



TURAS

TRANSITIONING TOWARDS URBAN
RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Case study report on **THE STUDIO** Citygate / Cureghem

*Cooperation between organisations, the
local community and the temporary use
of a large vacant building.*

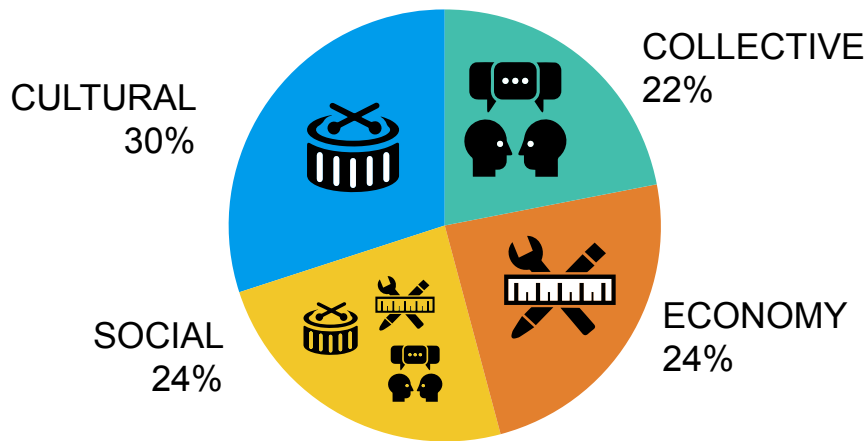


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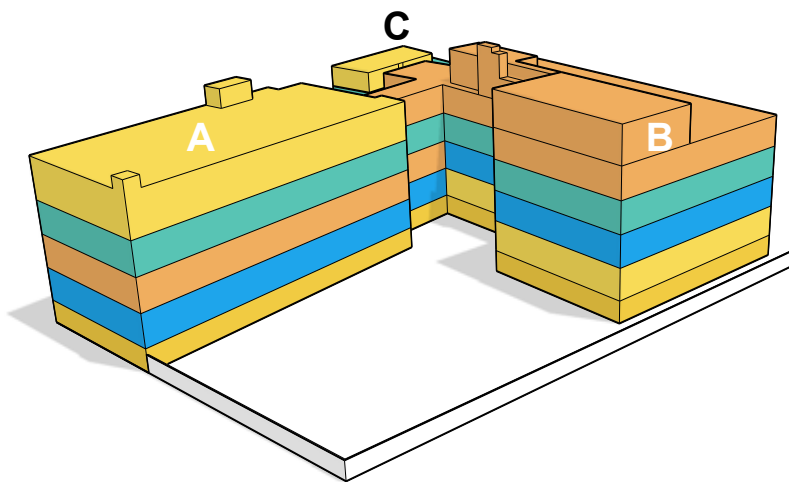


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Transversal Planning



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OVERVIEW

In May 2016 a successful bid was made for the temporary use of a 22,000 square metre former industrial building for transitional use over 3-5 (or more) years as the surrounding sites are developed.

The site is at a critical position, bridging an existing and very poor neighbourhood (Cureghem) with a new development area that will likely be focused on higher end apartments on the former industrial areas. There is a lot of hesitation in mixing local manufacturing with housing and other functions so the Studio aims to prove how a mix of functions is not only possible but absolutely essential in creating a vibrant destination and a rich local economy that is properly integrated into the context.

As this is not only a complex site but a complex constellation of partners, the project intends to be run through a co-creation process. The objective is for the building not only to be filled and active but for a strong relationship and interdependence to be built between all the future users and usages.

There are many challenges that require learning on the job rather than a prescribed formula as money, interest, commitment, viability and so on offer far too many variables. For example, what is the governance structure of a temporary use project? How can the partners benefit each other and the community beyond? How can the organisation look beyond the availability of the building and be resilient enough to shift into another space in the future?

While the project is likely to last around five years, the process of filling the building will need to be careful, gradual and adaptive to avoid anarchy and decay. The project also aims to survive without significant external finance or funding. The objective is to find a suitable way to connect with the existing and future neighbourhood while making it financially viable.

This project builds on knowledge developed in the TURaS project's research on local economies, transversal planning and the 'Bernaerts Process' that looked at the technical process of temporary use.

This document presents some of the outcomes of internal discussions for the future of the Studio site.



Biestebroeck

C

A

B

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Cureghem, showing a mix of residential and commercial buildings. A prominent, modern, dark-colored building with a textured facade stands out in the center. The surrounding area includes older buildings with red-tiled roofs, green spaces, and a railway line in the foreground.

Cureghem

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“Brussels used to be this forgotten place, and suddenly people are talking about it like they were talking about Berlin 10 years ago”

*Christina Vantzou,
New York Times,
21 September 2014*









1. CONTEXT

DUURZAME ECONOMIE

- Economie in transitie
- Gewestelijk programma voor circulaire economie**
 - 29/05/2015 - Symposium: De circulaire economie in het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest
 - 3 mei : Circulaire economie in de bouwsector: lancering van het BAMB Stakeholder Network
- Projectoproep

Duurzame economie > Gewestelijk programma voor circulaire economie

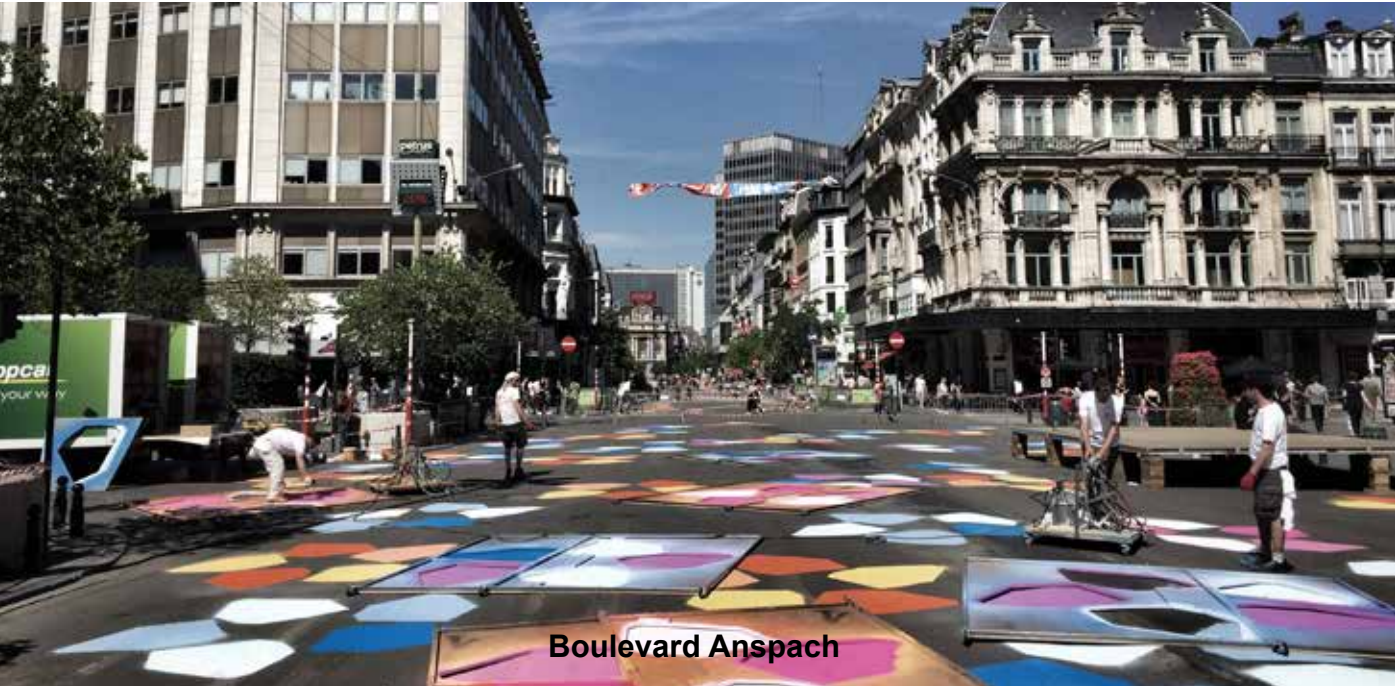
Gewestelijk programma voor circulaire economie



De Gewestelijke beleidsverklaring voorziet het huidige model van lineaire economie (grondstoffen ontginnen – produceren – consumeren – weggooien) te vervangen door een systeem van circulaire economie (recupereren – produceren – consumeren – hergebruiken) dat voor onze ondernemingen concurrentieel is op de markten, maar dat ook lokale werkgelegenheid schept.

De gewestelijke strategie

In haar Strategie 2025 die op 16 juni 2015 goedgekeurd werd.



Background

‘Temporary’, ‘adaptive’ and ‘flexible’ are not just terms describing innovative projects - it is becoming the norm in almost every industry. Increasingly managing project complexity is the central challenge. In urban areas with high levels of mixed use, with a large income gap between the new and the existing users and a lot of uncertainty in long-term investment, flexibility is key. However until now ‘temporary’ or ‘adaptive’ have been improvised and particularly challenging for collaborative projects. This project is about developing a temporary use for a large empty building, based on co-creation and value added for the community beyond.

The rise of the temporary

The temporary is increasingly a tool that is used in cities to allow for ideas to be tested. In Brussels, we have seen one of the city’s most prominent streets, Boulevard Anspach, closed under the guise of ‘temporary’ to see how people would react with a larger amount of pedestrian space. In so far as temporary use of buildings, the territory is relatively new with a formal industry existing for around a decade. There is much to learn legally and functionally about how to activate temporary use of space and how this temporary use can help define more concrete interventions.

Temporary can help address a number of issues, including: changes in land use, questions of employment, bridge social divisions, test new laws and it can be a useful low-cost / easy access point for new business.

Social divisions in Brussels

Brussels is a city of dramatic divisions. It is one of the richest per GDP in Europe while having areas with around 30-45% unemployment. The sheer division that this has created is pointing to a lot of issues that are beginning to haunt Brussels. The recent terrorist incidents are no small reminder of how this issues simply cannot be swept under the rug. Yet very few politicians are able to deal with the complexity of unemployment and the side-effects of it.

Rezoning of Biestebroek

The rezoning of Biestebroek, from largely industry to mixed use has been a long and complex political discussion between keeping Brussels’ manufactur-

ing base and finding place for housing. This has created conditions to try something new however there is temptation by developers simply to rely on their usual business models and avoid genuine mixed use, production based projects. Temporary can be a vital stepping stone to offer developers the confidence to build the future of work, industry and living.

The new face of industry + mixed use

Industry is undergoing a radical change. The smokey and polluting forms of industry from which Brussels grew, have all but left the capital region. Now we’re left with vacant land which is all too tempting for developers to turn to housing. The industry that can essentially replace the old can also provide jobs and an alternative economy to the services industry however it needs to be lured into the city. Temporary may offer a vital answer for this.

Rue des Goujons

A former industrial building that has been transformed and adapted numerous times over a century of use, was purchased by the Belfius bank as a real-estate speculation project. The purchase was too early and the site was far too complex for the bank who sold it to the Brussels region public developer - CityDev. CityDev has since planned to create a school and crèche for the new neighbourhood, but knowing that it will be years before these functions are in demand, they decided to experiment with temporary use. In April 2016 they launched a call for projects. In June 2016 the project was awarded to the consortium whom has written this document.



De Ceuval - Amsterdam (NL)



Fenix Food Factory - Rotterdam (NL)



Magdas Hotel - Vienna (AT)

In flux: the new normal?

Temporary and transitional uses are a powerful way to deal with uncertainty and to avoid lost value while places change. It is increasingly a norm that we need to learn to work with - the Studio is a chance to actively explore how this could be done.

What is transitional

There was an age where stable and ongoing growth was seen as the norm. People and business could plan with confidence and certainty many years into the future. After almost two generations of constant growth in living standards, our society has begun to get trapped by the idea of stability and growth and forgot how delicate it is. Financial crisis, wage disparity, climate change and a down-turn in growth all change this and we're doing what we can to hold onto stability. However flexibility, temporary use and transitions are likely to be the new normal that we'll need to adapt to.

In terms of the built environment, there is much to learn. 'Transitional' can refer to many things in terms of time and content. It could mean temporarily testing new traffic conditions for a year to see how the mobility system reacts (such as Boulevard Anspach in Brussels). It could be about having an alternative use during a period of time when something else is happening (such as the soil remediation in De Ceual in Amsterdam). It could be about allowing new businesses to test their ideas in a part of the city where commercial activity has changed (such as the Fenix Food Hall or Renew Newcastle's temporary activation of empty shops). It could be about a fixed lease of a building for five years to test an alternative business model for a hotel (such as Magdas Hotel in Vienna that employs and trains refugees).

Benefits of transitional

There are a vast range of benefits in an adaptive and transition based approach rather than a fixed plan. In uncertain markets it may be necessary to see if there is a business case for a certain product, service or building. By having small projects it can be possible to test opportunities before big investment. Transitional uses also mean that a place is constantly active. In terms of a buildings this means that it will be less exposed to looting, vandalism or squatters. Finally transitional uses can help ease change rather

than it occurring radically and result in a vacuum or rupture. For example if an area was being developed, a temporary park or play area could help families to engage with the site and consequently will be more open to the changes.

For users, transitional uses can be very exciting and can be a great drawcard to attract visitors back to see how a place evolves over time.

Issues with temporary

For a business, temporary is precarious and can make it hard to commit large basic investments. Shops, bars and cafes can be easily seduced into shorter contracts as their equipment often can be easily shifted. A mechanic for example may not want to move as relocating heavy equipment could cost months of work. This means that transitional uses can be relatively limited in variety and can attract risk takering business rather than local valuable jobs.

For building owners it can be an issue of vacating tenants from buildings once they are settled. It may also be a concern for building owners about vandalism or miss-use.

There are a range of legal and practical issues that also make transitional uses more trouble than they are worth such as environmental plans.

What are we trying to achieve here?

In this project we're aiming to look at the transitional development of a neighbourhood, its community and its economy. We'll be confronting issues with the organisations involved. We'll be challenged by legal issues. We'll need to find ways to deal with the neighbourhood surrounding it. Read on.



Narrative

The Studio is an opportunity to make something different, something that may have a much larger long-term impact in the building and its surroundings. Over the five or more years, we can create things that may not be possible anywhere else.

The location

The Studio sits at a pivotal place between the highly mixed neighbourhood of Cureghem and the future development of Biestebroek. Cureghem is one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Belgium with a very high unemployment rate. It has a highly mixed and young population. It is also a place that over the years has become the home of internationally renowned artists, and could possibly become the cultural hotspot of Brussels. Biestebroek is one of Brussels' new development zones, earmarked for mixed use development. However while developers must provide mixed use, it is very unclear if the buildings will provide added value for the existing residents surrounding the site or if the buildings will become gated private spaces that bring even a bigger division between rich and poor.

The people

We want to connect to local residents, brave entrepreneurs, doubting politicians, uncertain building developers wanting to try something new, public services officials and the community of Brussels that will eventually see the Studio as a respected destination. All of these people are stakeholders in this project. Therefore if this becomes a success, all of them will benefit. If the project appears successful without them, they may resent it and even do what they can to sabotage it. If it becomes a success with them, they will likely treat it with pride, defend it and be an important user.

Looking in

Buildings are often occupied by users that have very little to do with each other and therefore there is little value added by them being in the same space. They may share things like a garden, a café or even a conference space. But in the end there may be very little value that is gained from being each other's neighbours.

What if we see a building like the industrial building that it was, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts? In this way, we can focus on specific

problems, knowing that we are building on a bigger story. New types of mixed functions are being explored in Brussels and the Studio could showcase how it could be done. We need to believe in such a bigger story to make this happen.

Looking out

The Studio sits on the edge of two neighbourhoods – old (Cureghem) and new (Biestebroek). Sudden and radical change could bring about a big division in the neighbourhood that could result in segregation or even a ghetto. Urban developers are facing the challenge of building without affecting the local community while maximising return on their investment. Generally, urban development brings about greater amounts of disruption to a community than bringing it together.

How can the Studio help reduce the friction between the old and the new? How can the Studio assist the development of Biestebroek and show what kind of spaces are needed for the existing residents of Cureghem? What if there was a way to create a constructive dialogue between the local community, their future members and the developers?

We believe development can also have a positive impact on the local community if done effectively? We believe that the advanced development of a neighbourhood will require a focus on showing the economical potential for local and outside entrepreneurs, and creating a cultural crossing between local and outside culture. We believe that existing communities deserve respect and should be dealt with in a delicate way, only then is true development possible. The Studio could become a bridge between the old and the new.



Hand-drawn black rectangular shapes, possibly representing a stylized face or a decorative element.





2. PROCESS



Process

Vision Creation Process

The proposal developed at the end of April 2016 set out the general lines of the Studio project, however left much interpretation in terms of the general shared vision of the project (shared by the driving actors), the management process, the business model, the development process and so on.

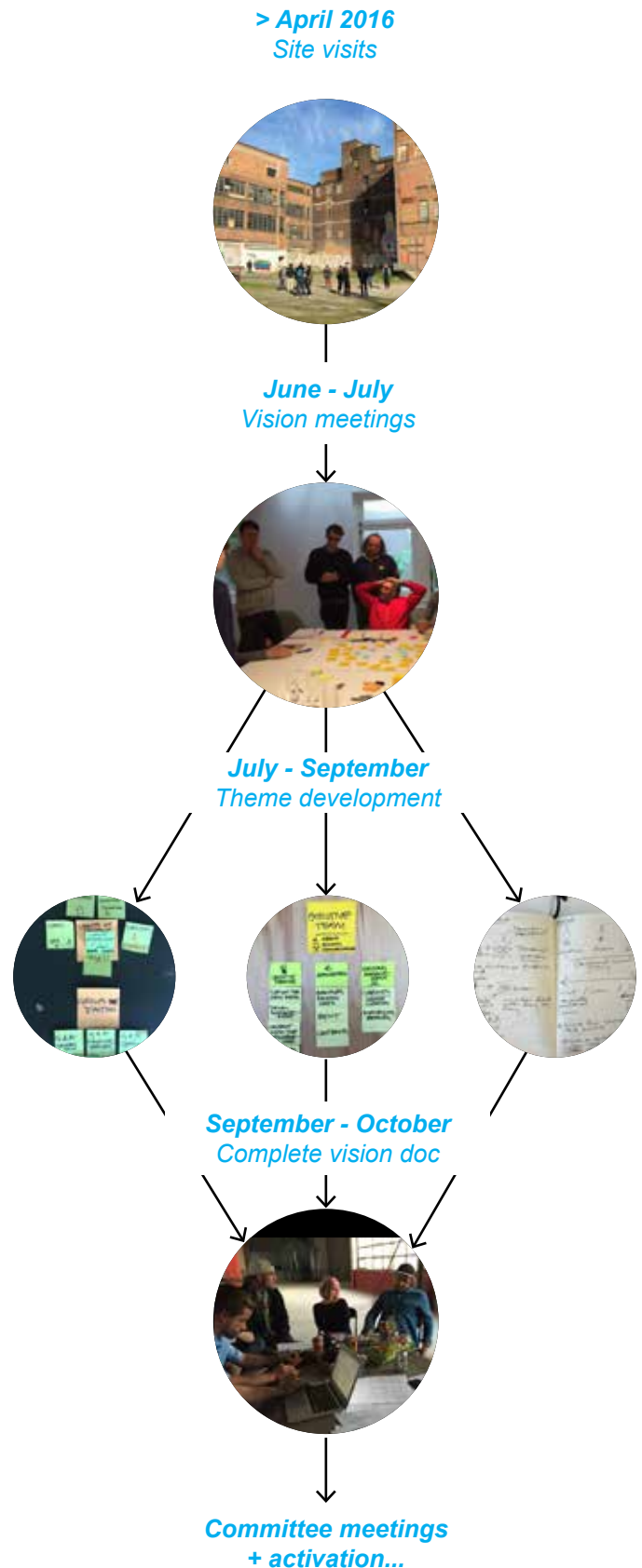
Some general themes that we discussed include:

- Three main streams of use: cultural, social and economic. All three of these types of uses would have a distinct way of engaging with the neighbourhood (Cureghem / Biestebroek / Molenbeek) and the region beyond (Brussels).
- We stressed a creative element to the site.
- We stressed a gradual process to fill the building.

In this document we aim to define the main focus of the project such that the work can be done quickly but effectively. Much will be based on a learning process and thus we will need to be adaptive when we face issues or challenges. Therefore the content in this document should be regularly adapted and development. Much of the material here is a synthesis of a number of workshops and meetings held in June and July 2016.

Steps

- **March-April 2016.** Site visits by CityDev.
- **April.** Application written by Dries Vanneste, Nicolas Hemeleers, Jane Haesen and Adrian Vickery Hill.
- **June.** Project approved by CityDev.
- **June - October.** Vision meetings, building permission meetings, strategy discussions, and so forth, by the pilot committee.
- **November.** First committee meeting.
- **November 26.** First building workshop.





A photograph of a window with a grid of panes, viewed through a green-tinted lens. Two birds are perched on the windowsill. The text "3. VISION" is overlaid in the center.

3. VISION

Vision

The brainstorming sessions with the project pioneers exposed a number of core themes that helped to define the main action areas, concerns and interests. While this was done without physically being within the building, it helped to draw out some early ideas and help connect the group. However as the group had not worked together, there was little to commit the pioneers from changing their mind or doing the contrary.

Objectives / Mission

What are we trying to do? Two core objectives: 1) a strong and vibrant mix at the building level and 2) a project that is well integrated into the surrounding neighbourhood. This will involve a dynamic use of the spaces, which is constantly evolving and changing.

Values

What do we care about? Our values are about creating something bigger than ourselves. We care to open the door to the outside and foster growth within the site. The project does not boast more than it really is. In fact, it doesn't boast. People are just intrigued to see what happens on the site.

Tone of expression

How do we express ourselves and the project? The expression is of intrigue, of surprise - it is falling down Alice's rabbit hole... We offer hints of what is going on, but never the full picture. We don't want people to be underwhelmed when they visit, they should be unsuspectingly impressed.

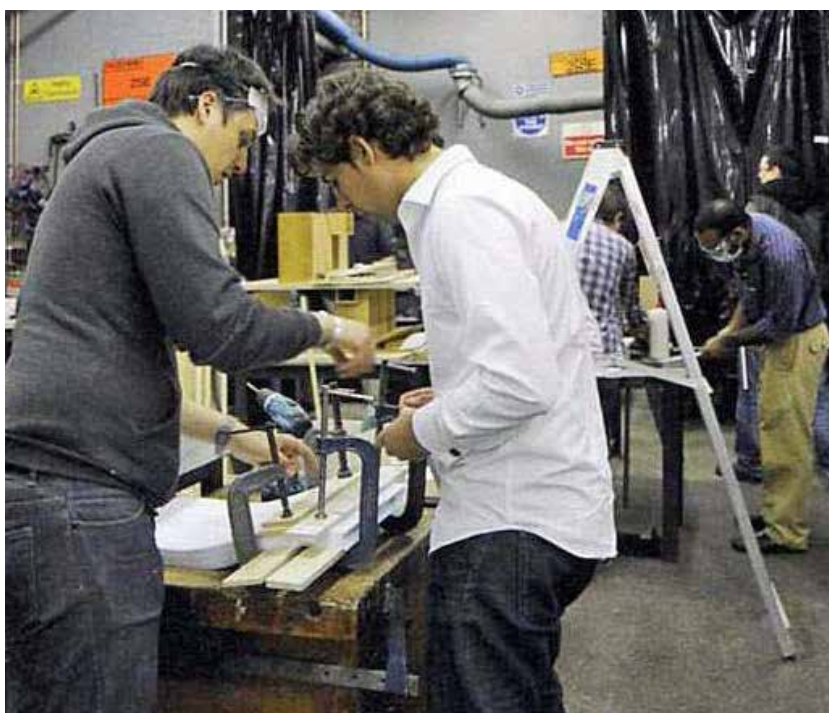
Target users

Who are we really doing this for? We are doing this first and foremost to try something we may have thought of being impossible. But this is not a lonely project so we must involve others into the story. In fact, the project is all about drawing others in which may include is the local community or residents of Brussels and beyond. Our target users are essentially those that are open to following this adventure. We are not a community centre for neighbourhood support or a commercial entertainment complex for selling consumer products made in China. We are a platform that stresses participation and engagement of all users, whether you are working in the building or just visiting it.

Proposition

What are we giving the users of the building, Cureghem, Brussels and the world? Some of the ideas can be summarised as the following:

- **Symbiosis of use and users.** Creating a strong interdependence between the users and a relationship between the functions that will inhabit the building - what could be called an 'ecology of users'.
- **A novel community model.** A system of co-creating and co-producing, an approach for users to work together rather than just inhabit the same space.
- **A novel financing approach.** An alternative to cash payments with possible service based compensation.
- **A platform for opportunity.** A place where people feel comfortable to contribute to the project and to be supported in doing so. This could be about creating a community and even a mentoring system.
- **Conditions to try the 'impossible'.** Conditions that allow users to take risks, knowing that the environment can support them to go further than they may have thought possible. This includes financial or professional support to help reducing the 'damage' caused by failure. Likewise the building occupants should also be compensated by supporting others in taking risks. We will find ways of sharing the profits like you see in Arabic 'soukhs' where different shop/stall owners help each other out in crisis but also share profit in times of wealth.
- **Relevance at a larger scale.** The building tests something that could provide larger scale regime change for temporary use of space.



Identity - Themes

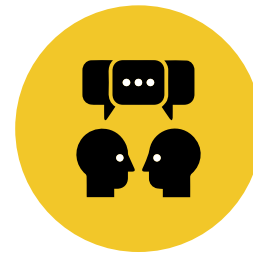
The Studio brings together three core themes: social, cultural and productive functions. All building uses will involve an intersection of at least two of these themes. It is a place for making - where we create conditions for opportunity, trial the impossible while having a positive impact on the local community.



Culture

How do we create an atmosphere of arts, entertainment and ideas?

The cultural theme focuses on events and performances that could be one-offs or regular. It is largely ephemeral and will be active for an evening, an afternoon, a day, a week or a month. Culture is something that we reinterpret everyday. It may have nothing to do with traditions. For us it is important to expand the definition of culture.



Social

How do we bring together people of different communities?

By social we refer to activities that essentially bring people together over a concrete act or event. We're not talking about hanging out over a 'social' cup of coffee but rather through doing something that has added value. It may be focused on formal learning, on building skills, on doing things together, it is about shared responsibility...



Making

How do we turn ideas into products and objects?

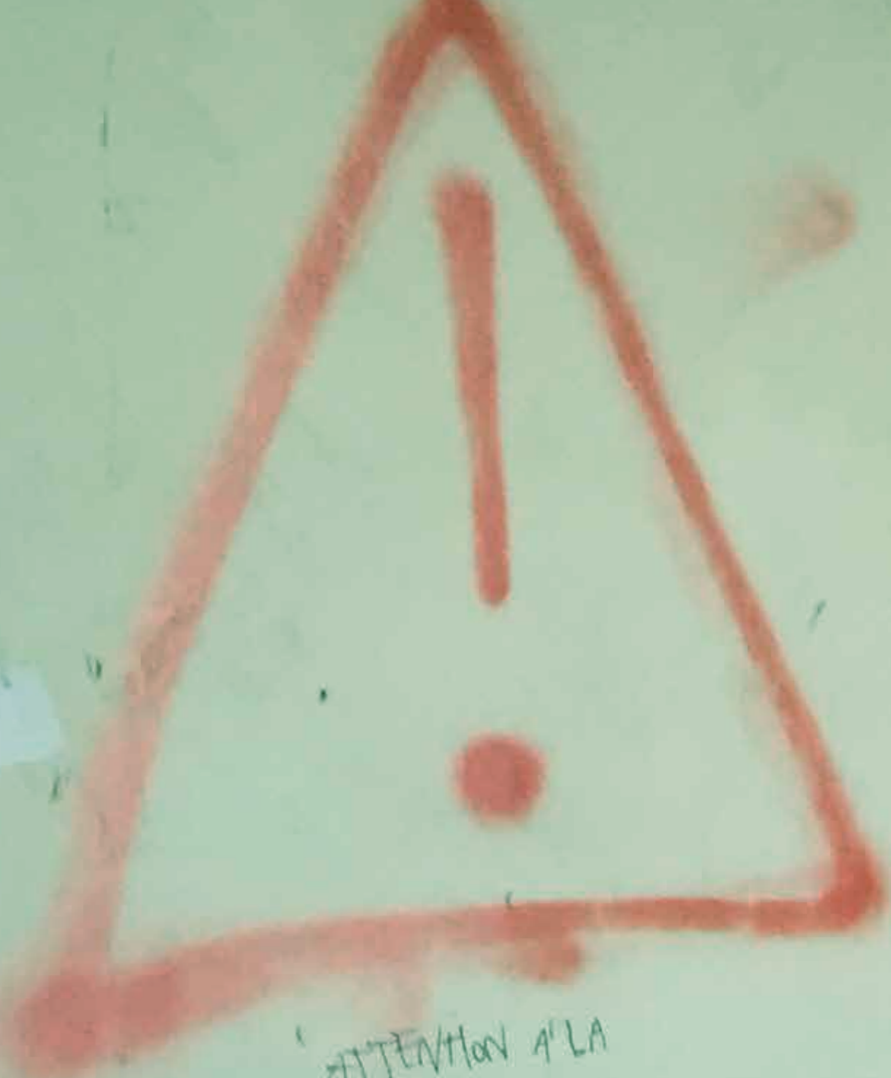
Making is about production. It is about things, about stuff. In other words, we're not talking about something that lives in an abstract parallel universe such as video games. We're talking about making furniture, building structures, testing technology, developing machines for construction and so forth. It could be making food, or processing it. It could be building or tending to a garden.



Intersection

How can we get the most out of these three themes?

One core objective has been to find a connection amongst these three themes. Every use or user involves at least two of the themes described here. On a regular basis (yearly) we review what each user is doing to connect the three themes.



ATTENTION A LA
PROPÉTÉ !



CASE STUDIES

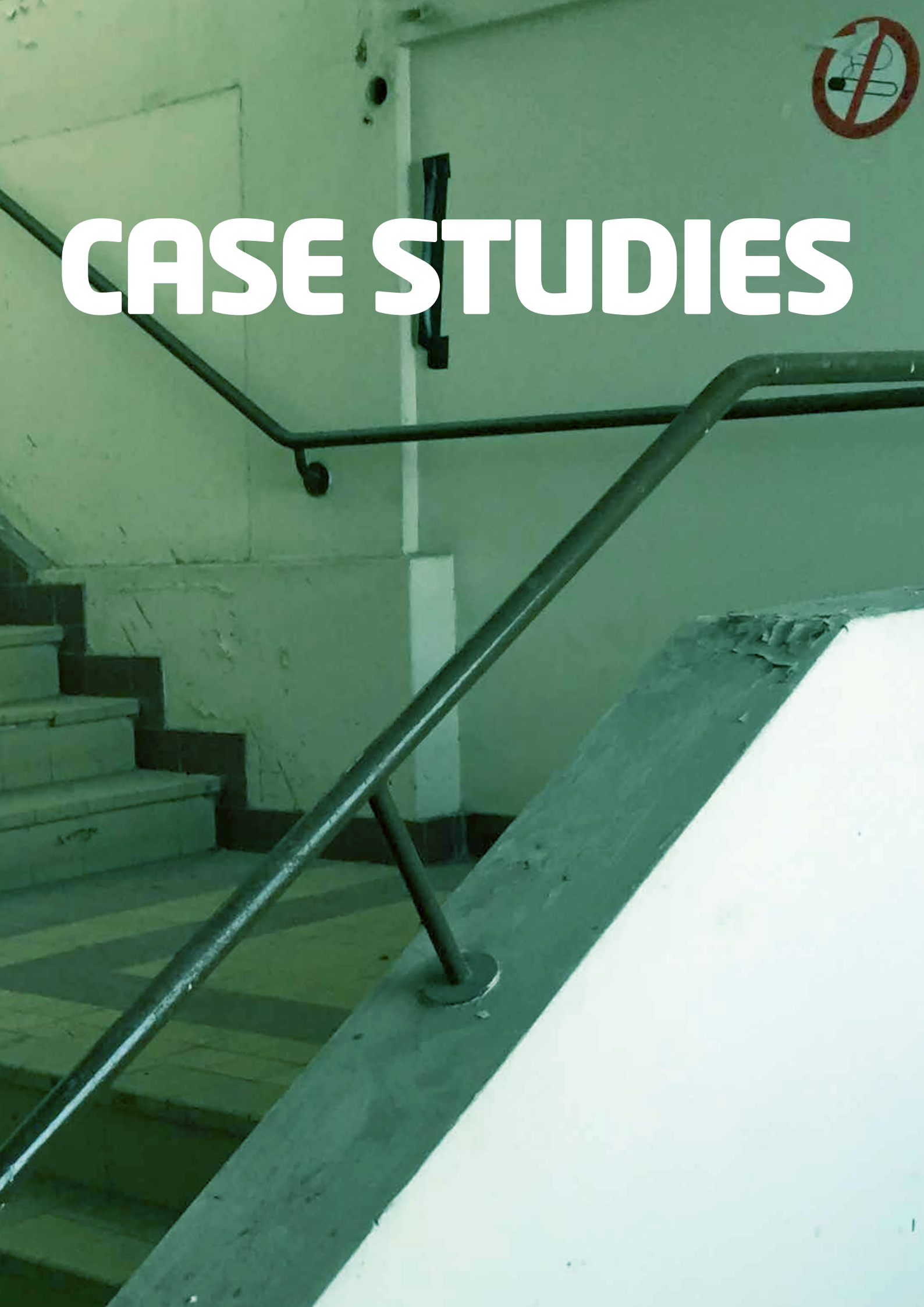




Photo: Makery

CENTQUATRE

(PARIS, FR)

CENTQUATRE is a publicly owned warehouse, in the former industrial canal district of Paris. This site is rare as it mixes both community functions, contemporary exhibition space, making, leisure, food and debates while acting as a public refuge for the youth. While not in a central location, it is constantly active and proves how an ecology of different but complimentary functions create a very inspiring environment. CENTQUATRE is an great example of a multi-functional space.



BLUE CITY - TROPICANA

(ROTTERDAM, NL)

Tropicana, a once abandoned aquatic recreation space on the river Maas, a building no developer dared touch. Thus an opportunity arose to create an alternative real-estate model and the building was 'crowd funded'. The objective is to build circular economy into the building by looking for co-dependent actors. For example the restaurant feeds the mushroom farm with organic waste, the mushroom farm grows for the restaurant. Other actors build onto this symbiosis. The result may appear to be a mix between Mad-Max and Frankenstein yet offers a new way of curating urban ecology within a single building.



Photo: Kings X Ponds Club

KINGS X PONDS CLUB

(LONDON, UK)

While Brussels is screaming for an outdoor pool, we see inspiration in how the Kings Cross Ponds Club has activated a former industrial space by implanting a much needed and very exciting function in an urban regeneration area. This is called 'meanwhile use', an attraction in its own right that bridges changes in land use (from industrial to mixed use). Here the Ponds Club contains a naturally filtered pool, a bar, a sauna and plenty of demand on summer days. We see that a similar function can attract visitors to the Studio site and allow users to interpret the future of the area for themselves. Evidently functions that are out of place can be very intriguing.



Photo: Schieblock

SCHIEBLOCK

(ROTTERDAM, NL)

The Schieblock is a modernist office building that almost suffered demolition prior to the 2008 financial crisis. The building became vacated and became a 'test site'. The result is an intriguing mix of designers and makers, talks and considered a Dutch design institution. The building is flexible and dynamic, fostering competition + collaboration, and feels both public + private. The building's 'hands on nature' has pushed many of the occupants to create brave and novel urban designs for Rotterdam and beyond (such as the yellow Luchtsingel).



FENIX FOOD FACTORY

(ROTTERDAM, NL)

The Fenix may seem like a simple food hall however creates an event out of weekend eating and shopping. It is a small space with some dozen or so venues open only Friday-Sunday. The stands are complimentary and carefully curated, offering the choice of a range of food and drinks and to create a kind of indoor picnic. There is music, a brewery, a bakery a book stand, a vintage shop and so on. It means visitors have a diverse range of reasons to come a visit while it is a weekend job for stallholders. Proof of its success is that most visitors travel across the harbour (two bridges) in rain and rough winds just to absorb the authentic atmosphere.

LESSONS

There is much to be said about the elements of success. We plan to explore a new model for urban activation, one that is neither primarily for profit or dependent on subsidies and one that is both privately managed and involves a community run curation team. This model looks at auto-generating activity and invites local visitors of all shapes and sizes. It is about using culture to generate commercial demand, and commercial profit re-circulated into cultural value. It is about creating an ecosystem of actors and co-dependence. We will be documenting this process to see how it can serve as a viable model for other similar development zones that are transitioning to new and uncertain futures.

