

ZOOM ON PROJECT 2: A GREEN-BLUE WALKING NETWORK IN THE SOUTHERN PENTAGON



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One of the walking networks proposed by the BCO as a spatial figure (see De Visscher et al., 2018; Vanin et al., 2020) that required reinforcement is located in the south of the metropolitan city centre. While the Steenweg still has a clear morphology in today's urban fabric (see De Visscher, 2020), the area between the Gare de l'Ouest and the Place Stéphanie is better described as a finely meshed network than a clear axis. This network of streets connects the pedestrian zone near the Place Fontainas with the upper and the lower city and stretches between the very accessible Gare de l'Ouest in the northwest and the Place Stéphanie, in the heart of the deluxe commercial district *Louise*, in the southeast. The Porte de Ninove and the Place Poelaert traffic junctions near the Small Ring cross this network, posing obstacles to pedestrian traffic.

This network in the Southern Pentagon connects a number of urban residential areas, many of which belong to Brussels's most popular neighbourhoods among immigrants, and which are also the most densely populated and socio-economically vulnerable. As the metropolitan character of the city centre is becoming increasingly visible through, among other things, more mainstream recreational tourist activities, there are many opportunities here to see the (culturally) hyper-diverse character of the residential areas as a quality within the socio-cultural and economic reality.

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➤ **Figure 1.** Guidelines for the Southern Pentagon



Source: Architecture Workroom Brussels, 2018

When the BCO and its partners wondered how and where they could best test their vision for a pedestrian-friendly metropolitan city centre in the field, it turned out that the southern part of the Pentagon was prime for a number of quickly realizable interventions. The challenges were in fact rather obvious. The southern part of the pedestrian zone had already been planned as an *Promenade Verte*. The Fontainas Park is a green lung in the city, and the densely populated neighbourhoods needed more green and blue (water), and less traffic.⁵ Spatial, social and cartographic exploratory research also showed that, in addition to the spatial possibility ...

- a rich network of neighbourhood organizations, services and schools is present in these neighbourhoods which form an important bridge between and leverage for the neighbourhood, public space and facilities;
- many residents' initiatives are thinking about changes to be made in these neighbourhoods;
- various governmental levels have invested a great deal of public resources in these neighbourhoods. Think of the neighbourhood contracts, school contracts ...

Practical experience and applied urban research show that by linking these projects and initiatives, an important lever for a transversal urban project can emerge. However, partners have highlighted the fact that such projects were not always in line with one another. Moreover, specific knowledge about the area was insufficiently exchanged between and tested with the actors, project partners and researchers involved. This created a risk that the many initiatives and policy instruments within this incubator would have the effect of cancelling-out, rather than complementing, each other, and would thus deprive the city of opportunities to achieve a more sustainable transition. Although the possibilities for action were present, a significant need for greater steering capacity and a transversal framework, to allow this complex urban project to be deployed strategically, existed. In many cities, such processes are controlled by a government. In the Brussels context this is not always the case, with the impetus often coming from civil society, activism or applied urban research. This was also the case for this project.

The first framework for this urban project originated in the course of 2018 through an intense collaboration between BSI-BCO, Bye Bye Petite Ceinture – BBPC⁶ (now Bienvenue sur la Petite Ceinture), Architecture Workroom Brussels – AWB⁷, BRAL⁸

⁵ Highlighted by the participatory workshops and the small survey undertaken by BRAL.

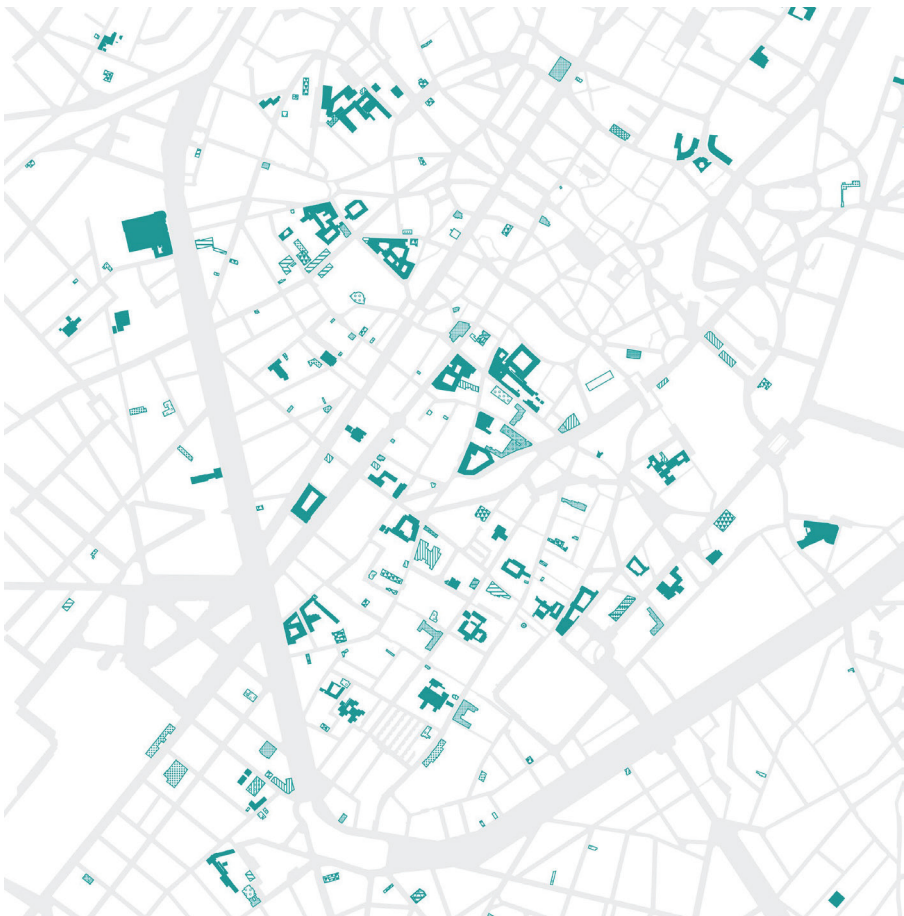
⁶ Bye Bye Petite Ceinture (BBPC) is a civil society initiative critically questioning the transformation of the Brussels small ring (inner ring road) from an urban highway into a multifunctional public space.

⁷ AWB (Architecture Workroom Brussels) is a think tank for urban development and design.

⁸ BRAL (Brusselse Raad voor het Leefmilieu) is a civil society organization which strives towards sustainable urban development in the Brussels Capital-Region.

➤ **Figure 2.** Map of the local network of neighbourhood organizations, services and schools

Actors overview



- Schools
- Counselling service for young people / School support / After school childcare / Youth organisation / School and socio-cultural support
- Socio-cultural support
- Library / Education centres / Documentation centre
- Creche / Daycare centre
- Culture / Community centre
- Retirement or nursing home / Senior citizens' housing / Organisation or support service for elderly
- Accompaniment of persons with disabilities and/or illnesses
- Daycare / Support general public / Legal service

and Atelier Groot Eiland – AGE⁹ and a number of other partners. This framework formed the basis for bringing knowledge together to sharpen the vision and challenges, map the actors involved, and develop a supported process of participatory research-by-design or ‘co-design’. The resulting project proposal included four parts:

- a program for the introduction of productive or edible greenery in public space and in the vicinity of community facilities;
- a learning path dedicated to local food production and management of public green space;
- a trajectory regarding social cohesion and community building in which the network of local organizations and facilities is examined as a lever;
- the setting-up of a process of ‘co-design’, in which the research-by-design is used as a participatory tool to increase support for the desired spatial transformation.

Governments and administrations were invited to participate in the project. While they showed an interest, only a part of the project is currently being realized. More concretely, a number of pilot projects received support from the Flemish Community (VGC) and the City of Brussels. Today, however, we face a number of practical challenges: Which public actors and tools want and can further contribute to this framework? How can the co-design process be further refined and elaborated, and how can it be structurally embedded within the city’s services? How can both the overarching story and the concrete projects find more support from citizens and politicians? And which resources and policy frameworks open doors to the realization of more pilot projects?

This contribution outlines the general challenges, ambitions and shared framework of the ongoing urban project ‘Southern Pentagon’. This is followed by an outline of the current situation, with a clear view of the next steps and possible future paths, along with concrete examples. Finally, a short reflection on how research-by-design and co-design are used in this project and which potential pitfalls deserve additional attention follows. This text is based on the scientific knowledge accumulated as a result of the research carried out within the BSI-BCO, widely described in this book, as well as by the concrete experience in the field which crosses academic knowledge, expert knowledge and non-expert knowledge.

⁹ Atelier Groot Eiland (AGE): is a social economy (not-for-profit) organization that aims to help people to gain work experience, provides training, labour care and job coaching.

1 > THE SOUTHERN PENTAGON – A BREEDING GROUND *PAR EXCELLENCE* FOR SOCIO-SPATIAL TRANSITIONS

In light of the major challenges that society is facing today, many actors, from citizens to policymakers, from entrepreneurs to activists, are looking for space for change in the city. The circular economy harvests raw materials from the urban metabolism and seeks operational spaces in which to establish short chains between production and consumption, water and biodiversity are regaining their place in the heavily paved urban area, local food production is gaining importance in the public space, attention to road safety and air quality is accelerating the transition towards a more shared mobility in which the dominance of car traffic is under pressure ... and so on. The way in which these changes take shape is no longer determined solely by policy and the market; citizens also participate in setting the agenda and searching for solutions. New public-private-civil partnerships are being tested. The city is buzzing with new initiatives.

This is no different in the southern part of the Brussels Pentagon, the heart of Europe's capital. This intricate network of streets and squares contains many – both physical and socio-economic – missing links that can be easily realized in order to create a car-free, safe and pleasant public space in the more vulnerable and youthful districts of the city centre. Some examples:

- > Many schools are present along this route. By expanding the walkability and cyclability around schools, for example through the concept of 'school streets',¹⁰ both an active, soft mobility network and a green (school) environment with healthy air are created.
- > By connecting the Gare de l'Ouest, Cureghem, Fontainas/Anneessens and Marolles districts with the Louise district, a connection is created between the vulnerable and youthful city centre districts in the lower city and the more affluent districts in the upper city. This creates opportunities for greater urban social cohesion between privileged and underprivileged groups.
- > The linking of green spaces to community development and local food production stimulates a healthy eating culture for citizens, and can serve as an example for strengthening a local and circular economy (production and labour), as well as for micro-entrepreneurship and labour care in vulnerable neighbourhoods.

¹⁰ A school street is a street on which is situated an entrance to a school, which can be temporarily closed to motorized traffic for a few hours each day. The concept has recently appeared in Brussels's regulations and has been subsidized by the Region and certain municipalities.

1.1 Both operating capital¹¹ and policy vision are present in the southern part of the Pentagon

In addition to the promising urban development features such as a dense network of streets and squares (mesh), an east-west orientation that is complementary to the pedestrian zone, the connection between the upper and lower city and the neighbourhoods within and outside the *Petite Ceinture*, this district is also bustling with local projects and initiatives which try to provide an answer to its day-to-day challenges, both large and small. To date, for committed citizens and policymakers (as well as the policies created) alike, the Southern Pentagon has proved to be a breeding ground for collective actions (for instance, protest actions by Filter Café Filtré), for unsolicited design research (BBPC, among others), for several neighbourhood contracts (Marolles, Jonction, Jardin aux Fleurs) and urban renewal contracts (Gare de l'Ouest, Heyvaert - Poincaré) and for listing priority investments (Zone voor Stedelijke Herwaardering - Urban Revitalization Area).

The citizens' initiative BBPC, together with the Brussels Academy and a number of citizens and experts, visited four neighbourhoods around the Brussels Small Ring (Canal-Saintelette, Midi-Porte d'Anderlecht, Botanique-Madou, Trône-Louise). Through co-creative design sessions, they searched for more cross connections over the Ring area, more qualitative public space for cyclists and pedestrians, and a stronger public transport.

The weekly actions of Filter Café Filtré, which were undertaken with the aim of achieving better air quality around schools, mobilized parents and committed local residents of more than 175 schools (throughout the entirety of Belgium) to temporarily close school streets. In collaboration with Architecture Workroom Brussels, in the context of the cultural manifestation around architecture and urban development "You Are Here", some of Filter Café Filtré's activists, together with parents architects and experts, designed their own proposals for the future of approximately 20 school environments.

Through the Green Connections initiative, the residents of the Cureghem-Bara and Cureghem Dauw neighbourhoods committed themselves to a more qualitative and greener connection of their neighbourhood with the city.

In addition to these citizens' initiatives, small-scale projects sometimes lead to new collaborations between local residents and the government. For example, last year, the intergenerational housing Project Casa Viva opened its doors on the

¹¹ By 'operating capital', we mean the capacity to take effective action and to give a concrete form to an idea.

Place Fontainas after LD3 vzw¹² and Samenlevingsopbouw Brussel¹³ held talks with the residents of the Anneessens district over the course of a period of two years. Elderly persons and families from different backgrounds have lived together ever since. On the other hand, a number of new community schools¹⁴ situated around the perimeter committed themselves to creating a broader living and learning environment for children and to maximizing their development opportunities by collaborating with other sectors.

In terms of policy, we find many objectives in the government agreements, both at municipal and regional level, that are intended to increase the quality of life in our cities. In the Brussels-Capital Region, the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (PRDD), the Good Move mobility plan and the Good Food strategy – for better food production and nutrition – all provide the tools for a transition to more sustainable and liveable neighbourhoods. At municipal level, the political agreements are at least as ambitious in terms of mobility and climate. When the many current initiatives and the renewal of policy instruments are linked together, broad support will arise, as well as much shared knowledge and public investment resources to work on combined tasks for tomorrow's city based on shared challenges.

Many new projects – such as the refurbishment of the Tour à Plomb into a cultural and sports centre – have also emerged within the framework of the various neighbourhood contracts. On top of this, large-scale urban projects around the perimeter, such as the reconstruction of the Porte de Ninove and the construction of wide bicycle lanes on the Petite Ceinture (small ring), are in their implementation phase.

All of this has created a climate in the Brussels Southern Pentagon in which citizens have committed themselves personally to the future of their city, neighbourhood or street, and in which the government has simultaneously tried to provide answers through new city and neighbourhood projects aiming to cultivate this potential present among residents through citizen participation. However, the question arises as to how this available local commitment can be maximally cultivated in shaping the city of tomorrow, and which methods of consultative citizen participation are the best means for it.

12 LD3 is an alliance of three 'local service centres'. A local service centre is a meeting place for local residents, where they can find information, recreational opportunities, training and services.

13 Samenlevingsopbouw Brussel is an association that works to encourage politicians to pursue a social policy. It defends the cause of less well-off Brussels residents and their right to the city, particularly in the improvement of their living and housing conditions.

14 Community schools (*Brede Scholen* in Dutch) are schools that commit themselves to work together with the neighbourhood, parents and local partners in education, culture, sports and social services, to provide maximal learning opportunities for their pupils.

1.2 Big and small challenges come together in the same city

The many ongoing initiatives and projects in the Southern Pentagon are food for optimism, but they are also motivated by a fundamental dissatisfaction with the current situation. The urgency to act is felt on a daily basis, especially when children cannot walk or cycle safely to school, when the heat in the city climbs to unprecedented heights, and when there are no green spots to cool down. The increasing sense of urban challenges for individual residents has fuelled an increase in initiatives in response to the status quo.

- The data collected during the ExpAIR measurement campaign launched by BRAL and the Environment and Energy Administrations of the Brussels-Capital Region (Bruxelles Environnement), shows that people are most exposed to black carbon in traffic. In addition to the majority of the Petite Ceinture, several local roads in the Southern Pentagon are also marked as having very poor air quality upon maps. (challenge: clean air – see da Schio and Vandenbroucke, 2020; Beaujean et al., 2016).
- The heat island effects lead to the air temperature during the night being up to 10°C higher in the city than in rural or adjacent wooded areas. The city is therefore in need of cooling spots. The shade of leafy trees and the coolness of water features are the most efficient tools for dealing with heat stress (challenge: heat island effect – see the map on Bruxelles Environnement website¹⁵)
- The Southern Pentagon is mainly a residential neighbourhood with a high population density. The average income is low. More than 30% of children aged three years and below live in poverty. In this context, the quality of public space and the strengthening of local networks can have a major impact on the quality of life. (challenge: a vulnerable residential area – see Wayens et al., 2020; Rosa et al., 2020; Malherbe and Rosa, 2017)
- In the Southern Pentagon, half to three quarters of the children attend nursery or primary education in their own neighbourhood. Consequently, there is a need for a safe network of car-free or traffic-calmed streets and squares that children can use to go to school and where space is created for informal social contacts and relaxation. By focusing on a network of proximity, the traversable, walkable city comes one step closer (challenge: road safety – data sources: BISA-Brussels)

¹⁵ <https://environnement.brussels/lenvironnement-etat-des-lieux/en-detail/climat/focus-cartographie-des-ilots-de-fraicheur-bruxelles>

2 > A FRAMEWORK THAT CONNECTS DIFFERENT REALIZATIONS

But how do we turn this multitude of initiatives into a coherent, structured and cross-policy-domain narrative for the Southern Pentagon, within which all known but diverse challenges are met?

The already-present seeds are an opportunity to perceive the area as an urban project. Such an urban project puts the vision of a liveable city first, by starting from the local people's real issues, instead of taking certain policy domains as a starting point. Indeed, a traversable or liveable city or neighbourhood also includes the underlying demand for more nature, less motorized traffic, more qualitative public space, and more social contact. Redesigning a street focusing only on mobility ignores opportunities to improve the quality of life. Closing a school street focusing only on the school's point of view or on road safety and air quality is a missed opportunity. The trick is to simultaneously test solution paths against various urban challenges, and to see how the project can be elevated to a more qualitative, efficient, sensitive, poetic and anchored whole. Moreover, by switching between the scale of the entire urban network and the street, building block or square level, and always involving the right stakeholders, simultaneous challenges can be intertwined and can contribute to a guiding framework for the city. An urban project cannot be reduced to a master plan that consists of the sum of delineated projects, but contributes to establishing a guiding framework of priorities and opportunities for the entire area.

In this respect, the Southern Pentagon is conceived as a test zone for working on a liveable city, by focusing on a cross-policy-domain urban project that connects small-scale local initiatives and large-scale urban visions and developments in a guiding framework for the future of the city.

2.1 A simultaneous approach is the message

One of the primary characteristics of an urban project concerns the way in which the city is approached as an ecosystem of interrelated challenges (air quality, social cohesion, heat island effect, among others) and where the solution for one thing acts as a stimulant for another. Thinking based on separate policy domains, which has become the only workable method due to the evolution of the political system, has a limiting effect in this respect. This political approach is an obstacle to a combined approach of simultaneous assignments in a given place, and points to the need to achieve a system shift based on a culture of urban projects.

The acceleration of the reflection on an urban project in the Southern Pentagon originates in a number of initiatives that traced together in 2017, and which underscored the need for a mobility shift (elaborated in more detail below). At the

outset of the research on the Southern Pentagon, the mobility issue was used as a starting point to work simultaneously on various tasks and to rethink the city this way. In practice, an urban project can start from any urban urgency/-ies that is/are felt at a given moment and that can be acted upon by citizens and policy in view of the improvement of the city's liveability. Multiple opportunities can be seized simultaneously.

Opportunity 1: shared mobility

The future of mobility is shared and multimodal. Vehicles will increasingly be shared, and a smooth transition between different modes of transport will become crucial. In order to facilitate the smooth combination of pedestrians, cyclists, public transport, private transport (following the STOP¹⁶ principle) and a range of new transport modes (steps, e-bikes, etc.), we must rethink public space.

Today, the public space in the Southern Pentagon is dominated by motorized transport. However, only half of the residents own a car, and many facilities are within walking distance of each other. Streets and squares that invite pedestrians and soft traffic create opportunities. We strive for a walkable fabric, reinforced with clear cycling routes and good junctions with public transport and alternative mobility. Specific loops ensure the accessibility of the city centre. This literally creates breathing space with room for meeting, cooling, retail, biodiversity, recreation and resting.

Opportunity 2: shared space

Within the dense street network of the Southern Pentagon there is a strikingly large number of schools and local organizations such as community centres, Kind en Gezin,¹⁷ youth centres and nurseries. The Southern Pentagon is a residential zone in which many parents and children travel from home to school and to leisure activities. Firstly, the public spaces must be well-connected, tailored to pedestrians, with travel by foot, bicycle or public transport being promoted. By reducing polluting motorized traffic, the street becomes a new place, safe and healthy, where parents can meet and children can play. It will be a shared space. Schools and neighbourhood organizations are an important lever to promote the relationship between public space and urban facilities and to strengthen social relationships. This is all the more the case when, echoing the Community School (*Brede School*) idea, playgrounds or parts of buildings are opened up to other activities and organizations, with this being done in an area-oriented and cross-community manner. Concrete projects in places where schools, urban facilities and the neighbourhood meet can form the stepping stones within a liveable and traffic-calmed network.

¹⁶ Priority is given to pedestrians (Stappen), then to cyclists (Trappen), then to public transport (Openbaar vervoer) and finally to private vehicles (Privévervoer).

¹⁷ 'Kind en Gezin (Child and Family) is an Agency that works actively in "Public Health, Welfare and Family" policy area. This Flemish Agency focuses on preventive treatment and guidance of young children geared to good outcomes in the future.' (www.kindengezin.be)

Opportunity 3: productive green and increased permeability

The mobility transition and the shift to a more qualitative, shared space can be supported by a program for urban agriculture and 'green'. A thorough reduction of the proportion of paved surfaces can temper the heat island effect in the city and ensure that more water finds its way back to the soil. By involving local organizations in a common process of urban agriculture in public spaces and school areas, we can achieve an integrated urban project. The schools' roofs, playgrounds and facades, as well as some public spaces, can thus become productive green areas, embedded in an educational trajectory of sustainable and healthy food. The Southern Pentagon already has a number of initiatives of greening, collective gardening and composting. We aim to further strengthen this network by focusing on sustained increases in permeability and the development of a program of urban agriculture in collaboration with the schools in the area. The first steps toward implementation were taken in 2019. The VGC began an urban renewal project in collaboration with BSI-BCO, BRAL, Atelier Groot Eiland and AWB, with the aim of creating a green-blue network in the Southern Pentagon. Funds were made available for several local interventions in co-creation with the involved schools, local organizations and policymakers.

At the beginning, the above-mentioned challenges were the most clearly tangible starting points from which to initiate an urban project in the Southern Pentagon. However, it would not be wise to limit the framework to these tasks. In situations where additional challenges such as energy production, affordable or energy-efficient housing, water management, recycling, local retail or production, and similar can be included in the project, this also happens.

2.2 From street to city and back

To tackle all the aforementioned challenges together, there is no more powerful tool than diving into the neighbourhoods themselves. The neighbourhood is the level where urgencies are felt first-hand, where the connection with the urban fabric becomes clear, and where both local stakeholders and policymakers can have a say. However, by continuously switching between the micro level (the building, building block or square), the scale of the neighbourhood and the scale of the city, long-term breakthroughs can be created. Choices must be made, for example, in terms of accessibility and quality of life, which must be assessed against the needs of the local residents and against policy priorities. Projects such as the school streets or the trajectory in the Southern Pentagon are therefore rich in opportunities because they zoom in on concrete, local interventions while positioning them, at the same time, in relation to a broader network of interventions aimed at the transformation of the city as a whole. This continuous zooming-in-and-out movement can lead to quality gains on many fronts. For example, it is possible to involve various stakeholders who, not only from the standpoint of different urban challenges (see previous point) but also from their own individual (user) perspective and

commitment, can contribute to a layered reading of and a framework for the city. For example, the accessibility of shopping streets for retailers is situated in relation to the introduction of car-free neighbourhoods within the Good Move plan and the need for a pedestrian-friendly fabric for local schoolchildren. The expertise that is bundled together in this way makes it possible, on the one hand, to set up local projects in line with the political vision for the city and, on the other, to better attune that large-scale vision of urban development to local needs.

2.3 A guiding framework is not a master plan

By treating two scales (neighbourhood and city) simultaneously, concrete solutions in the field can be used to work on a guiding framework for the future of the district. The overview map of the Southern Pentagon (Figure 1) provides insight into the urgent urban challenges and opportunities from the scale of the neighbourhood to that of the city as a whole.

However, the overview map of the Southern Pentagon should not be confused with a master plan. It does not provide an overview of delineated projects, projected out of the blue on a territory, but instead provides the background for a continuously adjusted overview of priorities and opportunities, both at the level of urban challenges and that of promising places and possible connections. In the implementation of urban projects, it is too often the case that today sharp schisms between preliminary research, project definition and project implementation exist, sometimes making 'supply and demand' difficult to reconcile. The framework therefore has the function of a working document that needs to be continuously adjusted throughout the process, based on new insights from residents, local stakeholders, experts and policymakers. It is a tool that allows defined projects and master plans to engage in constant dialogue with the guiding and evolving framework.

3 > BUILDING AN URBAN PROJECT STEP-BY-STEP

Since 2018, the Brussels Centre Observatory, BRAL, Bye Bye Petite Ceinture and Architecture Workroom Brussels have been collaborating on the development of the Southern Pentagon as an urban project through the method of co-design. It can be seen as a test program for the roll-out of more co-design projects for the future of Brussels. Throughout various design sessions, debates, meetings and walks, as well as an exhibition, the right ingredients and recipes have been – and still are – sought. The process passes through several steps, from scientific and design research to field explorations, from collective vision formation to realizations together with the residents and public actors.

3.1 Step 1: the mobility transition as an urban project

From the start of the BSI-BCO study on the pedestrian zone, the focus was placed on its southern part, both with regard to the connection with the South Station and the connection of Fontainas with the west and east. In November and December 2017, Bye Bye Petite Ceinture, together with Brussels Academy, BRAL, BSI-BCO and AWB, organized four walks and co-creative workshops for citizens, users, companies and associations around four zones along the Petite Ceinture: Canal-Saintelette, Midi-Porte d'Anderlecht, Madou-Botanique, and Trône-Louise. Together, efforts were made to find viable alternatives for the Petite Ceinture, which had been developed near-exclusively for smooth motorized traffic flows. There was a plea for more transversal connections across the ring, stronger public transport and more quality public space for cyclists and pedestrians. The series was preceded by a panel discussion and debate in the Kaaitheater about the potential of the Petite Ceinture as a space with and through which the surrounding neighbourhoods would be connected. This co-creative research contributed to the creation of a cross-policy domain urban project for Brussels, starting from a pressing urban challenge, in this case mobility.

3.2 Step 2: a structuring axis as a leverage area

In the spring of 2018, BSI-BCO organized an international masterclass 'Zoom In, Zoom Out – the Brussels Hyper Centre: from pedestrian zone to urban project' together with perspective.brussels¹⁸. During a series of seminars, a proposal was made that the current demarcation of the city centre, the so-called Brussels Pentagon, be viewed as a hypercentre stretching beyond the Petite Ceinture. In order to develop a safe, healthy and pleasant walking network, the network of public spaces must be expanded, so that soft crossings better connect the neighbourhoods inside and outside the Pentagon. For this reason, three walking axes between the upper and the lower city (east – west) were defined, which together formed a dense network of streets and squares, interconnecting the dominant north – south axes of the city centre. An initial vision was developed for each of the walking axes, and concrete interventions and programs were proposed (Vanin et al., 2020; De Visscher et al., 2018).

3.3 Step 3: co-designing a guiding framework filled with concrete project opportunities

Under the heading 'Shared Mobility, Shared Space' and within the context of the cultural manifestation You Are Here in the WTC-I tower – an Architecture Workroom initiative – the interim results of the above initiatives were exhibited

¹⁸ perspective.brussels is a regional expertise centre and initiator of the development strategy of the Brussels territory: <https://perspective.brussels/fr>

and continued in a co-creative design process. The trajectory was initiated with the support of the Mobility Administration of the Brussels-Capital Region (Brussels Mobility), in collaboration with Bye Bye Petite Ceinture, Architecture Workroom Brussels, BRAL, IRIB, Brussels Academy and BSI-BCO. The public debate 'Mobility is an Urban Project' took place in early October 2018. Among other things, it investigated how certain mobility solutions could be implemented in many places at the same time, thus contributing to the transformation of the city.

During two co-creative design workshops in autumn 2018, strategic places where the greatest potential lay for testing a new, connecting urban space were selected. The expertise of academics, designers, residents and other stakeholders resulted in a number of concrete future images for promising locations (see Figure 3).

Strategic junction A: Rue des Six Jetons

Four primary schools, two secondary schools and one location of the Erasmus College of Higher Education are located along the Rue des Six Jetons. The majority of students travel to school on foot, by bicycle or using public transport. Since the introduction of the pedestrian zone, the southern part of the Rue des Six Jetons has become a part of the city's small parking loop, resulting in heavy traffic (Hubert et al. 2017; 2020). The intersection with the Rue Van Artevelde is problematic, and there are no bicycle paths. However, the area holds a major asset: the Fontainas Park is already utilized by several schools in the area. During the current reconstruction, additional facilities are being built, such as a nursery, catering facilities and an underground sports hall. A transformation of the Place du Jardin aux Fleurs – Rue des Six Jetons – Fontainas axis is therefore imperative. We convert the intersections with Rue Van Artevelde and Place Fontainas into mobi points where we can switch between different transport modes. In the existing parking buildings, the most accessible floor is reserved for bicycle parking. The Rue des Six Jetons will be a residential area that connects schools with the park. A vegetable garden project in the park near Anneessens Funck, managed by the school, strengthens the school-park relationship. The 'greening' of the park will be extended to the construction of the nearby intersections, such as Place Fontainas and Place du Jardin aux Fleurs.

Strategic junction B: Area of Gare de Bruxelles-Chapelle

Today, the Gare de la Chapelle's underpasses and facades are dreary and underused. However, examples such as Le Viaduc des Arts in Paris and the *Hofbogen* in Rotterdam bear witness to the countless possibilities for such spaces. By using the accommodation for catering and other functions, it becomes a lively place in the evening. Surrounding actors can use the public space. Think of an evening market with the unsold goods of Les Tanneurs or a *table d'hôte* organized by Recyclart. During the day it becomes a place for games and sports for the students of the surrounding schools. The tunnels and the station's facades can be connected to

- Figure 3. Photographs of some of the selected streets and areas as potential places for experimental projects: Rue des Six Jetons, Gare Bruxelles-Chapelle, Marolles, Athénée Robert Catteau (view from Place Poelart), Rue de la Senne





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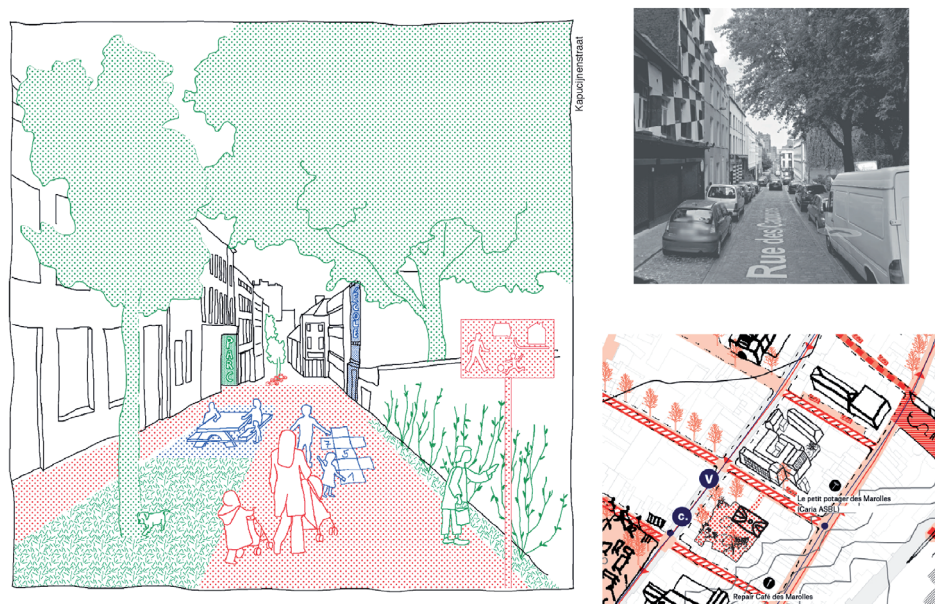
the other developments on the site and together form a large multifunctional pool in the district.

Strategic junction C: Place Poelaert

Today, the elevator at the Place Poelaert forms a major bottleneck. To encourage the use of the alternative slope, a redevelopment is required. Parking spaces should make way for a green promenade, offering a superb view over the city. It will be a place to hang out and rest while admiring this view.

Future imaginaries – Zoom 1: Rue des Capucins

➤ **Figure 4. Future imaginaries Rue des Capucins**



Source: Architecture Workroom Brussels, 2019

The Rue des Capucins is a cross street between the Rue Haute and the Rue Blaes. Today it is a narrow street, completely paved and dominated by parked vehicles. Young people on their way to school or to the green inner area *Escargot* are given little space to manoeuvre. However, the street could be given the *woonerf*¹⁹ status. Parking spaces would no longer be required, freeing up space for a paved strip for cyclists and pedestrians and a bicycle shed at the school entrance. The vacant space can also be used to play, relax or meet. Reopening and upgrading access to the *Escargot* inner area strengthens the relationship between the inner area and street events. The adjustments create a sense of the neighbourhood being traversable. Moreover, when the pavement is partially broken up, the street becomes greener, with water thus being able to find its way back to the soil. Edible greenery can be

¹⁹ A residential area with restrictions aimed at slowing down traffic.

planted along the walls of the adjacent residential complex and could be managed by the neighbouring secondary school Institut Diderot, residents of the residential complex or vzw BRAVVO,²⁰ which helps maintain the *Escargot* inner area.

Future imaginaries – Zoom 2: Rue Haute

The Rue Haute has the narrow profile of a one-way street and forms, together with the Rue Blaes, an access loop for vehicular traffic, ensuring accessibility for retailers located in both streets for loading and unloading their stock. However, the street is crossed by soft traffic axes in several places. A number of schools and facilities are also located on this street, but with little space at their entrances. However, limiting car traffic in one direction and installing markings and wide traffic islands at the intersections will create a priority space for pedestrians. Small interventions such as flower boxes, lighting and give-way road markings make it clear that this is a place in which cars are just guests.

So retailers can be smoothly supplied with goods, while it is also clear at intersections and in the areas in front of facilities that cars are merely guests.

Future imaginaries – Zoom 3: Rue des Alexiens

Today, the Rue des Alexiens is part of the small parking ring. Bicycle lanes are marked in two directions, but are embedded in the street. The *Sint-Joris* primary school is currently working on the school buildings and their access. A large, open, new school entrance is provided along the Rue des Alexiens.

When vehicular traffic is limited to one-way traffic, the vacant space can be transformed into an elevated, two-way bicycle path. At the height of the entrance to the school, a wide traffic island can provide a safe crossing.

A wider sidewalk and the widening of the school access provide space for waiting parents and children. By integrating play elements into the public domain, the routes from school to home become a trail full of experiences.

When the current parking strips are constructed to be permeable to water, with tree sections between them, the rainwater from the pavement will drain into this green strip. A green strip along the school wall can offer different qualitative elements, and the school can create a vegetable garden with an educational purpose on its roof or on the new playground.

Future imaginaries – Zoom 4: Towards a Place de la Senne?

The Rue de la Senne runs through a mainly residential neighbourhood. Only those who live here come here. Nevertheless, there is severe parking pressure in the neighbourhood. Besides one bus line (number 46), the area is poorly served by public transport, and parking is free. Between the intersection with the Rue de

²⁰ Bravvo is the prevention service of the City of Brussels, in charge of the fight against social exclusion and feelings of insecurity.

l'Abattoir and the Rue Cuerens, the road widens with trees along the sidewalks and on a central traffic island. However, the vacant space is underutilized and mainly paved. By removing one lane, space can be made for a separate bicycle path on the GF6 route. A Mobi point with shared cars and bicycles can be constructed between the tree sections.

When the square is decorated with urban furniture and modules for urban agriculture, residents can grow vegetables, have a picnic, rest or play there. The modules of urban agriculture can be managed by a neighbourhood committee or by another actor in the neighbourhood, such as the Tour à Plomb. The green space under the trees can then be considerably increased, allowing rainwater to flow from the adjacent sidewalks and better infiltrate the soil. This greening of public space can be extended to the front yard of the Tour à Plomb around the corner, and can thus contribute to making the urban fabric more traversable.

3.4 Step 4: collectively managed edible greenery as the first tangible result

In 2019, an urban renewal project of the Flemish Community²¹ focusing on community building around a productive green-blue network in the test zone of the Southern Pentagon was approved. As a result, the VGC provided funding for several specific installations, designed through a co-productive process and executed by Atelier Groot Eiland. The installations aim to create new green spaces that involve local residents and organizations in their design, implementation and management.

This means that schools and other neighbourhood facilities, but possibly also parts of the public space in the vicinity of these facilities, are used as a physical carrier for productive landscaping. Roofs, facades, fences, playgrounds, but also streets, squares and other forms of street furniture are cleverly provided with edible greenery (vegetables, fruit, herbs), nest boxes, and other installations intended to foster biodiversity and the short food chain in the city. The installations with edible greenery are placed in selected locations in function of the local support, strong visibility and link with the public space.

Atelier Groot Eiland concretely elaborates the punctual interventions with edible greenery. As a social economy organization, Atelier Groot Eiland accompanies people alienated from the regular labour market to employment through training and work experience. In addition, Atelier Groot Eiland also offers labour care for

²¹ As the Flemish Community Commission (VGC) can only intervene in community-linked competences, it lacks the competence to pursue an urban policy in the way certain other administrations can. For example, the VGC does not have a mandate to direct the development of the physical public space in a neighbourhood or to shape the global urban vision. Therefore, the project needed to seek alignment with the policies and urban development programs of the other Brussels public authorities.

vulnerable people with complex poverty or psychosocial problems. Atelier Groot Eiland is a non-profit organization that, in addition to urban agriculture, is also active in catering, carpentry and retail.

Edible greenery in the city

Because of the scarcity of space, edible greenery in the city has to fulfil various functions. For the same reason, most of the initiatives are small-scale. Food production is often 'a bonus', as opposed to the sole objective, of edible greenery in the city. A community garden provides a space for community building, a vegetable garden on a school's playground can serve educational purposes, a food grove in the city offers a cool place on hot days and at the same time space to play and for recreation.

Atelier Groot Eiland chooses to grow mainly high-value crops in the city. These are crops that can be harvested several times a year and have a high yield, for instance herbs, tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce and small fruit. Thanks to the proximity of the customers (short chain) and the minimum surface area required for a good yield, this is a model that is cost effective within small areas of the city.

All these forms of edible greenery in the city fulfil functions that will become increasingly important in a world in transition. The combination of professional and small-scale interventions with edible greenery increases city residents' awareness of the food's origin, and increases the knowledge and skills citizens need to grow their own food in the city.

Emancipatory levers for liveable neighbourhoods

Schools and other community facilities such as training initiatives, community centres, local service centres, etc. can play an important emancipatory role within the project. The new green spaces offer various opportunities for the neighbourhood: recreation, education and relaxation. Active citizenship, care for the environment and health are promoted through these installations through the joint efforts of schools, parent groups and neighbourhood groups. The 'greening' of the (semi-) public space contributes to a more pleasant and healthier living environment, better water management (for example through demineralization and increased permeability of the soil, water buffering and rainwater absorption via green roofs) and the tempering of the heat island effect in the metropolis.

The installations act as mobilizing instruments for sustainable urban development, focusing on concepts such as a participatory approach, health education and sustainable food. The project also contributes to the social cohesion in transition neighbourhoods, as the local community is called upon to take care of the edible greenery.

Coproduction, education and participation are key

The locations for which productive green installations are designed were selected through workshops in cooperation with the partners of the trajectory for the Southern Pentagon. Each individual location has specific requirements: for example, a floor slab needing to be broken out by a contractor, whether or not a roof was sturdy enough for a roof garden, the presence of any other greenery in the neighbourhood (such as a large tree that could be incorporated), orientation, soil type, etc.

An intention to develop an educational program around the green installations with the partners involved in the field, in order to provide a substantive framework and structural embedding, among other things, is also present. A motivated school director or coordinator of an organization, a group of teachers, or a parental or neighbourhood group can achieve a lot in this regard, but it cannot be assumed that schools and other community actors possess all the knowledge needed to maintain a food forest, a vegetable garden or fruit trees.

In addition to the investment resources required for the green installations, work is ongoing in relation to agreements regarding their maintenance. For example, fruit trees have to be pruned regularly according to certain principles and pest control has to be performed using environmentally friendly methods. A good plan for maintenance is therefore necessary. Since there are currently few systems for maintaining large-scale and long-term edible greenery in public spaces, we must look for new models in which citizens, associations, (social) companies and governments work together to achieve sustainable management and maintenance.

3.5 Still a lot of work to be done, but the actors are in position

Two years after designating the Southern Pentagon as a promising east-west axis for the development of the Brussels city centre, an intermediate account of the results can be drawn up. In addition to the preparatory cartographic research work by the BSI-BCO, AWB and BRAL have drawn up an overview map through co-design work sessions that serves as a continuously evolving working tool for the framework of the Southern Pentagon. It provides visual support for the discussions between the parties involved. It helps in envisaging new opportunities, linking opportunities and challenges, and connecting diverging interests with ongoing projects.

Within this framework, a number of promising locations have already been designated that can serve as strategic levers for the entire perimeter. This relates to a number of important nodes, as well as a number of streets and smaller squares in the dense network.

During the co-design sessions, actors with different user perspectives who had not previously sat together around the table were mobilized to formulate solution-oriented proposals for the future of the city. Local schools (Nieuwland, Sint-Jan-Berchmans, Sint-Joris), socio-cultural organizations (Habitat and Rénovation, Convivence-Samenleven, local Vegetable Garden Masters, De Markten, Nuit Blanche), experts and representatives of the City (administrations and cabinets) and of the Region (Bruxelles Environnement) entered into a dialogue.

Based on these sessions, images were made of what is possible and desirable for some of the strategic locations in the network. Overall, we can say that a certain consensus has grown between policymakers and civil society about the direction in which the Southern Pentagon should evolve, and that it is best to start from a dense network of shared spaces, shared mobility and productive greenery in a strengthened social fabric. The above process finally led to the mobilization of the first implementation budgets for the development of a green-blue network within the framework created for the Southern Pentagon.

So, the urban project for the Southern Pentagon is under construction. Many of the necessary preliminary studies (spatial and social) have been completed, with numerous opportunities for pilot projects having been explored. The guiding vision for the desired transformation of public space in the central neighbourhoods of Brussels has found a broad consensus among both private and public actors (see Vanin et al., 2020). However, there is still a long way to go for the realization of the urban project. Public investment resources and local dynamics in the neighbourhoods must be linked in order to realize the ambitions through concrete realizations, designed via co-design trajectories and managed via new public-civil partnerships. In addition, supervision by experts should also be continued, in order to control the quality and translate the global vision into the necessary policy and social innovations.

4 > AN URBAN PROJECT REQUIRES A NEW METHODOLOGY AND NEW ROLES

Many challenges, and therefore many possible solutions, come together in the city, all of which can have an impact on one another whether or not we consider them to be separate projects. For example, making the streets permeable again can also be a first step towards the creation of sheltered oases, which can, in turn, support soft mobility. Optimizing budgets for urban management (such as the renovation of sewers or the reconstruction of road surfaces) can provide opportunities for the redesign of public space with more latitude for water management and greening. However, the gap between objectives determined by policy and the capacity of individual initiatives and projects is often so large that we need to find new ways of scaling-up to connect both.

Policymakers already provide many useful tools for bridging this gap, but in practice they all too often merely ‘coexist’ without truly being linked together. The Good Move regional mobility plan and the Good Food strategy both search for new ways to formulate objectives in consultation with a broad group of stakeholders and through the addressal of simultaneous challenges in the region. In its revised edition, the PRDD tried – albeit cautiously – to bridge the gap between different policy domains. Since 2011, various sustainable neighbourhood contracts²² have been drawn up in the Southern Pentagon. In addition, there are several programs for school environments, such as the school contracts (perspective.brussels), the school streets (Mobility Department, City of Brussels) and the ‘richtlijnenboek beeldkwaliteit schoolomgevingen’ (a book with guidelines for the visual quality of school environments) (Brussels Master Architect²³). Some new Community Schools (*Brede scholen*) in the Southern Pentagon perimeter (e.g. Nieuwland) have expressed a desire to achieve a broad living and learning environment for children. The government’s current instruments, plans and projects all originate from a shared vision for the future, but ultimately separate into different tracks that are no longer mutually reinforcing solutions. They do not complement each other in a way that allows multiplication of the effects, and capacities for building bridges between the different instruments and projects are insufficient.

4.1 Need for a new methodology: co-design as leverage for a system shift

At present, within the current administrative system that is based on split, sometimes competing, powers, the methodology, time and budgets that would allow cooperation on an integrated project aiming to improve the quality of life in the city are lacking. Such an integrated project should link together all policy domains and scale levels in a framework that is continuously adjusted. There is thus an urgent need for a system shift that follows the logic of the urban project instead of compartmentalizing the whole into separate competences and (sub-)projects. In order to unite regional and municipal public initiatives with local civil society initiatives, a joint process is needed that bundles and promotes knowledge at all levels. Bringing local and public stakeholders, designers, academics, experts and committed citizens together around concrete design cases creates opportunities to align small-scale projects with urban regional plans and to tackle different urban challenges simultaneously.

The co-design method brings together a diversity of stakeholders, and searches for interfaces through design and imagination. The space is the physical place where

²² Sustainable neighbourhood contracts are urban renewal programmes subsidized by the Brussels- Capital Region.

²³ The Brussels Master Architect is a person, appointed by the Brussels Regional Government, who together with a team is in charge of guaranteeing the architectural, spatial and scenic qualities of new building projects in the Brussels-Capital Region.

all urban challenges present themselves simultaneously and design is ideally suited to clarify which choices can be made for all stakeholders. Everyone wants to live in a street with their own parking space in front of the door, with a wide bicycle path, with plenty of space for children to play and with plenty of greenery. But the street's width remains limited. Spatial design shows where sustainable choices can be made. Through the use of maps and images, connections between different projects can more easily be demonstrated, as can linkages between specific local interventions and their impacts on the wider urban fabric. A proposal for a local intervention can immediately be placed in synergy with other current projects or visions, and, vice-versa, large-scale visions can be refined to local needs.

➤ **Figure 5.** Co-design workshop within the project 'Shared Mobility, Shared Space', in the context of 'You Are Here' 2018



Source: Authors

By connecting all these different parties, the co-design method has the potential to work on widely supported transformation proposals for the city. Knowledge is passed on that would otherwise remain compartmentalized: the urban farmer shares their experiences with the policymaker, the mobility expert provides insights to local residents, the policymaker passes on knowledge about existing and future instruments, and so on. In this way, co-design can contribute to a fundamental behavioural change in the actors involved. Moreover, co-design can break through the rigid triptych between preliminary research, project definition and project implementation. Parties responsible for financing or future management are not informed in separate meeting rooms about the vision and expected impact of a project, but rather they sit together at the design table, enabling the laying-out of a more focused implementation and better monitoring of the long-term effects (Cassiers et al., 2020).

So co-design distinguishes itself from other forms of research-by-design through the early and explicitly active involvement of end users and other actors, such as experts, policymakers and residents. Therefore, citizen input takes place during the conception of the project and not in response to an already-designed and researched proposal. The visual translation of the challenges and concerns of those involved by designers makes it easier to imagine and discuss the impact and qualities of future projects together, and to gain support for the necessary change.

4.2 A need for new roles

Today, clearly defined roles and mandates that would allow the rolling-out of the co-design's methodology as a powerful tool for urban development and creation of sufficient capacity to act are still lacking. Effective co-creation and co-production are not accomplished by sporadically organizing a participatory workshop with a non-binding character and without a mandate.

It is important that the method is built into the current system as a full-fledged process, in which local stakeholders, civil society, designers, experts and policy-makers are all involved, as opposed to a process that is conceived as an extra layer on top of the current system. The capacities required to fulfil the different roles within co-design are already present in the existing organizations and authorities, but there has been a lack of determination to give these people the proper mandate within the current system thus far.

A first important role within co-design is the role of process supervisor. This person is a coordinator who continuously keeps the process going and adjusts it if necessary. They bring together all the available information from the various stakeholders, and direct the other roles within the co-design process. They maintain an overview of the overall framework, and continuously adjust it according to new insights. They ensure that co-design is deployed from vision development to project implementation and beyond, in a relentless and non-linear process. In the specific case of the trajectory for the Southern Pentagon, this role was assumed by BSI-BCO through the mandate they received from the City of Brussels on the one hand, and the VGC on the other.

A second role is that of the continuous search for support throughout the process. It is important to ensure that the role of citizens is not limited to presenting ideas or criticizing policy decisions, but includes active contribution to the development of their city. For this role, one needs to talk to local stakeholders in the neighbourhoods, see what is going on, and check where there might be opportunities to act upon. BRAL, just like actors such as ARAU²⁴ and IEB²⁵, keeps a finger on the pulse

²⁴ ARAU (L'Atelier de Recherche et d'Action Urbaines) is a Brussels civil society organization that was founded in 1969.

²⁵ IEB (Inter-Environnement Bruxelles) is a civil society organization that strives for a better quality of life in Brussels.

of citizen dynamics. BRAL represented civil society in the cooperation around the Southern Pentagon, bringing engaged citizens to the table.

The third role is reserved for the designer. Through research-by-design, challenges and actors are connected in desirable and feasible future projects. The designer shows how choices can be made and where qualities can be generated by linking challenges or actors. They have a crucial role in pushing the process further when it comes to content. Both BSI-BCO and Architecture Workroom Brussels have in-house research-by-design expertise. It should be emphasized here that the mandate for this role was largely absent from the process to date, being only manifested in the form of a subsidy support from Bruxelles Mobilité to AWB pertaining to the project's participation in an exhibition of the cultural manifestation 'You Are Here', an AWB initiative.

And finally, a fourth role is necessary in order to translate all of this so that it is able to fit into the policy frameworks. It is important that policymakers are also involved as stakeholders throughout the design process. They join the design table, where they gather information and transfer knowledge, subsequently following this up by means of progress meetings.

All these roles involve an investment that should not be underestimated, but which cannot be reduced to the tendering of a short-term one-off preliminary study. The different tasks within a co-design process direct the general framework, continuously indicate new projects, and align current and new projects, so that they take on a fuller role throughout the entire process of urban development – from vision development to the follow-up of implementation projects.

5 > FOCUS ON THE FUTURE: BROADENING SUPPORT THROUGH ACTION AND EXPERIMENT

Over the past two years, and despite the limited budgets, the co-design process in the Southern Pentagon as a test for an alternative method of urban development has been driven by the collective conviction of academics, designers, spatial experts and civil society organizations. This chapter opened with the observation that the Southern Pentagon is a powerful experimental place where operating capital that allows a response to the countless urban challenges that arise is available. The interim results also show that there is a growing consensus and solution-oriented direction from which to utilize this operating capital. The future revolves around a further roll-out of this process and the perpetuation of the various responsibilities within it.

In order to further roll-out this co-design process for Brussels, it is necessary to invest in a broadening of the support base by continuing the discussions with relevant residents and local organizations about specific design locations, and thus, step-by-step, contribute to a shift in mentality that can lead to behavioural change.

Discussions and design workshops result in widely supported transformation proposals for the specific locations, delineate the responsibilities of policy and local stakeholders, and continuously adjust the general framework, which, in turn, can lead to new projects in an ever-evolving and increasingly efficient process of urban development.

The future is all about action and experiment, both by the organizations responsible for the co-design process in the Southern Pentagon, and by city services and local organizations. However, in Brussels, the method of co-design has not yet been tested as a fundamental method for urban development, and therefore requires a form of well-coordinated experiment that can adjust and professionalize the process through well-considered actions. Above all, this should take shape in new collaborations between the City of Brussels, designers, researchers, civil society organizations and local stakeholders, whereby all of these parties structurally engage in a dialogue in order to build together on the general framework for the Southern Pentagon. Therefore, in parallel to the local design sessions, a mandate for – and proper coordination of – the various responsibilities within the co-design process (process coordinator, co-design supervisor, local stakeholder expert and policy representation) is required.

5.1 The main pitfalls: lack of mandate and relapse into excessive splitting

The direction of future work seems clear. However, it is important to consider some of the pitfalls already mentioned in this chapter, which may hinder the projected process.

It is crucial, however, that an urban project does not lapse into a ‘project logic’. Politicians today work with clearly defined projects and master plans that fit their policy areas and that can be financed through compartmentalized budget lines. In such a scenario, thinking all too often stops when the project definition is determined. As a result, the translation between the vision and process – which are constantly evolving – on the one hand, and the projects that result from these on the other, systematically goes wrong. If no budgets are found for these projects, the whole process is in danger of coming to a standstill because a – by nature – incremental and dynamic urban project is, out of habit, reduced to a linear process from vision to project execution.

A second pitfall, also mentioned earlier, is the misconception of setting up a co-design process as an intermediary phase intended to collect questions from various stakeholders in order to formulate better projects with greater support. The dynamics of co-creation and the exchange between diverse stakeholders do not cease after the design, but extend beyond the project implementation. Co-design is not only a quality touchstone for design, but also for project implementation, the

eventual use and management, and for evaluation; ultimately it will also lead to the recalibration of the original vision.

A last anticipated pitfall is that the existing policy instruments must be adapted to be able to accommodate new developments, so that the general framework for the Southern Pentagon can continue to be translated. But those tools are not yet available (consider, for example, BRAL's plea for a Master Architect for Co-creation). Reworking tools takes time, but co-design is actually a way to take steps gradually, to identify opportunities and experiment in a constructive manner, and as such can contribute to the realization of such a system shift.

Finally, we think it is important to stress that this process of co-creation can only be achieved if a process of mediation between the different stakeholders is established. This important task should not be underestimated, nor should it be confused with the process of co-creation itself. At the different stages, the BSI-BCO has tried to play a mediating role, which was possible thanks to its particular position, being outside the interests of each actor and the associated power games (Vanin et al., 2020). Unfortunately, this role has so far not been sufficiently appreciated in the process, especially among public actors.

6 > CONCLUSION

The Southern Pentagon project constitutes an important learning trajectory with fertile ground for testing things in the field together with local coalitions. Despite the current policy framework that does not focus on co-design, but rather operates on a project-based logic instead of a continuously evolving process logic, there are many actors (engaged citizens, action groups, designers, cabinets, schools and other local organizations and associations, civil society, and others) who share the same vision for the city and who believe in the importance of an urban project that can increase sustainability, liveability and solidarity within the city. This gives important encouragement for continuing the process and learning through it, together, along the way.

Let us celebrate and support the first modest steps as important building blocks for the collective urban project for the entire Southern Pentagon. For the remainder, we have faith in a yet-to-come domino effect.

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