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The role of the integrated conservation of cultural heritage for a creative, resilient and sustainable city

ACTA of the ICOMOS - CIVVIH Symposium, Naples 2012

edited by Teresa Colletta

Much of the current debate on how we should preserve our cultural heritage revolves around urban sites, historic districts, historical towns, but especially in the historical core of the big cities. Old cities conservation are much more difficult than the restoration of individual historical monuments, not only because of the quantity of physical structures to be rehabilitated, but mainly because cities are living organisms, with a complexity of human and functional, social and economical aspects. The cultural urban heritage is not made of built entities only. It may encompass crafts, art works, traditional trade and religious activities and may be intangible: a diversified population that is sometimes fragile often ill known inhabits old cities. All this complexity contributes to the peculiarity of historical old cities as a whole. The central question of the debate is: are there any actual examples from urban heritage sites worldwide to demonstrate key issues and best practices in the integrated conservation of the urban heritage of historical cities' core and their urban historic landscape today?

The book offers a comprehensive overview of the intellectual development in urban conservation in the 21 century on the basis of the evolution and operational context of urban management and the development of local urban conservation policies and practices by ICOMOS (International Council of Monuments and Sites) "experts".

The book collects the papers presented at the International Symposium of the ICOMOS - CIVVIH (International Scientific Committee in Historical Towns and Villages) in Naples in the September 2012 and focus on the integrated conservation and on the managing of urban historical landscape heritage through case histories of good practices in different countries of the world. In this way we have the possibility to study the creativity in the safeguard and rehabilitation of the historical towns and what an opportunity cultural tourism is for the historical towns sustainable development.

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The historic city as model for sustainable urban extensions: case histories

by Pierre Laconte*

1. Introduction

At a time of growing concern for resource depletion, in particular fossil fuel, energy price increase and economic slowdown, an innovative approach to urban extensions using the lessons of historic towns planning makes sense.

It includes lower energy consuming urban forms, lower requirement for motorised transport, achieved through higher density urban forms and shorter distances between activities, while putting emphasis on urban identity and quality of life through enhancement of architectural heritage.

The presentation illustrates these concepts through case histories.

2. Sustainable long term urban extensions: historical examples

The extension of the city beyond its original cradle has been a preoccupation of planners from the beginning of open urbanisation as opposed to the fortified towns. A pioneering Renaissance achievement in building an open town extension without destroying the Middle-age town was Ferrara, as planned by Architect-Planner Biagio Rossetti.

In Rome the Sixtus V Plan (1585-1590) achieved an organisational structure that allowed a linear urban growth along three main directions, starting from the present-day Piazza del Popolo and its obelisk: Via del Corso, Via Ripetta and Via del Babuino. The map of Nolli (1748) shows how this plan organised orderly extensions over a long period (Bacon 1967).

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Fig.1.The Sixtus V Plan of Rome created an organisational structure for linear growth in three directions.

In Berlin the Friedrichstadt masterplan (Friedrich Wilhelm I. - 1691) achieved a similar organisational structure that started at the present Mehringenplatz and allowed a linear growth in three directions, mainly Friedrichstrasse, independently from the Old Town of Coelln (Schwenk 1988).

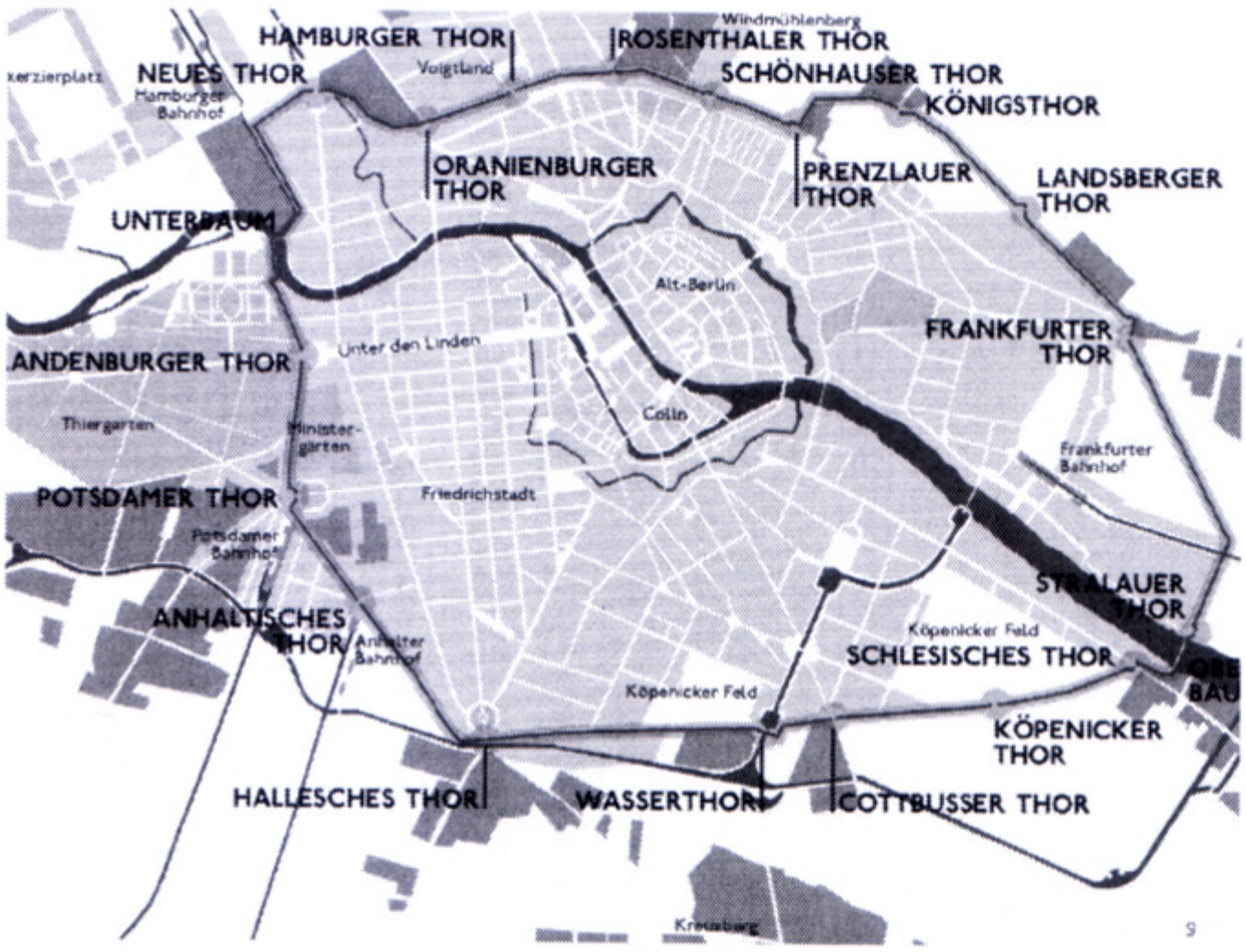

Fig. 2.The Friedrichstadt master plan similarly allows a long term linear urban growth, next to the existing middle-age town of Coelln.

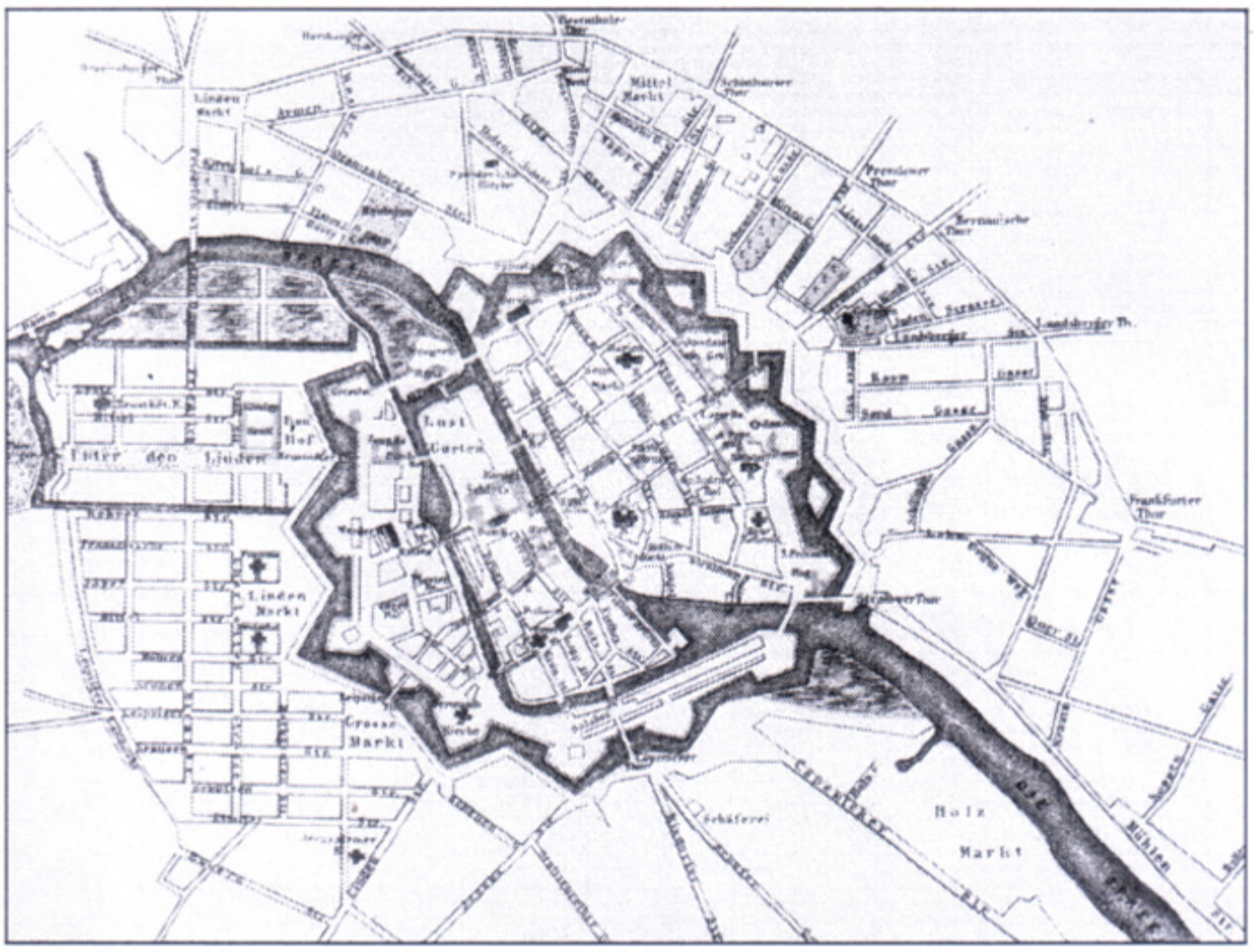

Fig.3. The new Schloss provided the buffer between the new town and the old town.

In Amsterdam the middle-age merchant city developed southwards from the Port but faced with the flow of immigrants from Flanders the Municipality decided to design from scratch an extension modelled on the old town. This plan was implemented over some three hundred years. It has become a world heritage site (Laconte 2012).

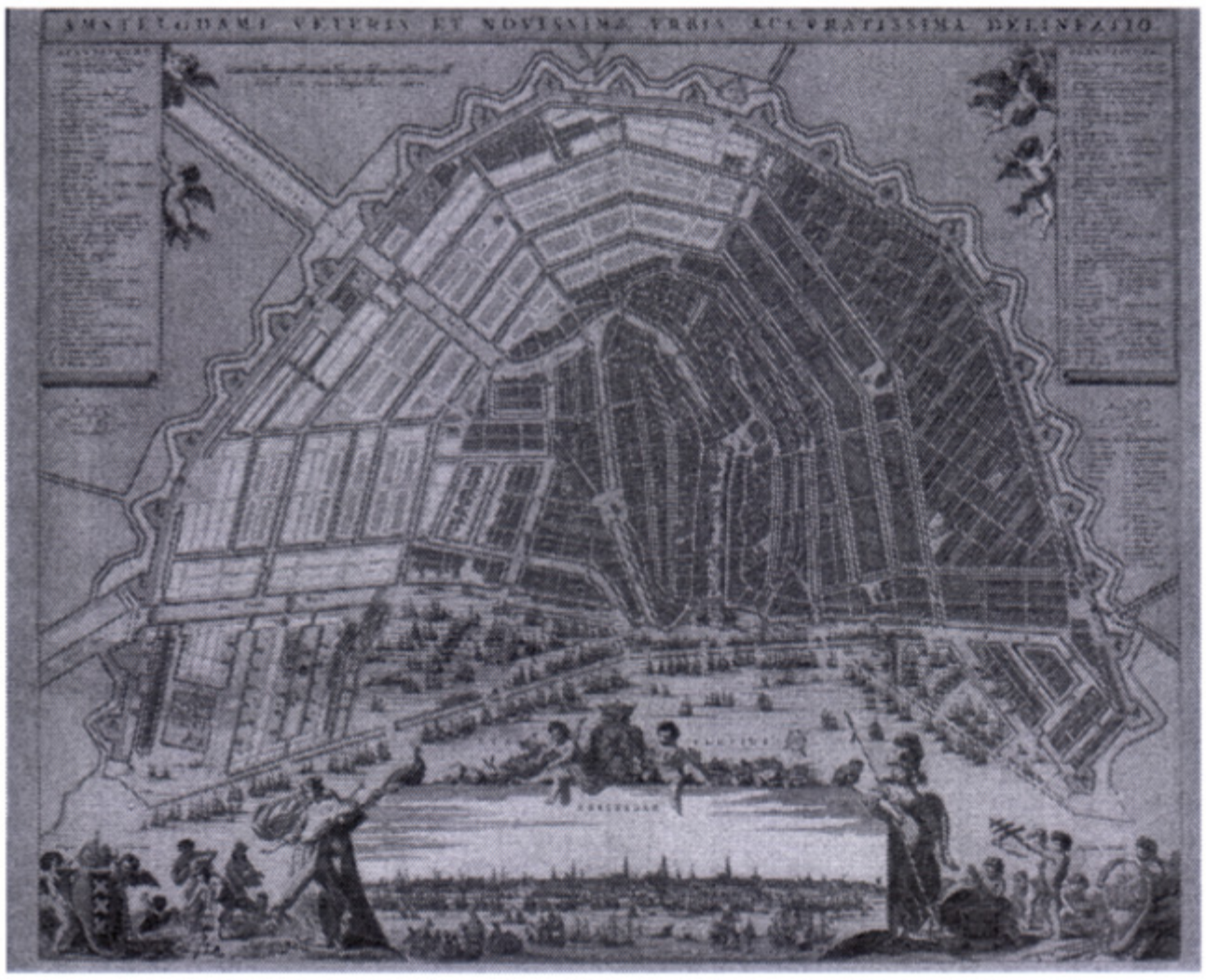

Fig. 4. The ambitious development plan of 1633 surrounded the old town by a triple circle of canals and connecting streets.

In Copenhagen the Middle age city narrow streets and small plots pattern was preserved and made pedestrian. The extension took place according to a linear pattern, along new tram lines ("Finger Plan").

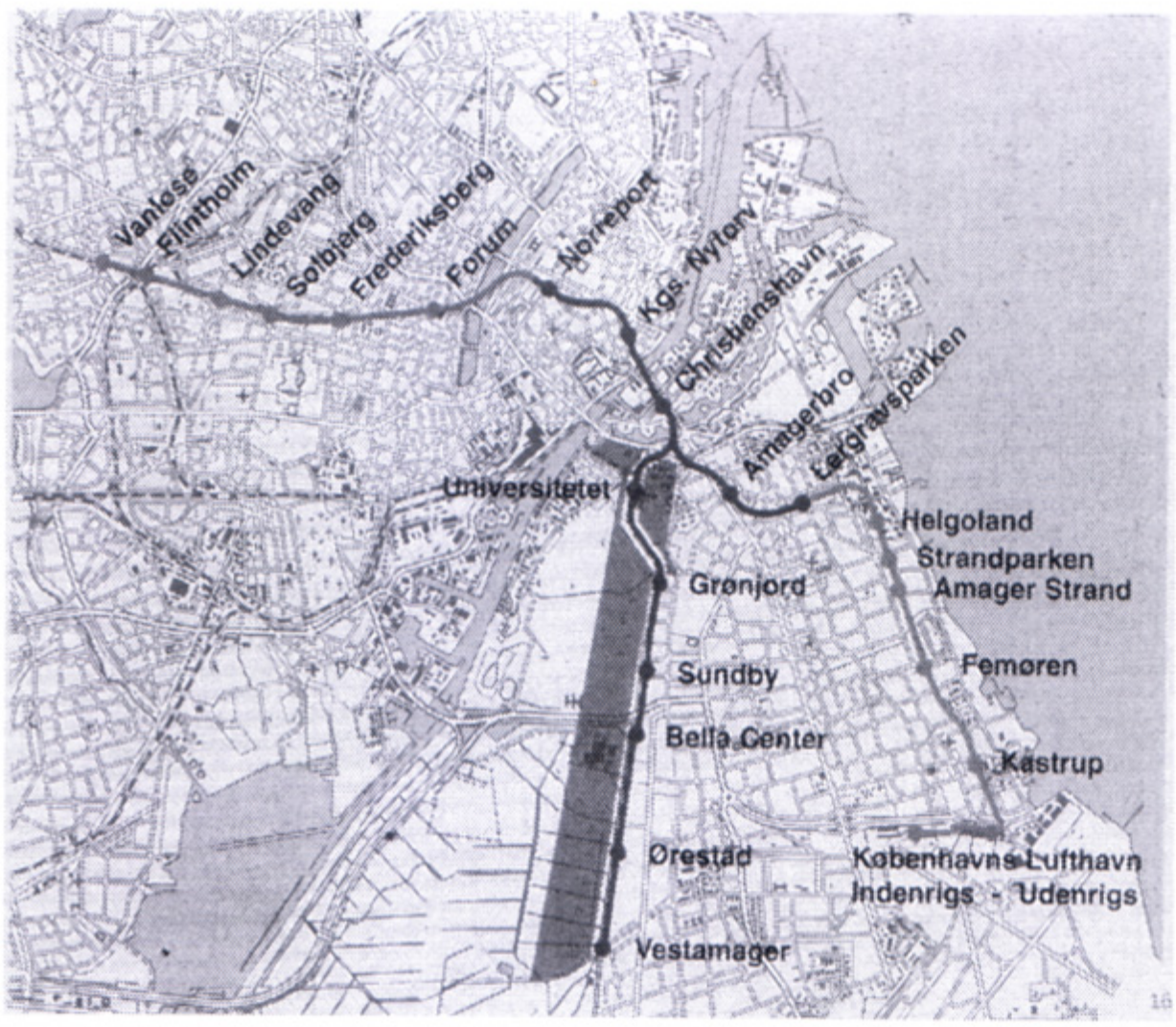

Fig.5. Urban extensions took place according to a linear pattern, along new tram lines ("Finger Plan")

3. Sustainable new urban development using the historic city as a model

The new university town of New Louvain ("Louvain-la-Neuve") was developed from scratch on an agriculture site. Its master plan made direct reference to the old university towns, in particular the university town of Louvain. It is in a way an urban extension. The street pattern and circular fortifications of Louvain were replaced by a linear growth pattern. Sustainability was achieved through keeping the spine exclusively for pedestrians and bicycles, saving space and energy. A succession of piazzas plated with trees ensure variety of urban landscapes. The development of the site started from the existing trunk road, east of the site, extending towards the west. The first phase, opened in 1972, included a piazza with shops, apartments and restaurants in addition to the faculty buildings. From 1976 a new sunken railway station started its operation and the "Place de l'Université", located next to it, became the focal point of the development (Laconte 2009b). From that point urban development took place on a slab that took advantage of the undulating terrain.

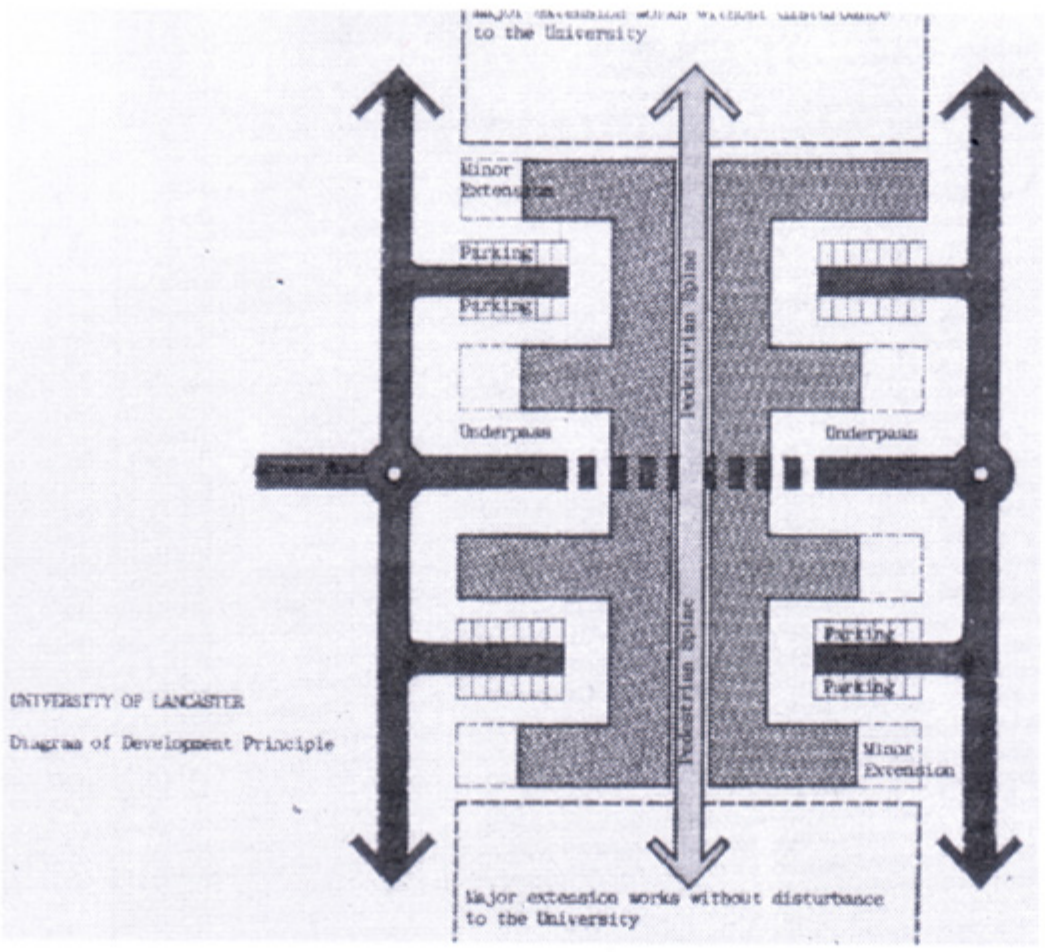

Fig. 6. Schematic diagram of linear development along a pedestrian spine as applied in Lancaster University and Louvain-la-Neuve.

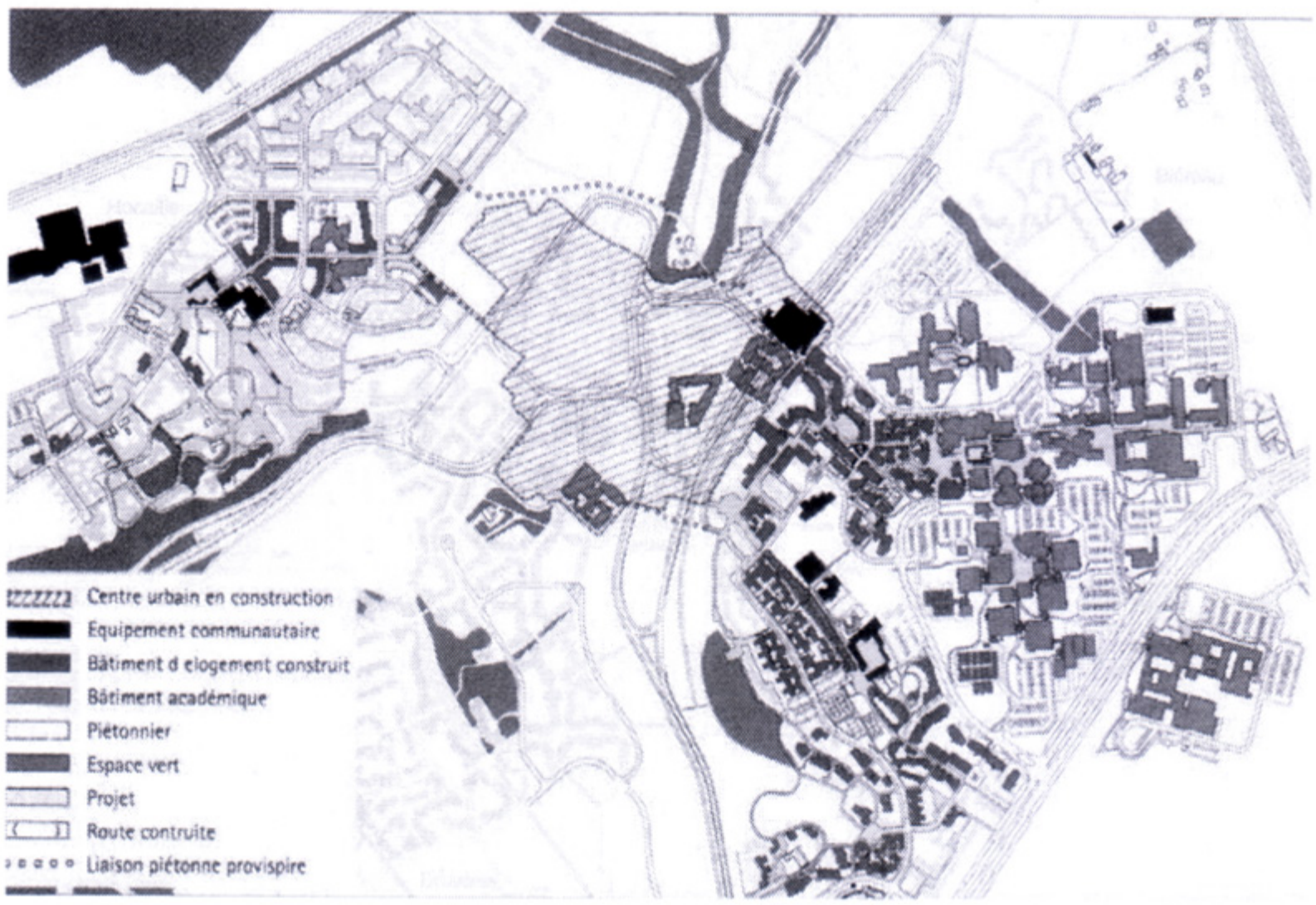

Fig.7. Overall development plan showing the east-west pedestrian spine, the railway station and the slab (ca 3 ha). The pedestrian spine extends further west towards the sports center.

Fig.8. View of the station from the tracks. The tracks are to be covered by a shopping centre extension.

Fig.9. View of the Station entrance from the pedestrian spine. The spine seamlessly switches from natural ground to a slab.

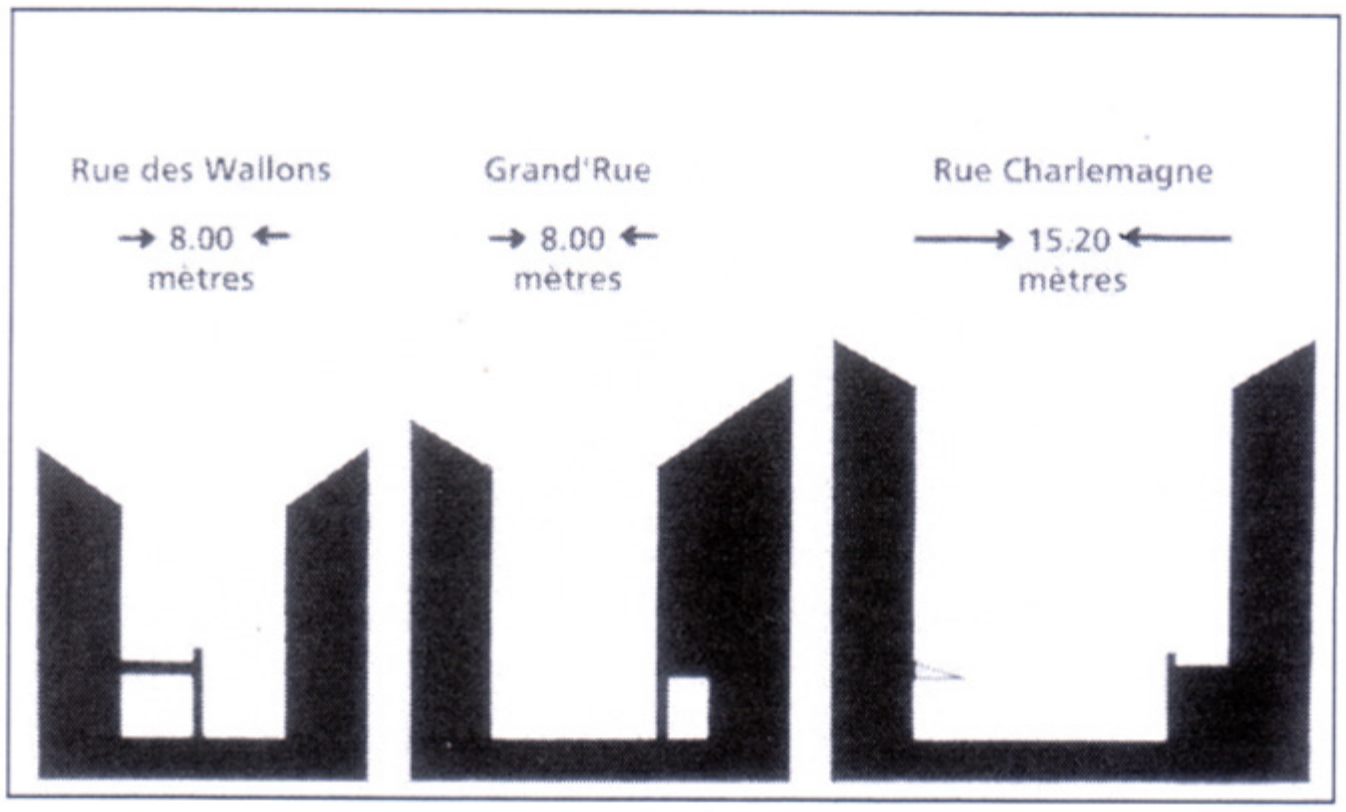

Fig.10. The street pattern is characterised by high density-low rise narrow streets and. interlocking courts and piazzas.

Fig.11. Piazzas are multipurpose and planted with trees, making the city "compact and green".

3. Conclusion

This limited number of examples suggests that innovative approaches to urban extensions needed to meet the demographic pressure can make some use of the lessons drawn from historic towns planning extensions. Town planning extension may include leapfrogging in new areas or altogether new planned unit developments.

Fig.12. Lateral extensions along the spine are hosting a diversified urban architecture such as the Hergé (Tintin) Museum, by Arch de Portzamparc (Paris).

Fig.13. Quest for sustainability includes a dual water collection network. Storm water is collected in a lake. His lake acts both a reservoir, protection, against floods and amenity.

Three millennia of urban history have possibly more to teach us than some 80 years of urban functionalism for finding solutions to the requirements for new settlements.

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