



Belgian Country Report

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for an Overall Review and Appraisal of
the Implementation of the Outcome of the
UN Conference on Human Settlements
(Habitat II)**



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Louvain-la-Neuve - A Traditional New Town in the 20th Century

UNDERGROUND CENTRAL STATION:

The new university town is build along a high density - low rise core pedestrian street. From 1972 each phase of development has been self-contained as if there would be no further one. The Centre of the development (insaugured in 1976) was planned around an underground station giving access to Brussels in 25 minutes. The photograph shows the lower level (road ans rail) and the buildings above.

In 1968, the academic authorities of the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) were asked to move the university out of the Dutch-speaking town of Louvain (Leuven) where it had been founded in 1425 and to find a location in the French-speaking part of the country. Instead of creating a new campus the UCL, under the leadership of its general administrator Prof. M. Woltrin, chose to develop an integrated new university town and acquired to this effect 1000 hectares of agriculture land in the municipality of Ottignies, some 25 km south-east from Brussels. The main idea was to foster town-and-gown interaction by attracting a strong non-university resident population as was the case in the town of Louvain.



The land acquisition took place on the open market through different agents, with the help of a low-interest loan from the State. The UCL appointed the Groupe Urbanisme Architecture (R. Lemaire, J.P. Blondel and P. Laconte) to draw the master plan of the new town (called Louvain-la-Neuve i.e. New Louvain) and co-ordinate its development and architecture.

Considerable flexibility was to be maintained in view of the uncertainty about the future urban growth, as only the university buildings were receiving State grants while housing and shops were to be developed through the private property market. This flexibility was achieved by structuring the entire new town along a strong linear backbone and implementing it by successive self-contained phases. The master plan was approved in 1970, and the first self-contained phase came into use in 1972. This master plan received the 1982 Abercrombie Award of the International Union of

ABOVE THE STATION:

A traditional pedestrian market place lined by contemporary architecture.



Architects. It was also presented as a good practice by Belgium at Habitat I (1976).

The linear backbone is made of a long pedestrian main street and a succession of piazzas with shops, restaurants and cultural facilities and (since 1976) a new central underground railway station, paid for by the State. Automobile access to the buildings is by peripheral roads and underpasses. Parking is peripheral or located under the buildings. The new rail link has put Louvain-La-Neuve at less than 30 min. from the centre of Brussels, which has strongly helped to attract non-university resident population, which is by now (2001) higher than the one linked to the university.

The residential areas are made of rows of single-family houses, maisonettes and low-rise apartment buildings. This design option also applies to the university buildings. The master plan allows for the parallel growth of urban services and population according to the response of the housing market. The total day occupancy is about 24,000 people (about 100 per built-up ha).

The close propinquity (less than 1 km radius) of most of the University buildings, housing and the associated social facilities, shops and restaurants, means that contacts are more effectively encouraged than by any organised procedure and that automobile transportation is extremely reduced inside the town. The whole concept actually maximises the use of non-motorised transport. The "high-density low-rise" option also meant dividing the site into small plots (200 to 400 m²). All categories of contractors could tender for both the residential and the university buildings, effectively discouraging cartel formation and keeping prices down. Besides its unusual compactness and the fact that all wooded parts of the site have been land marked the Louvain-la-Neuve

A VIEW OF THE PEDESTRIAN CORE STREET:

The street winds through each part of the town and is made of piazzas, terraced cafés, commerce and culture. The upper floors are reserved for apartments.



PASSAGE THROUGH A BLOCK: *The high density - low rise concept includes numerous pedestrian ways under arcades or through buildings.*

development has several pioneering ecological features. These include a double water collection system by which all rain water is collected separately towards an artificial lake located at the lowest part of the site. This lake has become a key amenity for residential development around it.

By contrast to the main design features the master plan provides for a central district made of a large concrete slab (some 3 hectares) covering the railway station, two layers of underground parking and the underground access to the shops and services situated along the central part of the linear pedestrian backbone (see illustration). The land remains in the hands of the University and the air rights are shared between the National Railway Company (railway station), the Bank of municipalities (underground parking space), private developers (commercial space) and the University itself (for the university buildings located on the slab). The space for shopping and leisure in the central district of Louvain-la-Neuve will be considerably increased as a result of the project Esplanade (see illustration). It is to be built on university land by a private developer (agreement signed in 1999).

