks, thus facilitating innovation.

Pilot projects are intended to generate models for desired future developments. Moreover, their realization can lead to an evaluation of existing policy and legal frameworks. Monitoring and observing the process, deploying means in a focused manner and drawing on expertise can provide insight that facilitates innovation and enhances its chances of success.

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