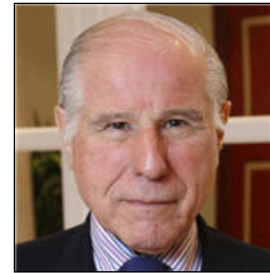


FROM THE HERITAGE CITY OF LOUVAIN/LEUVEN TO THE NEW LOUVAIN UNIVERSITY TOWN

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Abstract

The historic Flemish city of Leuven (Louvain in French), was a major centre of the textile industry in the middle ages. It suffered industrial decline, leading to urban renewal in 1425 through the creation of a university.

The Louvain/Leuven cultural heritage of high density mixed residential, commercial and university buildings is well preserved, inter alia the “Beguinage”, an urban area of small houses and gardens for single old women, gradually abandoned and renewed in the 60’s to house university staff (World Heritage inscription 1988).

Belgium’s language conflict led to the French-speaking section of the university, its staff and students moving out of Leuven into the French-speaking part of the country. The university choose to create a completely new university town, and bought in 1968 920 hectares of farmland, less than 30 km from both Leuven and Brussels, on which to build a “New Louvain”.

This new university town aimed from the start at reproducing the Leuven university and urban mix, being therefore both a “place of memory” and a place for contemporary university planning and architecture (Abercrombie Award of the International Union of Architects 1978).

The two cities are connected since 1975 by a direct train line. In 2016 the two cities decided to twin, while the two universities jointly organised the 500th anniversary commemoration of Thomas More’ “Utopia”, a world cultural landmark published in Louvain/Leuven in 1516, and are developing various common projects.

The objective of the paper is to explain both the cultural heritage preservation of historic Leuven and the planning process of the new Louvain. Both are aiming at sustainability, in particular through high density-low rise design, rail public transport-oriented development, and reserving streets and public spaces for pedestrians. The new town has gone as far as reserving all of its public space to pedestrians. All building development there takes place through long term leases, allowing the university to keep control of the construction quality.

To summarise the main features:

- The new Louvain aimed at both architectural innovation and urban design inspired by the old Louvain/Leuven.
- Sustainability and economy concerns led to a linear form of development along a pedestrian spine and a string of small squares, of a fully pedestrian town centre, a priority given to rail transport - thanks to the National Railways investing in a new underground railway station.
- The linear pedestrian spine has been the backbone for the development of both university faculties, residential/commercial neighbourhoods, a Museum and a shopping mall directly linked to the railway station. In some 45 years Belgium’s only new town has become its fastest growing urban service centre of Belgium.
- Storm water is collected into a reservoir, treated as a lake.

Keywords: *historic-cities, development, university, density, adaptive-reuse.*

1. The location of the old City of Louvain/Leuven and the new Louvain.

Central Belgium is a highly urbanised area, Brussels being the centre of a metropolitan region including the cities of Antwerp, Ghent Bruges and Louvain/Leuven to its north and the cities of Charleroi, Nivelles, Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve (as a result of its development) and Wavre to its south. Most of them are within commuting distance of each other and from Brussels (LACONTE 2007).

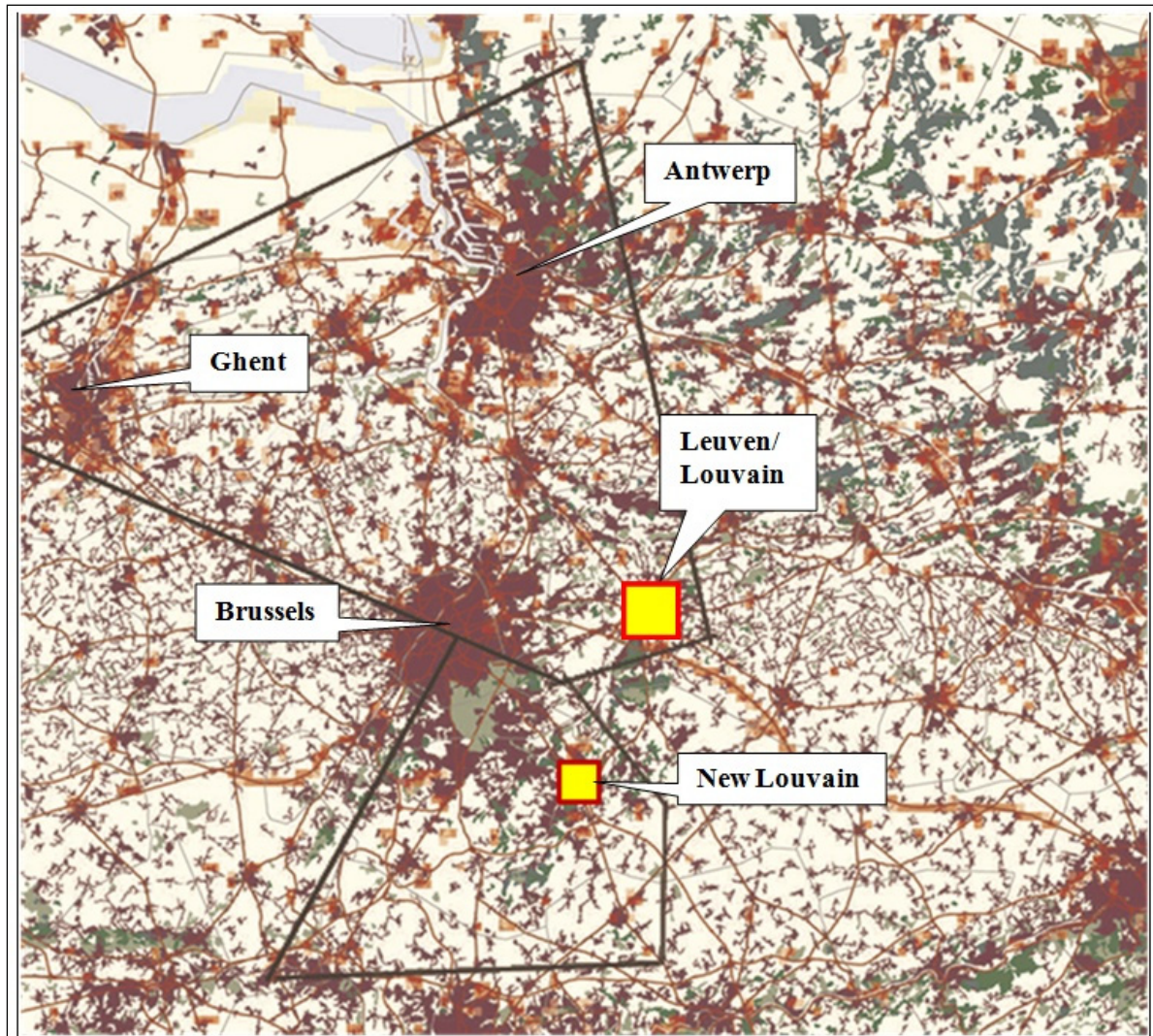


Fig. 1. Satellite map showing the urbanised area of central Belgium, around Brussels. Antwerp lies 50 km to the north, Ghent 60 km to the west and Louvain/Leuven 25 km to the East of central Brussels, in the Flemish region and form a kind of diamond (lined in black). The loose conurbation south of Brussels forms a kind of triangle. The Louvain new town has been located in that part of the Walloon region, at less than 30 km south of central Brussels (lined in black). The university bought 920 ha farm land, in view of building on it a complete town. The historic Old Louvain/Leuven - East of Brussels - and the New Louvain university town - South of Brussels - are shown on the map by yellow squares.

2. Development of the City of Louvain /Leuven and its university.

As most cities in the early middle-ages the city of Louvain/Leuven developed at a river-road crossing used by the merchant's caravans. These « merchant cities » formed a maze some 30 km apart, corresponding to the distance caravans covered in one day. Within the Duchy of Brabant Louvain/Leuven and Brussels emerged as the most powerful cities. In 1312 Duke Jan II, under financial pressure, obtained consent from the people of

Brabant to raise the level of taxes, in return for a charter. This charter guaranteed the rights of citizens, in line with the English Magna Carta, created a Council with dual representation (of cities and citizens) and introduced the impeachment, i.e. the deposition of the Duke if he would not respect the charter. It was thus a forerunner of modern constitutions. The charter was signed in the abbey of Kortenberg, located between the rival cities of Brussels and Louvain/Leuven, and is known as the Charter of Kortenberg.



Fig. 2. Louvain/Leuven market place, location of the former cloth market that became the university's headquarters in 1425. The center of the city was largely destroyed during the first World War and reconstructed in the 1920's, preserving the old street pattern and cadastral plot division.

The prosperity of the city was mainly based on its textile industry. In the 15th Century it went into decline because of international competition and reinvented itself by obtaining a papal decree authorising the creation of a university, in line with the papal creation of Bologna, Paris, Oxford, Heidelberg and Krakow, among others. The disused cloth market hall was adapted for reuse as the university headquarters.

The university became one of the great European universities. In 1516 Thomas More published his celebrated "Utopia" in Louvain/Leuven. The original university teaching language was Latin, later French and Dutch, in separate sections.

Louvain/Leuven was very heavily damaged in 1914 by German troops, when they forced their way through Belgium, notwithstanding its fierce resistance, and occupied the entire country (except for a small coastal area) until 1918.

After the war reconstruction took place, respecting most of the former street pattern. The style of the new buildings reflected the different styles of former centuries, but kept an overall coherence. This was criticised at the time as an imitation of the past rather than a bold step towards the future. Only at the end of the 20th century was the quality of this way of planning and building recognised internationally.

Within old Louvain/Leuven the Groot Begijnhof/Grand Béguinage, located south of the town centre, is of particular interest.

It was a large neighbourhood occupied by single ladies ("beguines") who could not afford the market cost of housing. It was a "social housing" estate before this term existed.



Fig. 3. The Groot Begijnhof/Grand Béguinage of Leuven. The Beguinage neighbourhood (ca 3 ha) has the appearance of a small town on its own right, with houses planned along a network of narrow streets and small squares. This is in contrast to the beguinages of Bruges or Amsterdam, where houses face a central courtyard. The only large open space, on the left bank of the river, resulted from the demolition of some houses in the 19th century (see photo). Photo RLICC 2016.

The majority of the houses date from the middle of the 17th century. They were constructed in the traditional local architectural style, enriched with some sober baroque elements. The facades are of red bricks with sandstone transoms and frames for windows and doors. As seen in the photo there are numerous dormers, often decorated with crow-stepped gables and round arched windows.

Some houses were replaced or constructed in the 19th century, but fewer than in other Flemish beguinages. Most of the beguines left in the 20th century because of the provision of more comfortable public housing, but although the area became dilapidated, it was perfectly fit for adaptive reuse.

This adaptive reuse was achieved by transforming the entire Beguinage into housing for university staff and students, equipped with modern appliances but totally respecting the dense urban character of the neighbourhood. It was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1988.

This masterly neighbourhood restoration was directed by historian of architecture Raymond Lemaire, who also became famous for other large-scale restorations, such as the temples of Borobudur in Indonesia, and for the creation in 1964, together with Piero Gazzola, of the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). He was teaching in both the Dutch- and in French-speaking sections of the university. This was common practice in Louvain/Leuven, as in other bilingual cities such as Bolzano/Boson in Italy, Neuchâtel or Biel/Bienne in Switzerland, or Turku/Abo in Finland.

The gradual suppression of the French language in the Flemish region led to the banning of the French-speaking section of the University from Louvain/Leuven in 1968. This was the tipping point that led to the need to create a new French-speaking university.

Raymond Lemaire continued teaching in both universities and created within Leuven university the “Raymond Lemaire International Centre for Conservation” (RLICC). This centre is located in the historic Arenberg Castle belonging to the university and has both research and training activities. Its president is Minja Yang (Japan), former Deputy Director, UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Director UNESCO New Delhi Office.



Fig. 4. Arenberg Castle. The historic Arenberg castle houses the Raymond Lemaire international Center for Conservation, Leuven University (RLICC). The RLICC photo shows the 2016-2017 group of trainees.

3. Development of the new French-speaking university and its urban context, inspired by the old city of Louvain/Leuven.

Within central Belgium, the historic town of Louvain/Leuven is the original seat of Louvain university. The languages used in teaching until 1968 were French and Dutch. In that year the French-speaking university (UCL) had to leave the de facto bilingual City, because it was located in the Dutch-speaking part of the country, and to find a new location in the French-speaking part.

Facing this situation the French-speaking university had the option to locate in the officially bilingual district of Brussels-Capital, where it owned land, but the majority of its board wanted it to locate in the French-only Walloon region. Attempts to locate in existing Walloon cities did not materialise. At this point the university board - on a proposal by its general administrator Prof. M. Woitrin - accepted the invitation of the small municipality of Ottignies (4.000 inhabitants) to settle at the edge of its territory. It bought a 920 tract of farming land 27 km south-east of Brussels, and, rather than building an isolated campus, it decided to construct a new town, making use of the university's annual grants as equity. The central part of the site was set aside for high density – low rise development, and all forest land was preserved (Fig. 5).

Urban development of a wholly university-owned site met with opposition from the Belgian government, which preferred an isolated monofunctional campus such as the one adopted by the Liège university (FRANKIGNOULLE 2012). It enacted a special law (24 July 1969) that forbade universities to sell land they had acquired with subsidies to non-university users. The university escaped from this law by granting long term leases (“erfpacht”) instead of selling land outright. The leases are sold with a right for the buyer to start the lease again.

Continuity of UCL ownership proved beneficial to the implementation of the masterplan as it ensured the land owner's ability to preserve its initial planning objectives in the long term (LACONTE 2013).

The leases were initially granted to individuals and small developers and contractors. In later phases larger tracts were leased, e.g. for the shopping mall and for mixed used developments.

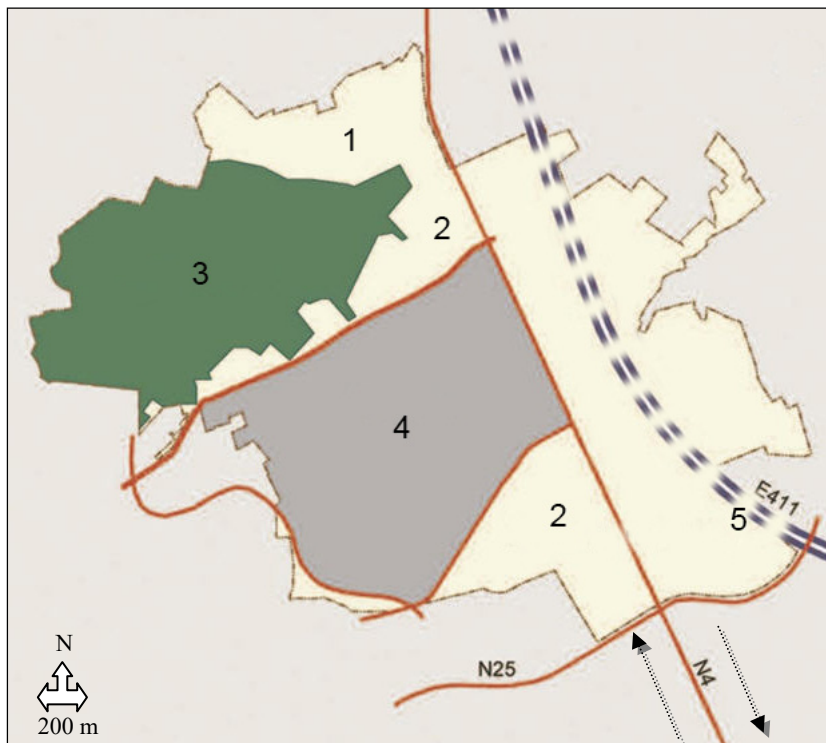


Fig. 5. The 920 ha of land acquired by the university in 1969 (“Domaine de l’université”). The arrow shows the anchoring of the new town on the only existing infrastructure, i.e. the N4 road linking Brussels to Namur and Luxemburg. The E411 motorway did not exist at that time and is shown by dotted lines. Dense mixed-use urban development (“Aire urbaine”) was restricted to the central part of the site (4). The northern area in green (“Bois de Lauzelle”) was reserved as forest (3). The area east of it and south of the dense urban development became a research and development park (2). The area north of the forest was developed as a golf course (1). The area east of the N4 road became extensions of the research and development park. Drawing by the author, based on the local cadastral map.

4. From the Victor Gruen Associates master plan (1968) to the master plan by “Groupe Urbanisme Architecture” (1970).

Having opted for building a new town in the fields, the university board decided - at the suggestion of its general administrator Prof. M. Woitrin - to hire the established international planning firm Victor Gruen Associates (Los Angeles), a pioneer of American shopping malls, to draw up its master plan.

The Gruen Associates master plan, which was based on functional considerations, included a large central air-conditioned mall surmounted by high-rise buildings. All infrastructure had to be built before any part of the plan could be brought into use, entailing a large up-front investment cost.

The Gruen master plan was presented to the university board and the university community in September 1968 and rejected by a large majority of the university’s members.

At that point the university board decided - in October 1968 - to entrust the master plan and architectural coordination of the new town to an interdisciplinary team recruited by the board itself. This team, called “Groupe Urbanisme-Architecture” (Groupe UA) was jointly headed by:

- R. Lemaire, specialist of historic towns, who was in charge of the Leuven Beguinage restoration,
- J-P. Blondel, Architect-planner from the Brussels Free University, and
- P. Laconte, urban economist, former head of staff at the Brabant Government for the Brussels-Capital structure plan and planning appeals.

Within the “Groupe Urbanisme-Architecture” R. Lemaire was in charge of the coordination between architects appointed for the individual buildings. J-P Blondel was in charge of the daily management of the staff. P. Laconte was in charge of the relations with the political and administrative authorities related to the project’s rail and road infrastructure, water management and the planning permits.

The new Groupe UA master plan was adopted by the university on 15 October 1970 (GROUPE 1970) and has been the guiding framework ever since. It embraces the model of traditional university towns, in particular Louvain/Leuven.

The Groupe UA took its inspiration not only from medieval universities but also from the garden cities developed in the UK in the early 20th century (Letchworth and Welwyn Garden City). It relied on the millennial experience of successful multifunctional cities and neighbourhoods, rather than on a few decades of functionalism and spatial separation of functions, generating the need for motorised transportation to linking them.

The expertise of the university faculties was made available for the legal issues and the engineering projects related to infrastructure, forest and water management, long-term leases and municipal finance.

The general administration department of development and management (“Service de promotion et de gestion urbaine”) was in charge of the implementation of planning decisions, in particular the supervision of the platform. Its coordination was handled by J-M Lechat from 1974 till 1997. Property development and relations with developers are handled since 1972 by the Institute for site development (INESU) headed by Philippe Barras since 2007.

A major feature of the new town is a central linear pedestrian spine, a concept pioneered among others by the University of Lancaster in England (EPSTEIN 2009). It allowed a step-by-step development, with automobile access to buildings and parking space located outside the spine, with occasional underpasses. Each phase of development included a mix of urban functions, allowing it to be put into operation immediately, unhindered by works on extensions. The total length of the spine is around one and a half km, as illustrated by Jean Remy (REMY 2008, page 133).

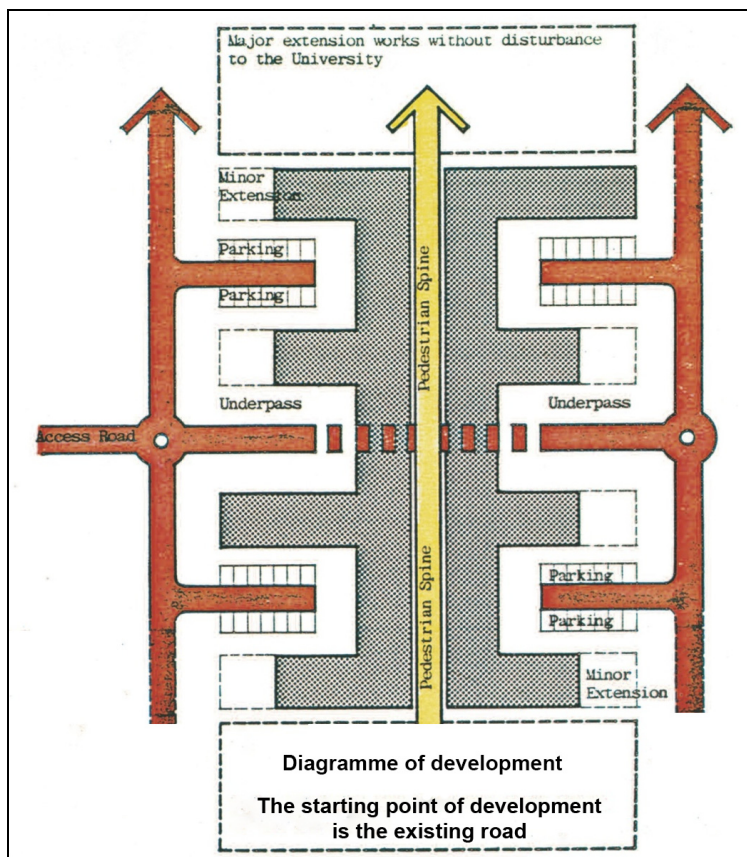


Fig. 6. Diagramme of development. Linear development, along a pedestrian spine, allows the most flexible form of urban development (“stop and go”). In the case of Louvain the initial development started from the existing N4 road and extended along the spine from east to west, an adaptation of the linear development designed by G. Epstein in 1964 for the University of Lancaster (EPSTEIN 2009).

This pedestrian linear option allowed savings to be made in land take and in the cost of initial road infrastructure investment but, more importantly, it favoured informal contacts among people.

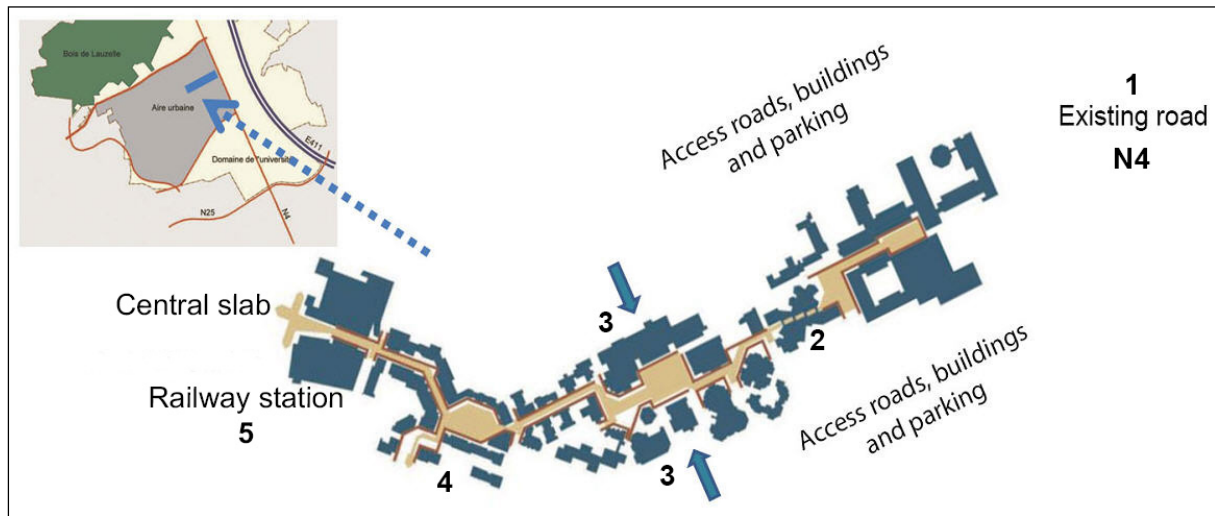


Fig. 7. The first phase pedestrian spine. The Eastern starting point is the existing N4 road (1), followed by a string of public spaces and passages through buildings, indicated by dots (2). The diagram shows the location of access roads and parking lots. The arrows indicate the automobile underpass under the “Place des Sciences”(3). The piazzas have different shapes and their street access is either perpendicular or tangential (4). The sub-surface railway station (5) marks the beginning of the underground slab (see fig. 5). Drawing by the author, based on the Groupe UA masterplan.

The concept of a main central pedestrian spine was translated into actual urban design as a string of public spaces, starting from the existing road to the east of the site (Fig. 7). It came into operation in 1972 (see the eastern part of the site), and was later extended to the railway station opened in 1975, and from there to the future centre of the city, and to the western part of the site. These spaces have different shapes and their street access is either perpendicular or tangential (LACONTE 1980).

This string of spaces has been compared with the old Florence string of piazzas by Piet Lombaerde (LOMBAERDE 1977 & 1978).

Car access to buildings and parking is located outside the spine, with an underpass for cars. Outdoor parking space was treated from the start as a public garden. All open air parking spaces are planted with different tree species in order to attract a variety of birds, as a tribute to biodiversity (landscape architect: J.-N. Capart). They have in fact become an ornithological reserve.

The centre of the first phase was the Science Library, an iconic concrete building seen as the cathedral of a university town, with its public square (“Place des sciences”) built above an automobile underpass. For some 45 years it has been a place for informal gatherings, with university buildings, shops and restaurants, conceived by the architect A. Jacqmain, of the Ateliers d’Architectes de Genval (JACQMAIN 2009).

In 2015 the same team of architects was entrusted with a facelift of the string of public spaces west of the “Place des sciences”, to be implemented by 2018. The science library will move to the general library of the university and the building is to be converted by 2017 into “Musée L”, new museum of the Louvain university.



Fig. 8. The science library piazza (“Place des sciences”). This concrete and wood piazza is the main gathering place of the first phase. It includes access to an underpass and to underground parking. Photo by the author, taken in 2015.

A new station was built by the national railway company SNCB/NMBS in 1975. The railway station provides a direct rail link to central Brussels in 35 minutes, and is to be expanded as part of Brussels’ new S-Bahn fast commuter rail network (LACONTE 2014). It is entirely below ground. Open air tracks are to be covered at a later stage. The full development of the spine included a central slab covering the lower part of the site. Besides the railway tracks it hosts access by car, underground public parking, delivery services and storage.

5. Property development along the pedestrian spine and the central slab.

On each side of the long pedestrian spine and of the central slab, mixed use neighbourhoods have been built by a large range of individual investors, in accordance with the 1970 master plan. The Groupe UA favoured small plots (100 to 200 m², including terrace housing and small gardens) and low rise apartment buildings. These were cheaper than large apartment blocks, as they could be built by small contractors. They have proved very popular (MASBOUNGI 2012) and have quickly attracted a diverse population.

As a result, from an early stage the resident population has been composed of people attracted by the environmental quality and the cultural activities generated by the university, rather than mainly of university employees or resident students. Today the town’s 12,000 permanent residents not connected to the university are in a large majority (UCL 2014).

The new sub-surface railway station put into service in 1975 opened up the possibility of developing a network of pedestrian streets at ground level, while allowing car and parking access underneath. The diagram (Fig. 5) shows how the slab uses the lowest part of the dry valley (ca 10 ha, i.e. ca 1 % of the site).

The ground under the slab remains the property of the university, while the infrastructure and buildings are leased for up to 99 years.

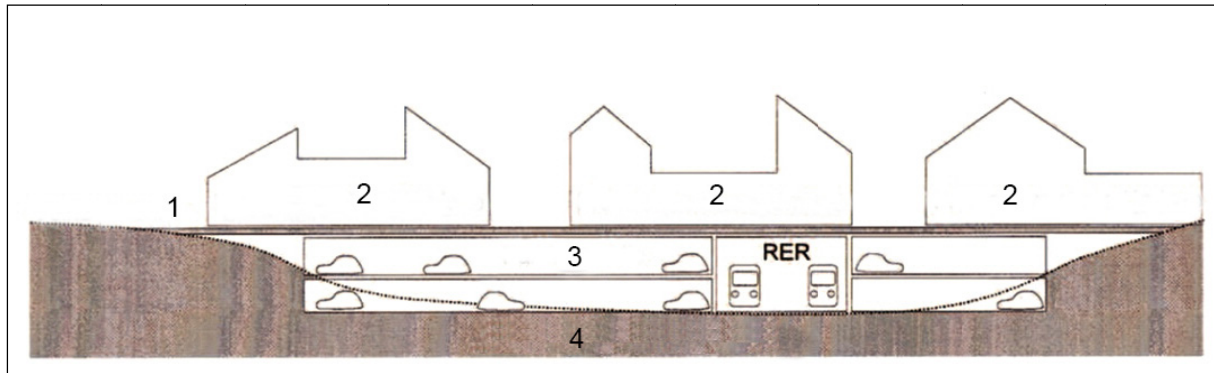


Fig. 9. Diagram of the platform. The platform/slab is covered by offices and apartments, with shops on the ground floor (1) and a high density – low rise commercial streets network that can be considered as “architectura minor” (standard architecture), in contrast to a few iconic buildings, such as the “RER” S-bahn rail station (see fig. 10), which are considered as “architectura major”. The underground slab was financed by its infrastructure users, i.e.: the rail and parking operators (3), rental storage space, and by leases on the commercial space above it (2). No speculative high rise development was included in the master plan. The ground below the slab remains the property of the university, just as the rest of the site (4). Drawing by the author, based on the Groupe UA masterplan.



Fig. 10. The arcaded entrance to the railway station (arch. Y. Lepere) seen from the street. The station is the point on the pedestrian spine where the natural ground meets the artificial ground (i.e. the slab), as schematically shown in fig. 9. Photo taken by the author in 2008 and used for the cover of his 2009 book (LACONTE 2009).

Streets are narrow and mostly canopied to save street space, as well as to protect pedestrians from rain and sun. Plots are kept small whenever possible to allow architectural diversity and to facilitate access to the university’s building market by small contractors.

Courtyards are open passages, whenever feasible, for easier access from buildings to open space.

High-density low-rise buildings with interlocking courts and piazzas replicate the gathering places and colleges of traditional university towns (LACONTE 2009).

The slab hosts numerous public spaces, large and small, planted with trees. Shops, cafés and restaurants adjoin pedestrian spaces, while automobile access, deliveries and parking are exclusively located underground.

The contribution of developers to the cost of the slab and its extensions has led to increasing the size of the plots. On-going mixed-use developments at the edge of the slab and next to the railway station are proposed by large developers. Larger developments include a 200 rooms hotel (BARRAS 2012 & 2016). However in order to keep the human scale character of the town center, only a few larger developments have been accepted by the university-landowner, on or next to the slab (BARRAS 2013). The latest neighborhood, launched by the university in 2006 on the north-east of the area set aside for residential developments (Fig. 5, point 4), will include all types of housing, including community projects inspired by the Abbeyville community of Colchester, in England.

New Louvain's slab proved a successful magnet for private investment. From the start it was linked to the new railway station and was supported by a growing group of train users, i.e. the staff and students of the university, and the inhabitants of the neighbourhoods coming on foot.

By contrast the Cumbernauld Scotland new town slab was built before the indispensable feeder population had materialised, as this central infrastructure had to be built before any part of the plan could be brought into use, entailing a large up-front investment cost.

A similar approach had been tried on other post-war university campuses (such as the University of Essex, England) and in new towns all over Europe. It has been considered by many as disappointing.

Fifty years after its inauguration, the University of Essex campus inspired this comment: "An expansion of universities has not led to much enlightened architectural patronage. Rather the opposite, in fact. The (Essex) university visual trope remains those dogged dreaming spires" (BAILEY 2014).

As for Cumbernauld, it has been described as follows in Wikipedia (WIKIPEDIA 2016): "The intended core of Cumbernauld remains the Town Centre buildings, all of which is essentially contained within one structure, segmented into "phases", the first of which was completed in 1967 (...). Designed to be a commerce centre, an entertainment and business venue and a luxury accommodation site, it was widely accepted (...). Unfortunately, the town never developed to its planned size, and the town centre has never had the life envisaged. Wealthy occupiers for the centre's penthouses never materialised and some now lie empty and derelict".

The Louvain masterplan allowed changing land-use as long as it respected the compact linear main spine.

A major land use change occurred in 2005 as a 35.000 m² shopping mall ("L'Esplanade") and a new residential street "Charlemagne", directly linked to the railway station and the slab, entered into service. This private shopping and leisure mall now has a patronage of 8 million visitors (2014) per year and is preparing to add a 20.000 m² by using the airspace above the rail tracks. It has been a major windfall for the new town.

New neighbourhoods were developed in line with the university and the town's growth, attracting cultural investments (entertainment) and a private museum devoted to Hergé, the creator of the character Tintin, which is also located along the spine, close to the railway station (Arch. Atelier de Portzamparc, Paris).

The university's science faculties have attracted a science park of 230 ha located in the periphery of the town center.

The railway station has been chosen by the Belgian national railways as the south-east line terminal of the new Brussels S commuter rail system (S for 'S-Bahn', or "RER" for "Réseau express régional"), including a new parking complex. This evolution towards commuter traffic will be challenging, as it will generate a daily influx of rail commuters coming by car from surrounding municipalities and not related to the population of the new university town. A residential complex ("Courbevoie") is however to be built above the new parking structure provided for the railway users (BARRAS 2013).

The Ottignies municipality (4.000 inhabitants in the sixties) has now become the City of Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve. It has a permanent resident population of 31.000. Out of this total the new town has 12.000 permanent residents and 45.000 day occupants. Citizen participation in the new town is ensured since 1972 by the Association of Louvain-la-neuve inhabitants, which actively advises on all projects on the university site. It has been a key participant in the adaptation process to larger scale projects, critically advising among others on the shopping mall "L'Esplanade" and residential street "Charlemagne", opened in 2005, and on the new housing project ("Courbevoie") linked to the future enlargement of the railway station and the construction of a new parking structure.

6. Water management.

A key feature of the new Louvain is the conservation of the Ottignies plateau's water resources. A dual water collection system has been installed in all buildings. Only waste water goes to the water treatment plant. All storm water is collected into an artificial lake that serves both as a reservoir and an amenity. The water level varies according to the amount of rain.

Pre-monitoring of water entering the lake and oxygen provision allows the fishing water quality to be checked (de BACKER 2009). This water saving policy has become more pertinent than ever, at a time of increased resource awareness.

The collection of storm water into reservoirs treated as lakes with a variable water level has been adopted in a number of cities in neighbouring countries, e.g. at Billancourt, near Paris. Its large linear park (Trapeze) is inundated in the rainy season and becomes a lake (BAVA 2014).

In monsoon areas this land-water interface has been successfully applied as a natural way to absorb heavy rain and avoid floods e.g. in Binshan-Ang Park in Singapore (HAUSER 2014), The celebrated Dujiangyan ecological anti-flood scheme in Sichuan (256 BC) draws upon the same water management philosophy (WEI-NING 2014).

The lake has acted as a magnet to residential development close to both the central slab and to the park land surrounding the lake (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11. All storm water is collected to an **artificial lake** that serves as reservoir and amenity.

7. Conclusion: achievements and challenges.

The conclusions drawn from 45 years of implementation might be summarised as follows:

- The Louvain new university town master plan achieved from its first phase (1972) a mix of land uses. Each phase could operate on its own but was linked to the following ones, all along a pedestrian spine a that started on the East from the existing main road and extended on more than 1½ km, through the whole site, saving road infrastructure costs and generating a maximum of places for informal meeting between people. This feature proved the main attraction to both residential and commercial development. The preference for small plots generated in-built architectural diversity.

- The central part of the spine was developed above a new sub-surface railway station built in 1975 by the national railways, and directly connected to Brussels. This feature allowed cross commuting. The underground space also hosted access roads, parking and room for storage, while the surface was reserved for pedestrian spaces, shops and cultural investments, attracting more residents.
- All storm water was collected towards the lowest part of the site, to a reservoir treated as a lake (Fig. 12), which became another attraction to residential development not connected with the university.



Fig. 12. Aerial view of the city taken in 2014. The view shows the high-density low-rise character of most of the development and the potential for further extensions close to the lake.

- Also linked to the railway station, a 35.000 m2 shopping mall, mixed with residential development, started operation in 2005. It presently (2014) has 8 million visitors per year and will be expanded by another 20.000 m2. The station itself will become the terminus of one of the new Brussels commuter lines, generating another boost to the town. Close to the station the Hergé Museum (Fig. 13) is attracting younger visitors.

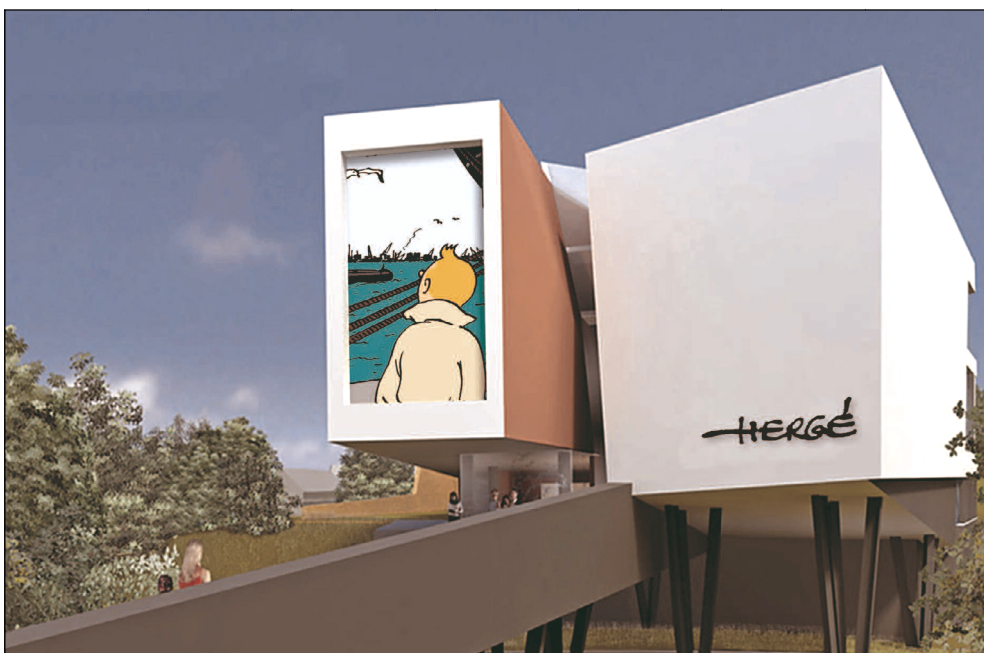


Fig. 13. The private Hergé museum was located in connection to the main spine (architect de Portzamparc).

- From the start the new inhabitants and temporary residents, mainly students, organised themselves in a strong Association of inhabitants, a countervailing power to that of the university land-owner and private investors, as well as to the municipality of Ottignies, which meanwhile has become the city of Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve, led by Mayor J-L. Roland since year 2000.

What in the late sixties looked like a utopian project has turned into the fastest growing urban service centre in Belgium, boosting the whole area around it. The start-ups generated by university research now extend to the periphery of the university site and beyond. Some have become large international technology-based firms, such as the IBA group.

The originality of the Louvain new university town was recognised by its being awarded in 1978 the Sir Patrick Abercrombie Prize for town-planning by the International Union of Architects (UIA).

However, challenges are looming and will have to be met during the coming years: the demand for residential development and the status symbol of the place have led to larger projects, higher prices and higher developer profits. The planned transformation of the railway station into a large commuter terminal with park-and-ride and hundreds of parking spaces, will create a conflict of interest between the needs of the commuters and the aspirations of the Association of inhabitants (partly alleviated by the construction of a new neighbourhood above the new parking slab). But fortunately the pedestrian environment imposed by the 1970 master plan is not in any way jeopardized and no high rise development is contemplated.

Meanwhile the old Louvain/Leuven has gradually become more pedestrian, green and blue (improving its riverfront). Connections between the two universities have increased, as did the connections between the two cities. They have become “twin cities” and have jointly celebrated the 500th anniversary of UTOPIA’s publication in Louvain/Leuven, while the new Louvain no longer looks like a utopian project.

8. References.

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