

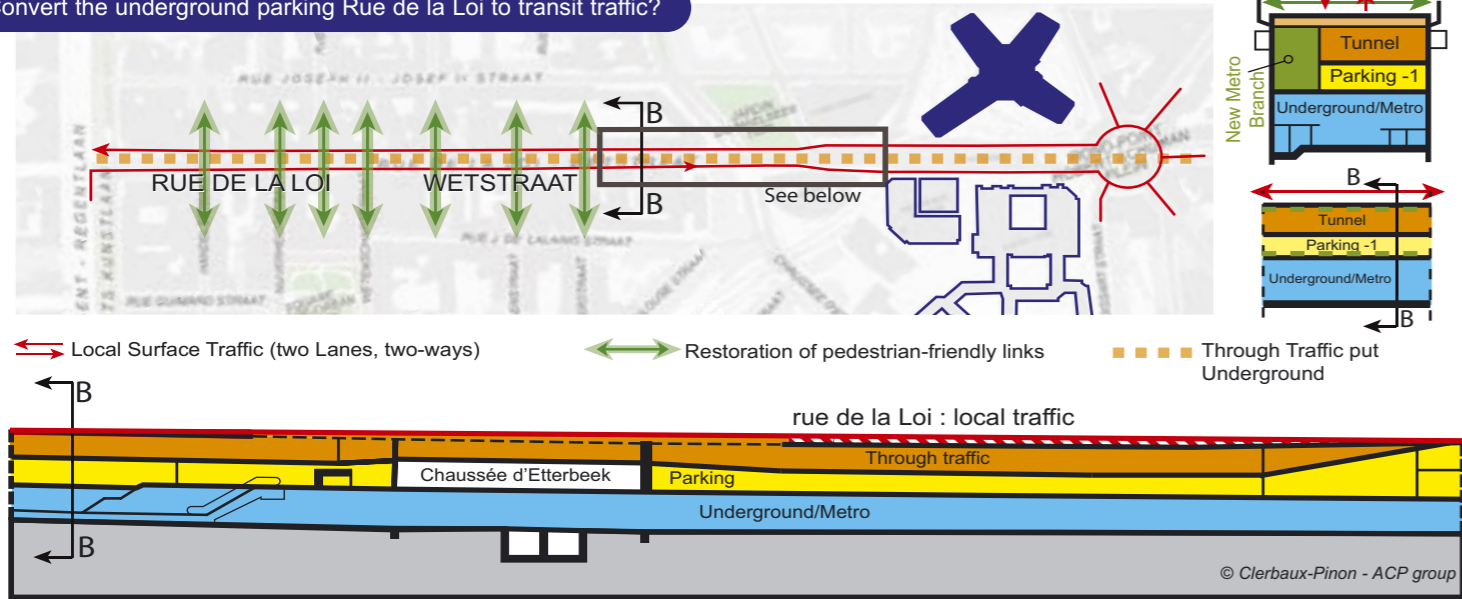
SOME QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS... (GFR, CHAPTER V)



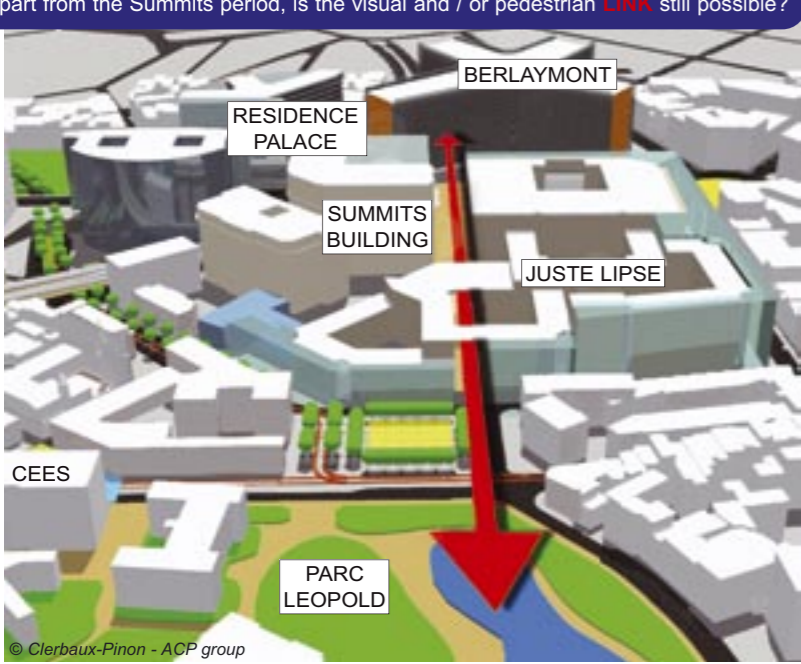
What future for the European district and its surroundings?



Convert the underground parking Rue de la Loi to transit traffic?



Apart from the Summits period, is the visual and / or pedestrian LINK still possible?



Dépôt légal: D/2007/11.036/1
ISBN-13: 978-2-9600650-0-8

Éditions ALITER

Pierre LACONTE & Carola HEIN, Eds.

EU SUMMITS BUILDING © Philippe SAMYN and PARTNERS - STUDIO VALLE PROGETTAZIONI, architects / BURO HAPPOOLD LIMITED, engineers



FOREWORD: Siim KALLAS
INTRODUCTION: Charles PICQUÉ



With the support of the Brussels-Capital Region

Publication of the Foundation for the Urban Environment

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TEN MESSAGES TO THE READER

POINT 1. Brussels as a microcosm of a decentralised European Union and therefore appropriate as its main capital

Belgium today is a territorially decentralised country comprised of ‘three federated entities’ – three autonomous regions and three linguistic communities – obliged to reach unanimity in all decisions that affect two or more of their jurisdictions, such as control of noise around the airport. One such federated entity is the Brussels-Capital Region, which covers 160 square kilometres (out of Belgium’s 30,000).

Belgium’s evolution has thus been centrifugal. The same can be said of the 27-state European Union, which is also obliged to reach consensus on all matters in which the Maastricht Treaty requires unanimity. After a peak European centripetal evolution, materialized by the Single Market, the single Euro currency and the European Constitution project, Europe is now going through a centrifugal period.

POINT 2. The centripetal Central Belgian mega-city

While the institutional evolution of Belgium has been centrifugal, the economic geography suggests a centripetal evolution in favor of the Central Belgian mega-city. The Brussels-Capital Region is the hub of the central Belgian mega-city, which is composed of several autonomous poles that are in competition, yet in a situation of complementarities and cooperation (referred to as ‘coopetition’).

The concept of the Central Belgian mega-city was developed in Peter Hall’s Polynet study of 2006, as one of several urban regions from across Europe, focusing on their ‘physically separate but strongly networked systems, be they visible or invisible’. The Central Belgian mega-city includes to the north a triangular/trapezoidal space made of Antwerp, Ghent, Leuven, and Brussels, and to the south an area of around 30 kilometres including Nivelles and Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve/Wavre. This configuration and its growth from 1990 to 2000 are further confirmed by land cover satellite observations. While the institutional evolution of Belgium has been centrifugal, the economic geography suggests a centripetal evolution in favor of the Central Belgian mega-city.

POINT 3. The Brussels-Capital Region: a small territory but an economic and cultural motor

As per its geographical location and history, the Brussels-Capital Region is an economic engine and cultural pivot, at Belgian and international level. It qualifies as a metropolis, or a ‘heteropolis’ in the Greek sense of the term: a city of the outside, capable of receiving and integrating outside influences. The Brussels-Capital Region is itself comprised of 19 communes jealous of their autonomy. The extension of the voting rights to non-Belgians has resulted in the opening of political parties to foreigners of all different cultures and ethnicities. Festivals like ‘KunstenFESTIVALdesArts’,



ABOUT THE FOUNDATION
FOR THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT (FFUE)

The Foundation is a non-profit institution of public interest authorized by Royal Decree (17/8/1999). It sponsors and organizes activities in the fields of urban planning and mobility, including conferences, publications, and exhibitions.

The FFUE partnered with the “A Vision for Europe” Foundation to put on an international exhibition, “The traditional city and contemporary architecture” (in Berlin and Bologna in 2000, and in Strasbourg in 2001), and it co-organised, with the World Bank, the conference “Cities on the Move: Towards Sustainable Urban Development” (New York 2001) and of the “Fifth International Eco-Development Conference” (Shenzhen 2002).

Donations made to it are tax deductible.

Its scientific advisors are Professor Philippe Bourdeau (ULB), formerly Director General for the Environment at the European Commission, and André Berger (UCL), climatologist and greenhouse gas specialist. Professor Ylva Prigogine (ULB), Nobel Prize, recently deceased, whose work included studies on traffic flows, was also an advisor.

Its Board of Directors includes Evelyn Gessler, Managing Director of Decider’s Agency; Bernard Laconte, Jurist; Claude van den Hove d’Ertsenryck, Secretary of the Brussels Mobility Commission; and Christian Lasserre, Lecturer at the Cambre School of Architecture and UCL.

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PUBLICATION IN 2003
TO ORDER: PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE FFUE.ORG



PUBLICATION IN 2005
TO ORDER: PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE FFUE.ORG



PROJECT FOR A TILTING TRAIN

BETWEEN BRUSSELS, LUXEMBURG AND STRASBOURG

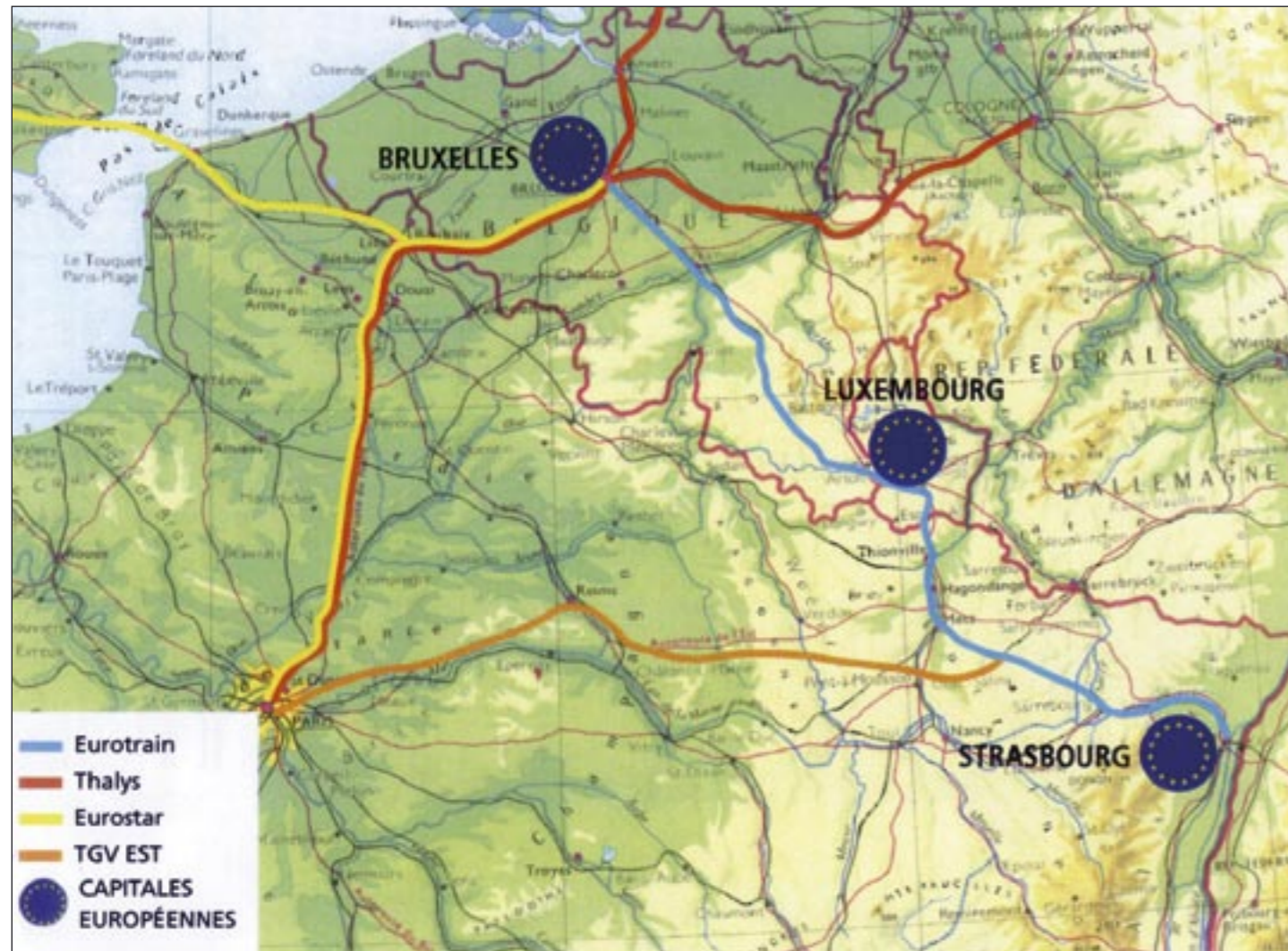


ILLUSTRATION 3: Project for a Tilting Train between Brussels, Luxembourg, and Strasbourg.

The rail link between Brussels, Luxembourg, and Strasbourg remains weak. It takes around five hours by train. The work planned for the Belgian section, together with the projects that are being promoted by the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the portion of the Paris-Strasbourg TGV route that has been realized between Beaudreaut (Metz) and Strasbourg), will constitute an important improvement to the rail link. They will enable the introduction of a tilting train that would reach speeds up to 250 km/hour on the existing tracks, thereby reducing travel time between the three cities by fifty percent.

'BRXLBRAVO Arts Festival', 'Couleur Café' and 'Zinneke Parade' are embodiments of the multi-cultural character of Brussels' civil society, if not its educational system. Given the continued enlargement of the European Union, multiculturalism is becoming an increasingly important feature of Europe in general and of Brussels in particular. For member and applicant nations and their regions, establishing an active presence in Brussels is an opportunity to showcase their own cultural identity, not to forget the Flemish, French, Walloon and German cultures of Belgium. Additional cultural agreements and programmes would be an appropriate tool for affirming cultural diversity within a common European historic heritage.

POINT 4. Making highest and best use of the semi-annual rotation of EU Council presidencies

Brussels could make better use of symbolic occasions like the semi-annual rotation of the EU presidency. It might serve as an occasion to trigger titular nations to put on extensive cultural programmes, not only in Belgian cities (particularly those with a specific historic connections to the titular nation), but in cities across Europe. Between 2008 and 2011, eight countries will hold the presidency: Slovenia, France, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Spain, Belgium, Hungary, and Poland.

POINT 5. Decentralising the European institutions in different parts of the Region

In terms of urban planning and environment, Europe's challenge to the Brussels-Capital Region is embodied by the European Quarter (about 3% of the Region's territory) and its extensions. Starting in 1958, the decision by the Belgian Government to locate the Commissions in the verdant, residential Cinquanteaire Quarter, instead of in the publicly owned vacant area next to the North Station, has transformed this residential quarter into a rather boring office area. Today, some are thinking about siting other activities there (see below 6.) and to locate more European institutions in other areas (see below 7.). A multi-stakeholders' forum has proven useful in Hamburg or Berlin in transforming similar areas, and such a forum might be considered for the Brussels-Capital Region.

POINT 6. Improving the existing European Quarter, with the help of civil society

The existing European Quarter can be improved through urban design, enhancing the quality of public space and emphasizing the symbolic representation and visibility of the European Union. The Region might proceed in a number of ways:

- By channelling the through traffic Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat, using one layer of the long underground existing car park and restoring street level pedestrian links between both sides of what is presently a canyon. This would also give a new visibility to the Cinquanteaire Arcade from the Berlaymont.
- By completely rebuilding the bland facade of the Justus Lipsius Council building on the Place Jean Reyplein side, and creating a pedestrian street that also would be a visual link between the Berlaymont and the Leopold Park), passing through the Justus Lipsius building.
- By creating a broadly-based multipurpose Center of European social and cultural events with full translation facilities in the North Hall of the Cinquanteaire.

- By planning a coach and car park under the Parc du Cinquanteaire connected with a new Metro station which would also serve the Museum and the future European Center for Events at Cinquanteaire.

These ideas are in line with the proposals of the citizen group Fonds Quartier Européen, set up within the King Baudouin Foundation. This group recommends recreating the vista towards the Cinquanteaire Arcades, making an urban plaza from the European Parliament Esplanade, filling the present vacant space between the Schuman area and the Parliament area with a mix of urban uses, and attracting new residents to the European Quarter through appropriate incentives.

POINT 7. Planning for European extensions around Delta and Josaphat railway stations

This includes selecting appropriate sites in the Region for orderly planned extensions into areas well served by public transport. These areas should have provisions for both European institutions and related services, such as a sixth European school, housing, and commerce. Particularly well suited are the surroundings of Delta and Josaphat railway stations, which already host European institutions. Josaphat railway station is located at 8 minutes from the airport and 5 minutes from Schuman station.

POINT 8. Reinforcing the accessibility to Brussels from neighbouring countries

Brussels already has all the geographic qualities of a crossroads city. Today, 120 million people can reach it by train in 4 hours by train. Its position will be further enhanced by the activation of high speed rail services between Brussels and the Amsterdam airport, which will significantly improve access to the city from distant destinations. As for Strasbourg, the present five hours it takes to get there by train could be cut in half through the introduction of a tilting train – an opportunity that might be exploited by a private operator in the context of European rail liberalisation.

POINT 9. Improving the links between Brussels gateways and the European quarters, and improving general traffic conditions

The tilting train connection between Brussels and Strasbourg would bring the added symbolic value of having both the Schuman station (Council of Ministers/ Commission) and the Quartier Léopold station (Parliament) served by fast international train.

To improve general traffic, we propose creating new dedicated surface sites for public transport (especially Chaussée d'Etterbeek / Etterbeekse Steenweg), building new cycle paths, and duplicating the east-west metro axis by making creative use of existing infrastructures.

POINT 10. Improving planning governance within the Region and its municipal components

The challenge for Brussels seems to be developing a strategy for the effective administration of its own territory, which is presently underutilized (as compared with Paris for example). Such improvement might include, for example, creating solidarity between richer and poorer municipalities and harmonizing housing and social help policies. Territorial strategy should combine regional and communal politics, and should emphasize the city's principal asset: its ability to operate at the European and international levels, while maintaining the local character of its 19 communes and the patchwork of its 1,000 neighbourhoods.

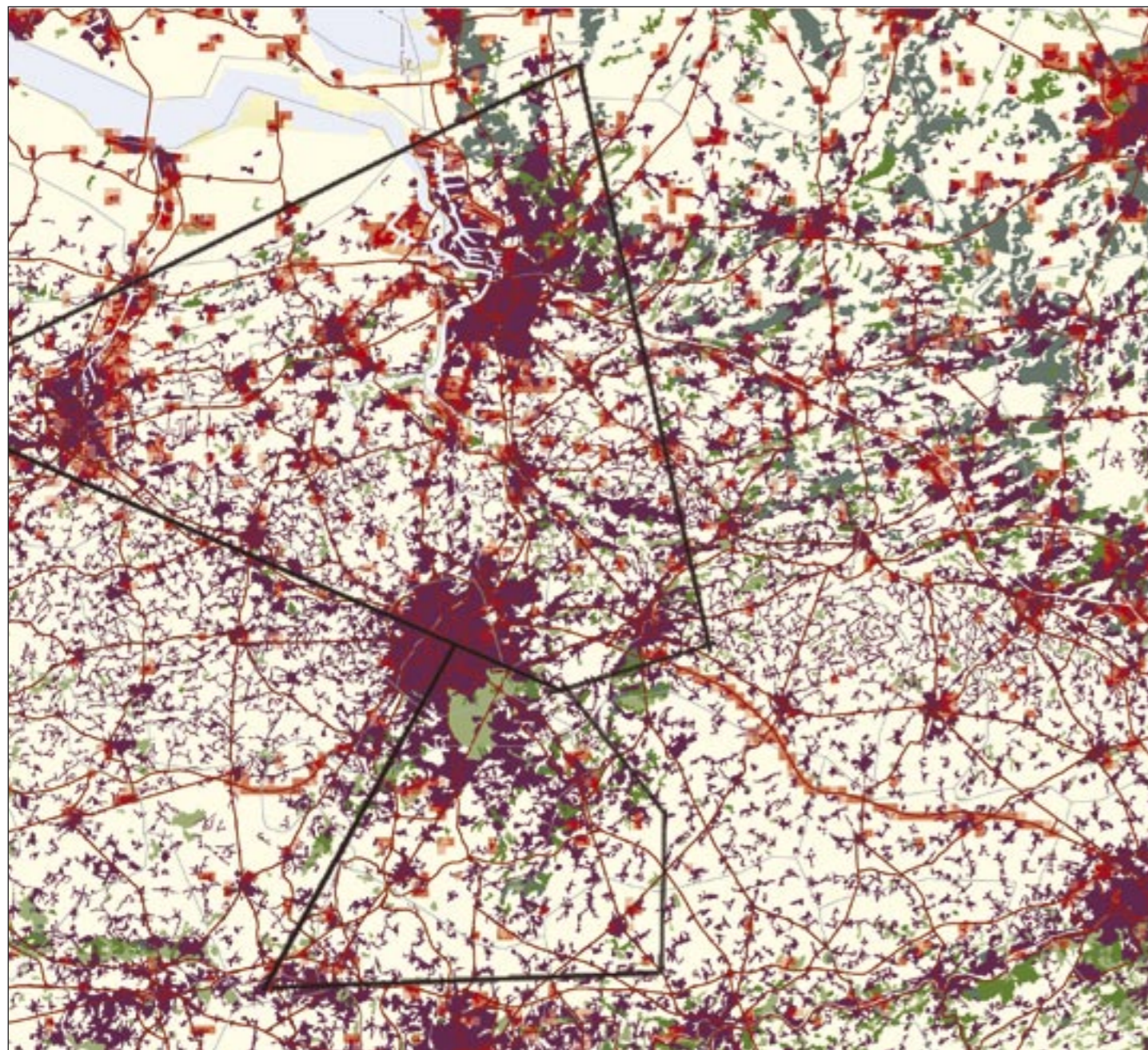


ILLUSTRATION 1: The Central Belgian mega-city.

Credit © European Environment Agency - Pierre Laconte, 2007.

The satellite images of land cover, analysed by the European Environment Agency (EEA) show the areas of urban growth 1990-2000 (LIGHT ORANGE). They illustrate the fast growth of the triangular/trapezoidal area including Antwerp, Ghent, Leuven and Brussels, and of the area south of Brussels that includes the Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve/Wavre cluster and Nivelles.

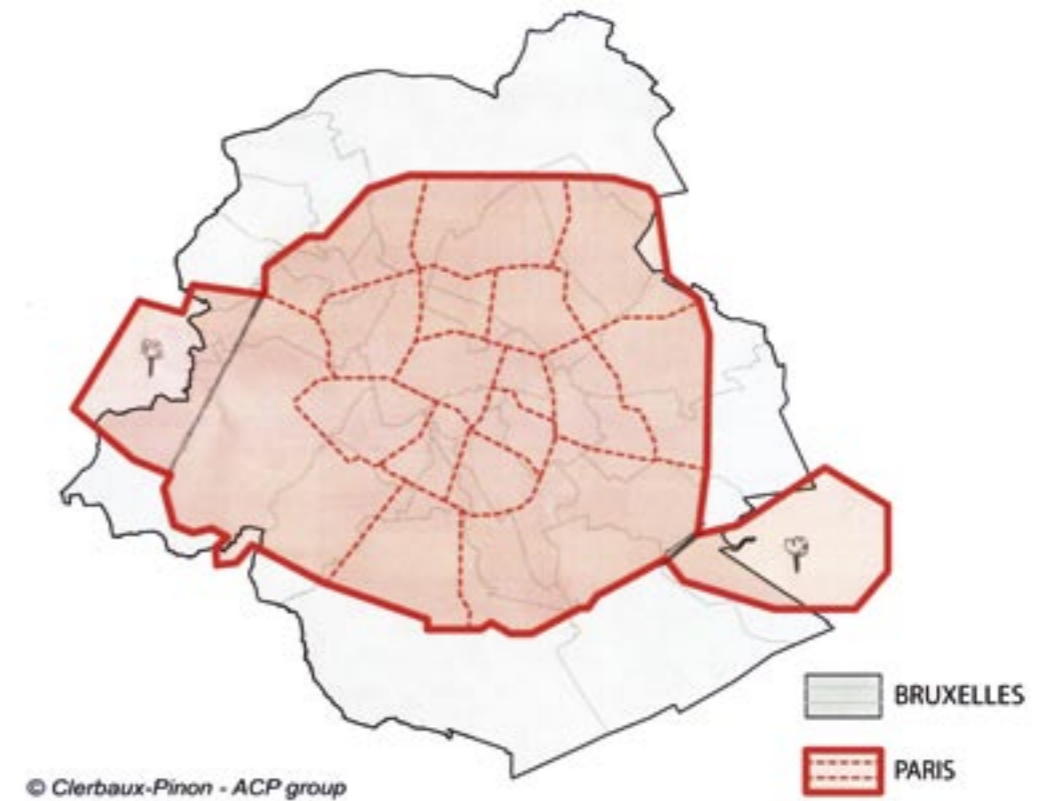


ILLUSTRATION 2: Overlay map of Paris 87 sq kilometres (without the Bois) and Brussels 160 sq kilometres.

“BRUSSELS: A MULTICULTURAL PIVOT FOR A EUROPE OF CULTURES”

In: *Bozar Architecture – A Vision for Brussels – Opinions*, Berlage Institute, 2007.

The European Quarter occupies some 3% of Brussels-Capital Region’s territory, which totals 160 sq. km. Its origin is the 1958 offer of the Belgian Government to its European partners: it concerned the residential area bordering the Cinquantenaire Park, a site which was eventually extended towards Leopold Park and the Luxemburg railway station.

That whole quarter and particularly the Berlaymont building focused international attention on Brussels as Europe’s political capital but it also created an image of bureaucratic boredom, which ignored the rich cultural diversity of the nearby existing neighbourhoods.

Fifty years have elapsed since the decision on the original location. Since 1992 the status of Brussels within the network of European institutions host cities has been confirmed. The time has come for a fresh assessment of the European Quarter and its future, as well as that of other areas that could accommodate further clusters of European activity.

The European Quarter could be improved by giving a new quality to its public space, reopening lost vistas towards the Cinquantenaire Arcades and the Leopold Park, attracting a residential population wishing to live close to its work, improving pedestrian mobility within the area and improving the relation with the surrounding residential neighbourhoods. Indeed, the

Brussels European Quarter is located within the urban fabric and not in remote outskirts, as is the case with NATO Headquarters.

Other areas in the Region would be well suited as future clusters of European activities, mixed with other uses, in particular the areas around Delta and Josaphat stations, which already host European activities. This would give Brussels the opportunity to receive new agencies, as advocated by the European Commission’s Vice President Kallas in his foreword to the book of the Foundation for the Urban Environment “Brussels: Perspectives on a European capital” (Pierre Laconte and Carola Hein eds).

Finally Brussels is not only a political capital of a European Economic Union also a multicultural pivot for a Europe of Cultures. The six-monthly shift of the European Council of Ministers’ presidency opens a wide field of cross-cultural activities centred on the titular country and enriching the Belgian and other European regions through an array of cultural events.

Pierre LACONTE

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