

Leergang 16

17.09.10 t/m 17.12.10

**Planning Sustainable Mega-Cities:
thinking beyond the Urban Centre**



Amsterdam University

Opening Lecture 17.09.10

**From Brussels, the
Brabant Capital, to the
Cosmopolitan Central
Belgian Metropolis
and the Low Carbon
University Town
of Louvain-la-Neuve**

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- A recurrent feature of Brussels is its receptiveness to external influences and opportunistic short-term adaptation.
- Brussels as an open Metropolis started with Wenceslaus of Luxemburg's accession to the throne of Brabant in 1356. As foreign ruler he had to accept a charter limiting his power, called "De blijde inkomst" (happy entry). He settled his court on the Coudenberg Hill.





- One century later in 1440 Brabant became part of Burgundy. Philip the good moved his court from Dijon to Brussels. The AULA MAGNA, a 40 meter high Assembly hall symbolised his power and his capital.

- Another century later the Habsburg Charles V, Emperor of the German Holy Roman Empire chose Brussels as capital and installed his munificent imperial court on the same Coudenberg Hill.
- His son, Felipe II, chose Madrid as Capital.
- In 1579, the Northern part of the Low Countries declared its independence while the Southern part and Brussels remained faithful to Madrid.





- In counterpoint to the Court which occupied the Hill, the low-lying land close to the river was occupied by the merchants and common people. The Town Hall and its grand square symbolised the power of the merchants and their corporations.

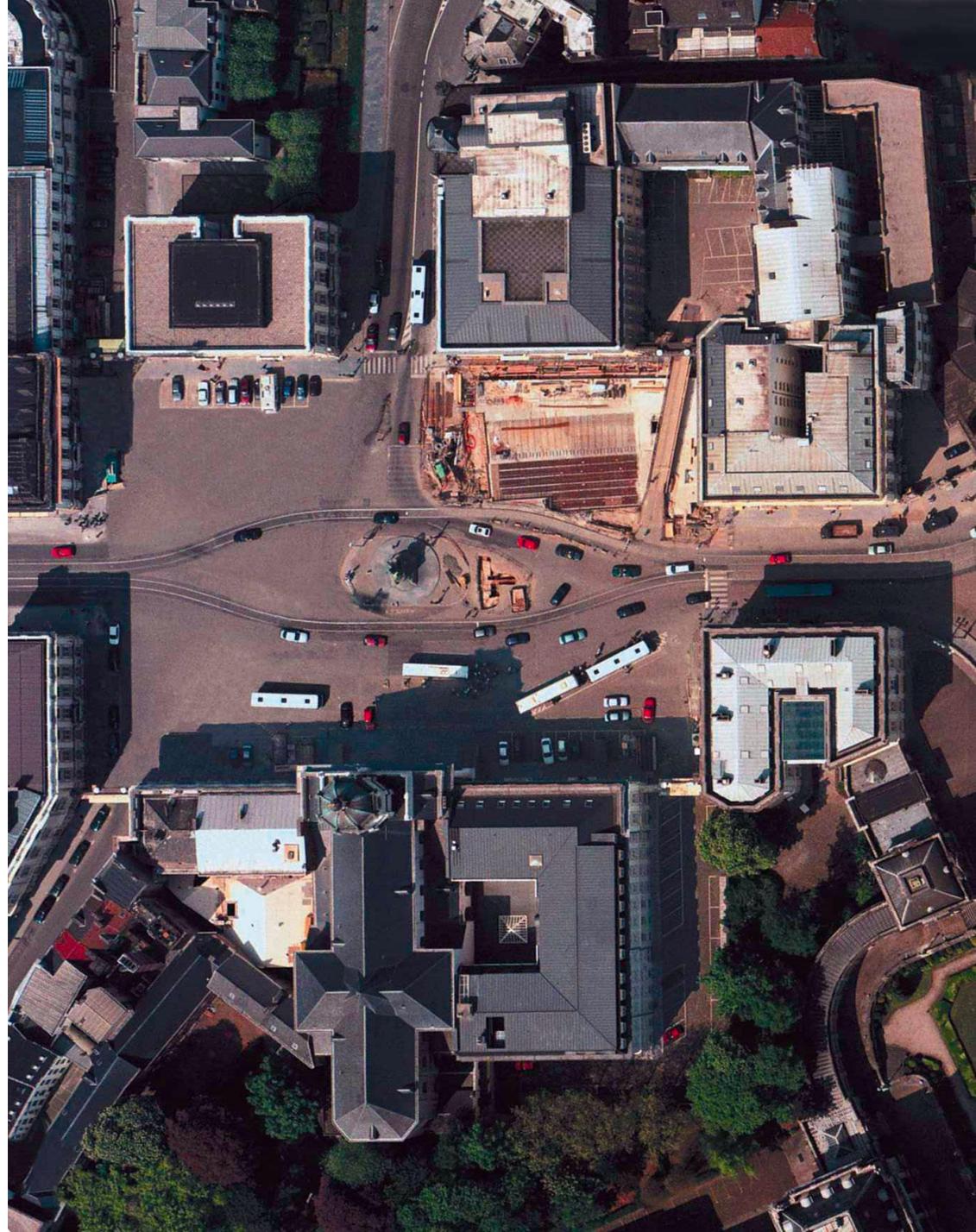


- The cathedral is located exactly in between the common people and the aristocracy.



- The attempt by Louis XIV to conquer the Low Countries and to demolish the highly symbolic Brussels Town Hall failed on both accounts. Another foreigner became the ruler of Brussels: Eugene Maximilian Duke of Bavaria, to whom the Belgians owe the reconstruction of the town square as it stands now (1696).

- Soon afterwards, Brussels and the Southern part of the Low Countries became a (remote) part of the Austrian Empire.
- The magnificent imperial court of Coudenberg including the late gothic chapel of Charles V had to give way to a more modest classic square copied from of the grand Nancy Stanislas Square.



- The French Revolution and invasion of the Low Countries brought a 20 year French occupation.
- In 1814, the Vienna Conference remodelled Europe.
- The Southern Provinces were not represented while the Netherlands were strongly represented by their new German born King Willem I.



- Brussels became part of the Netherlands and its alternate capital, on par with Amsterdam.
- Willem I proved a strong supporter of Brussels as a cosmopolitan metropolis.
- However his staunch Protestantism and his pro-Dutch language policy made him unpopular and triggered the 1830 Brussels Revolution.

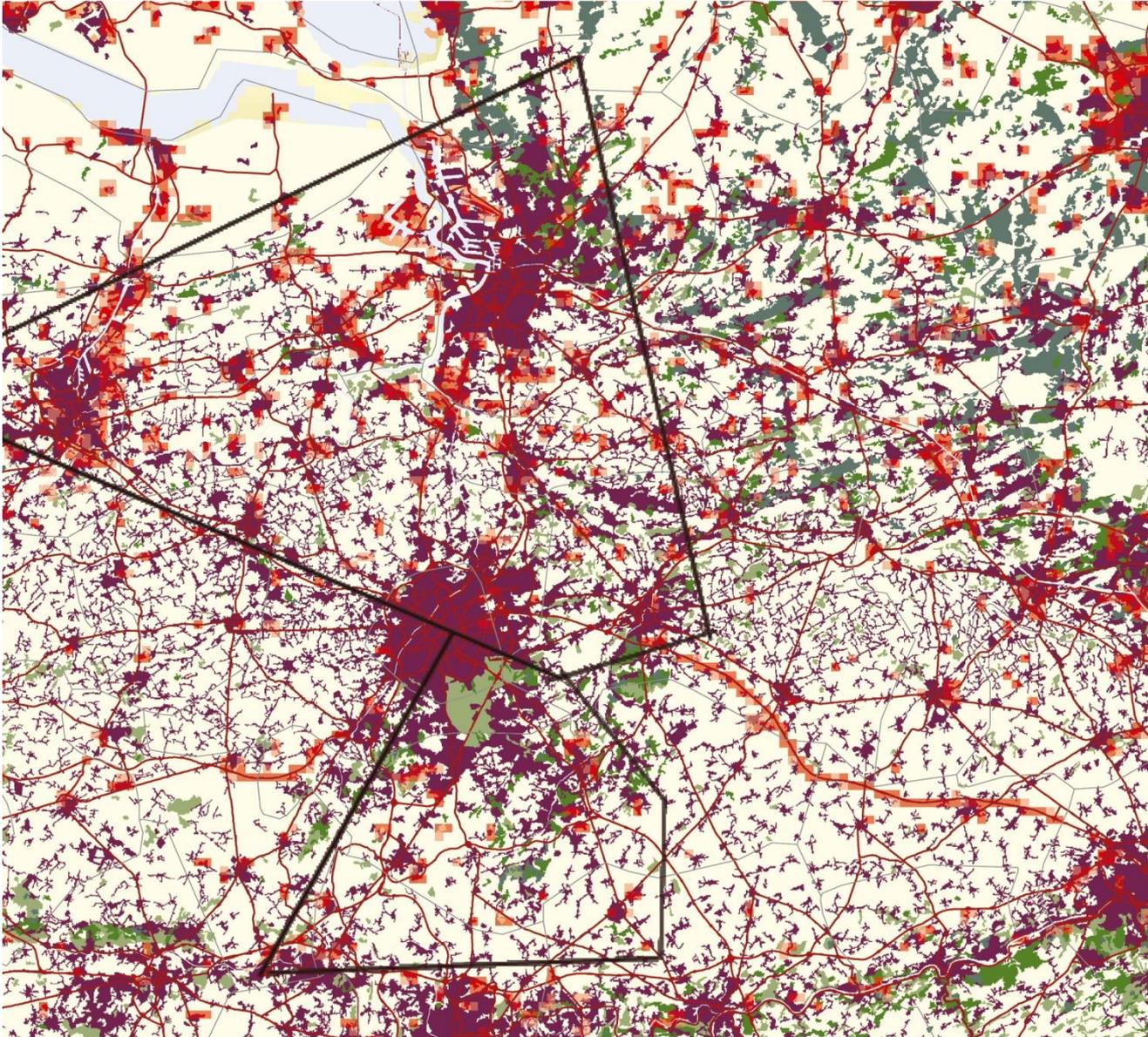


- The Brussels Revolution brought to power another German Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha.
- He pursued the Wilhelm I development policies and succeeded to keep the new country alive and well.



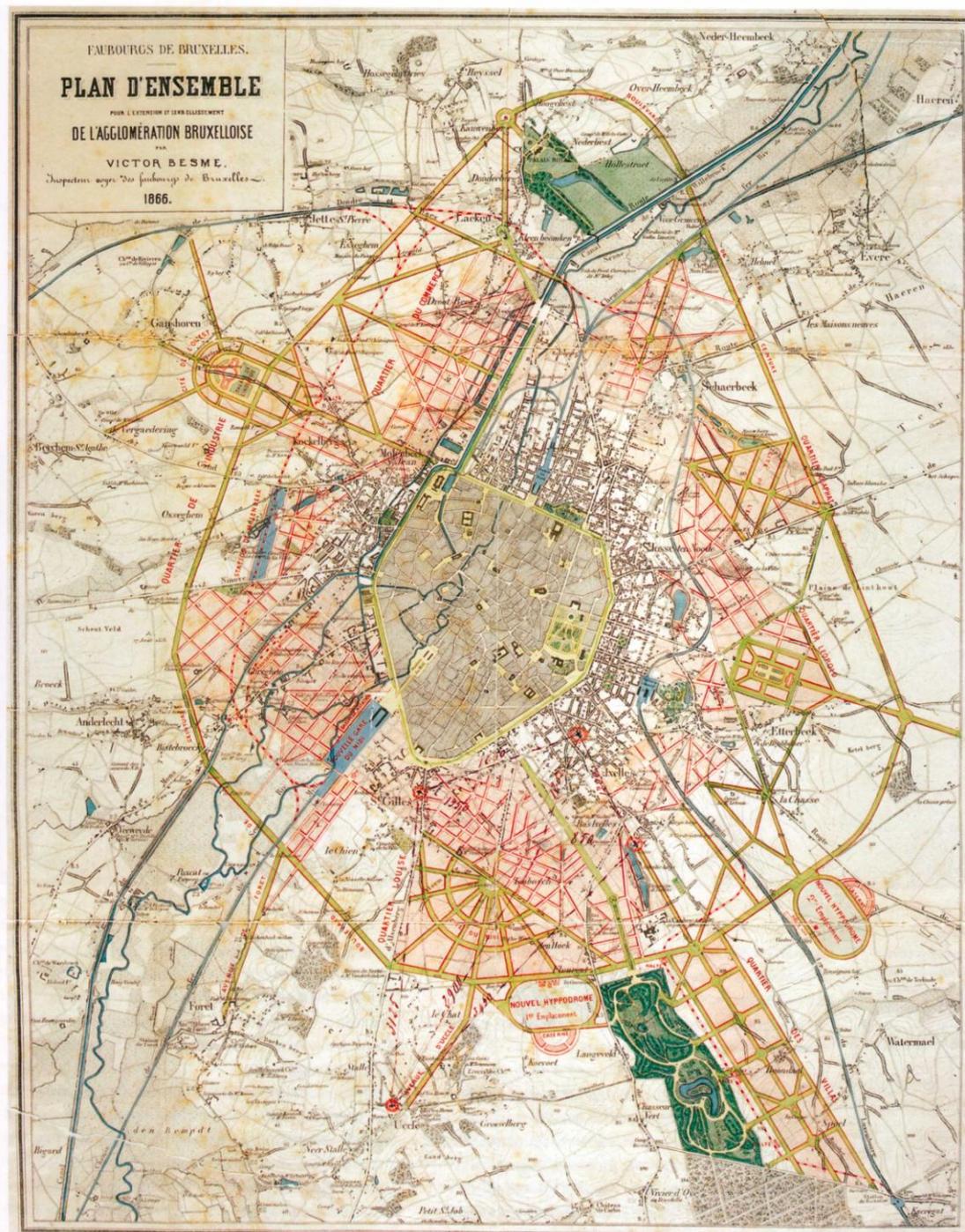
- He was followed by Leopold II, a ruler of imperial stature, who wanted Brussels to become again a cosmopolitan capital, both compact and green.





- He expanded Brussels outside its urban limits through a rail and tramway network extending over the whole country, allowing easy commuting.

- Inside Brussels, he triggered an overall masterplan which included numerous public parks, implemented through public private partnerships.
- He also set aside a huge amount of forest land as public open space, planning with the central Belgian metropolis in mind.
- His time and the following years could be called a golden age for urban living at lasted until after the Second World War.

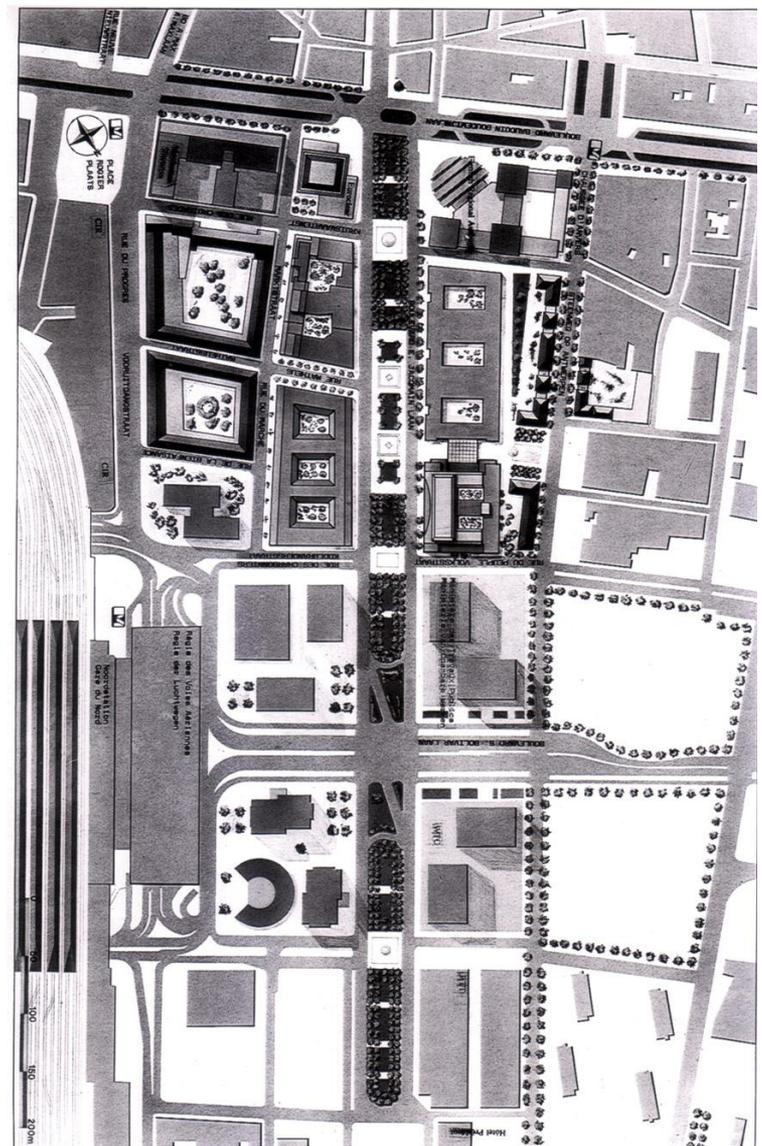


- 1952 was an opportunity for Brussels to become the first European Capital but this chance was thwarted by the national Government which refused Brussels as European Capital by pushing Liège that was not wanted by the others. Luxemburg became the first European capital.
- In 1957 by contrast each of the six countries wanted to host the new institutions but Brussels won the competition, not because of the national Government support but thanks to the alphabet. Brussels being the first European country in the alphabetical order was to host the first Council of Ministers and the related administration.
- This marked the beginning of Brussels as a European Capital.



- The 1958 Brussels Expo was another boost to its international character.
- In 1989, Brussels and its 19 Commune agglomeration became the Brussels Capital Region.





- The City and two other municipalities took the initiative to build a huge international office area with a World Trade Centre next to the North Station with a direct link to the airport.

- But the main developers preferred to have the European offices in a residential area where they could buy individual homes at lower price and replace them by office buildings to be offered by the Belgian Government to the European Commission and later on to the European Parliament.





- This residential area adapted itself over some 50 years became the present mono-functional European quarter, with scarce open space as can be seen.

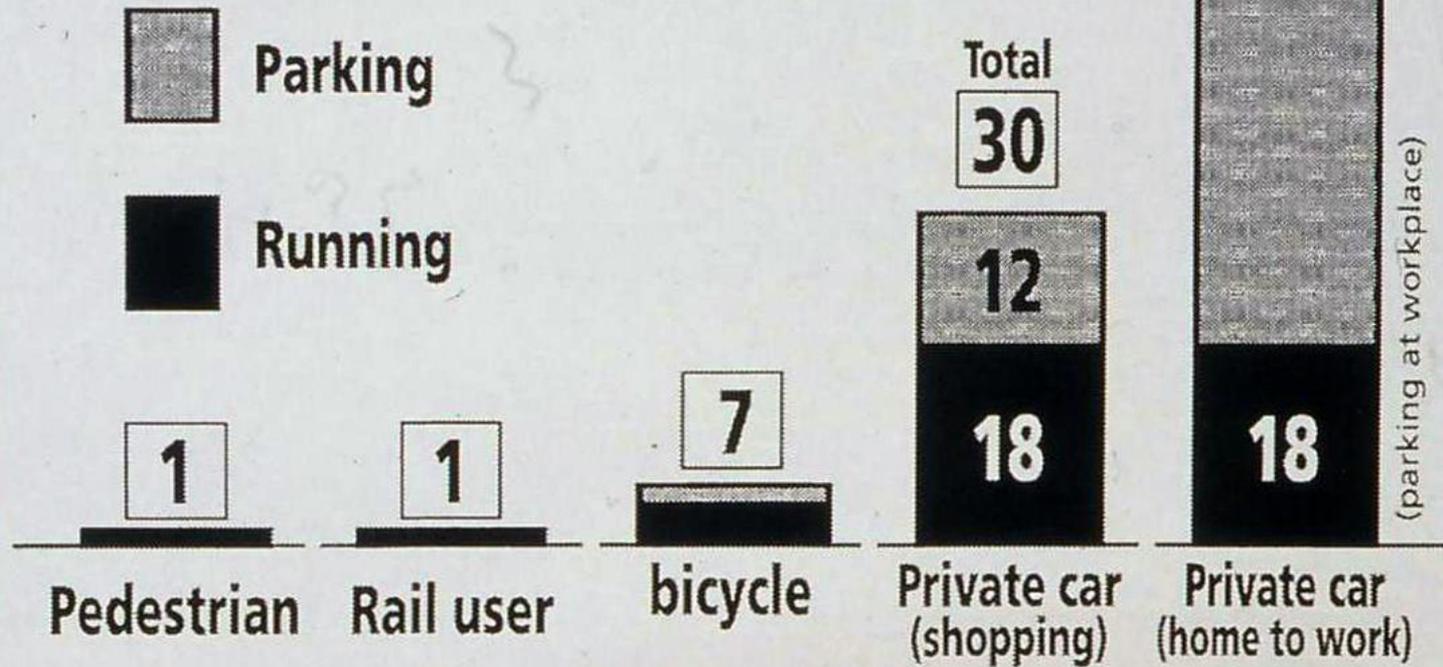


- It is only now becoming ready to integrate the hosting of the three institutions. The latest development is the European Government Summit meetings building, presently under construction next to the Council of Ministers complex.



- A huge urban sprawl took place along the US model shaped by the automobile industry.

Area x time consumption

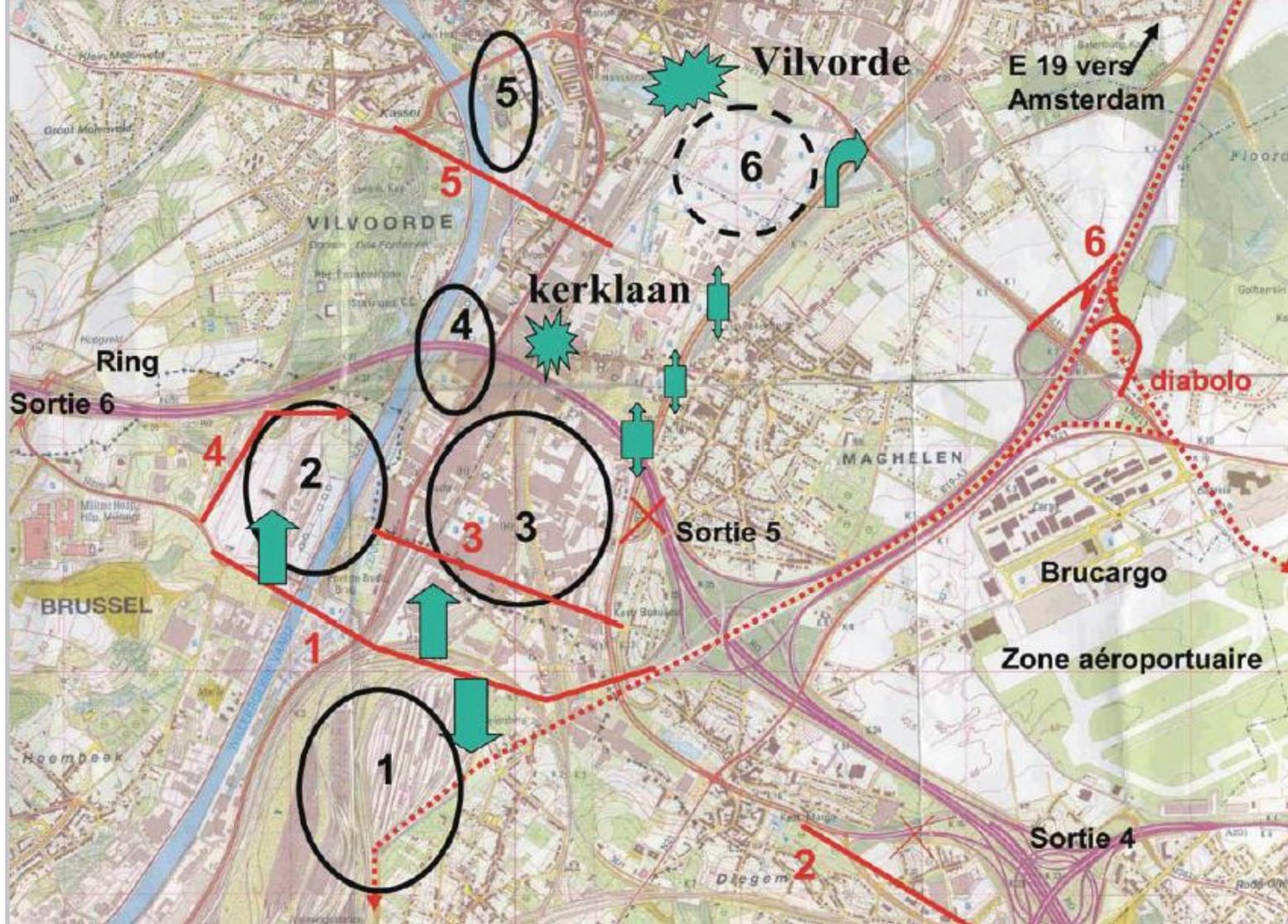


UITP - source : Marchand, RATP



- It pushed some 200.000 inhabitants towards the Flemish rural villages in estates only accessible by automobile.
- This inflow generated tensions between the Flemish population and the new French speaking settlers creating a conflict between the territory-bound rules and the individual rights illustrated by the BHV story.





- The generalised urbanisation of the central part of Belgium saw the emergence of growth poles around expanding small cities like Leuven, Mechelen, Aalst or Vilvorde (close to the airport, see image), all at commuting distance from Brussels, and planned in an autonomous way, ignoring each other and Brussels.
- Only rail infrastructures are planned at national level and are the framework for urban clusters.

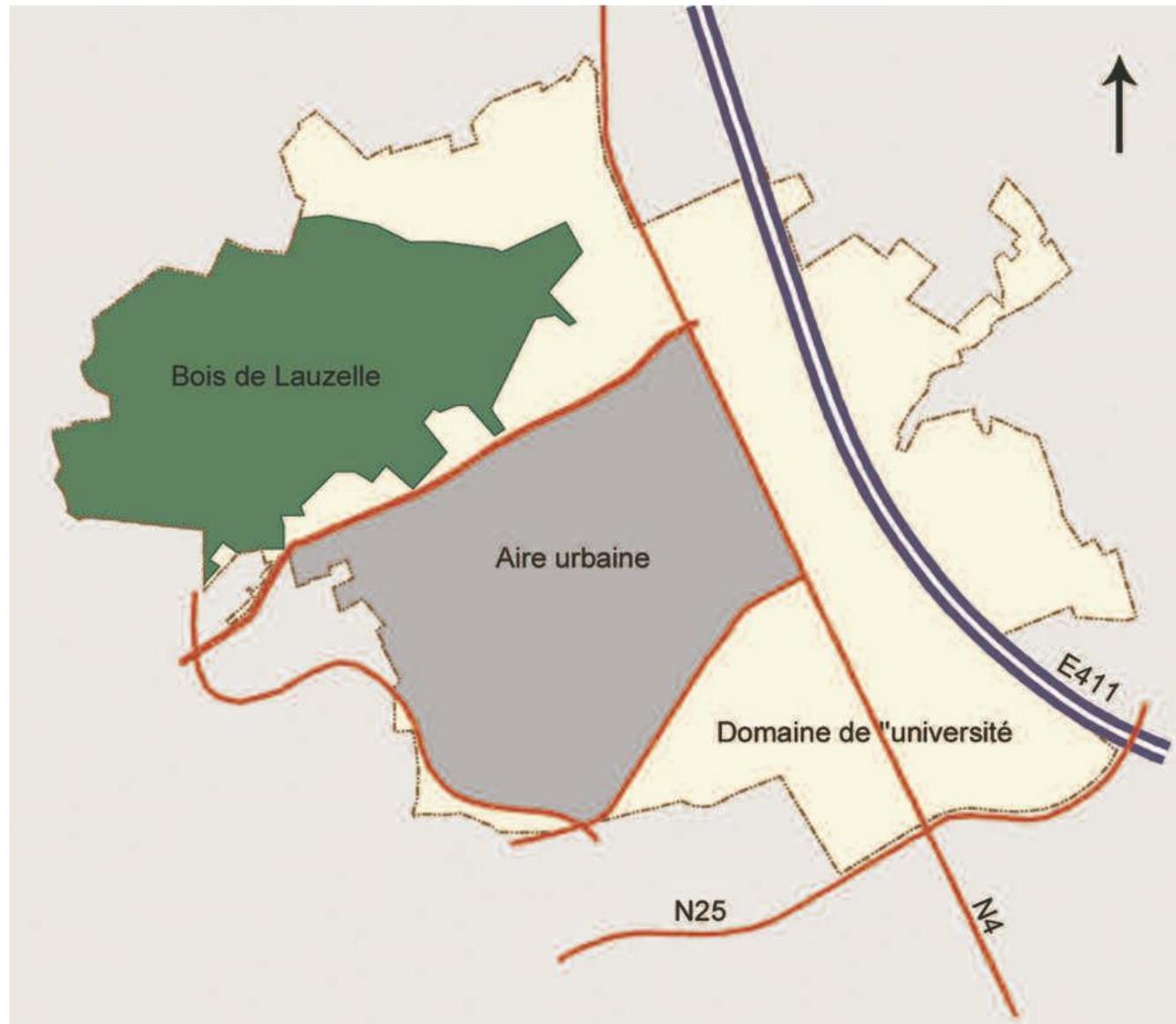


- One new town was built within the Central Belgian Metropolis. It resulted from the expulsion of the French-speaking Louvain University from the city of Louvain.

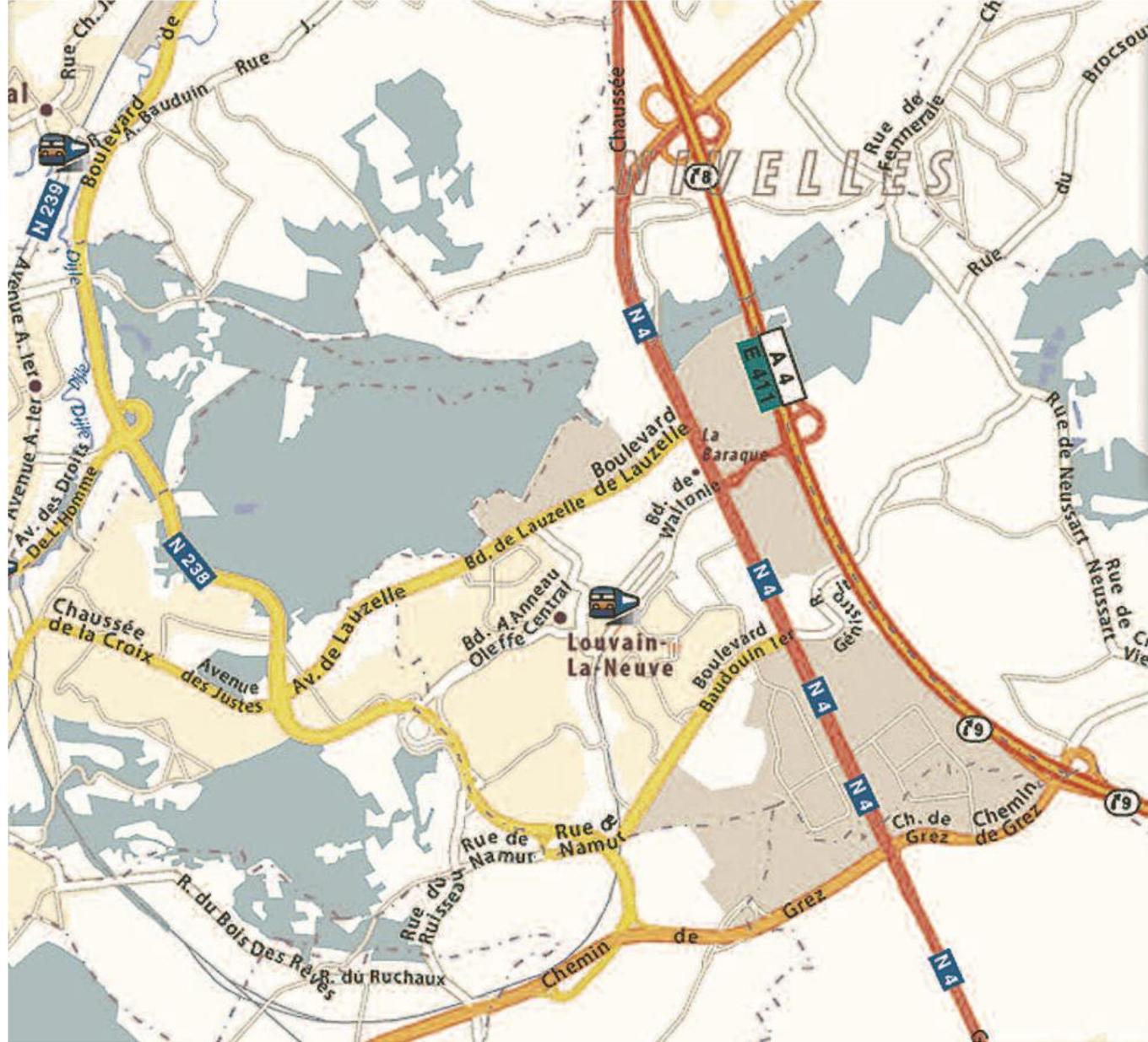


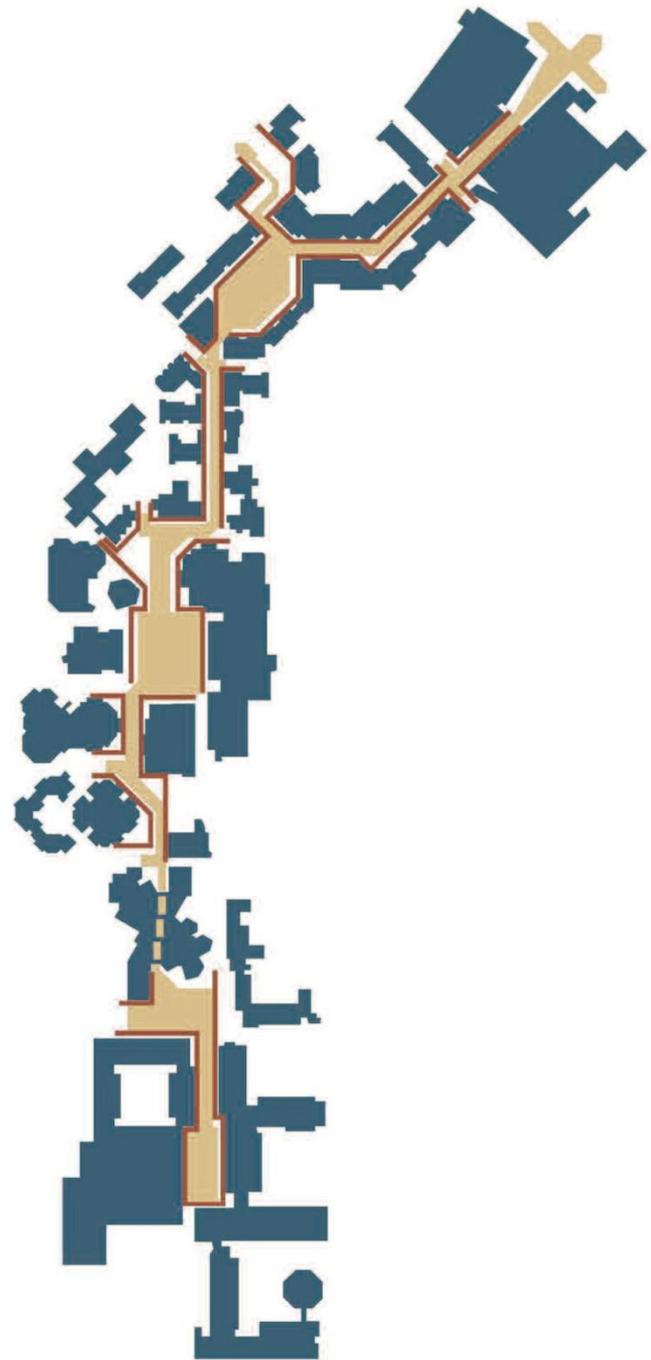
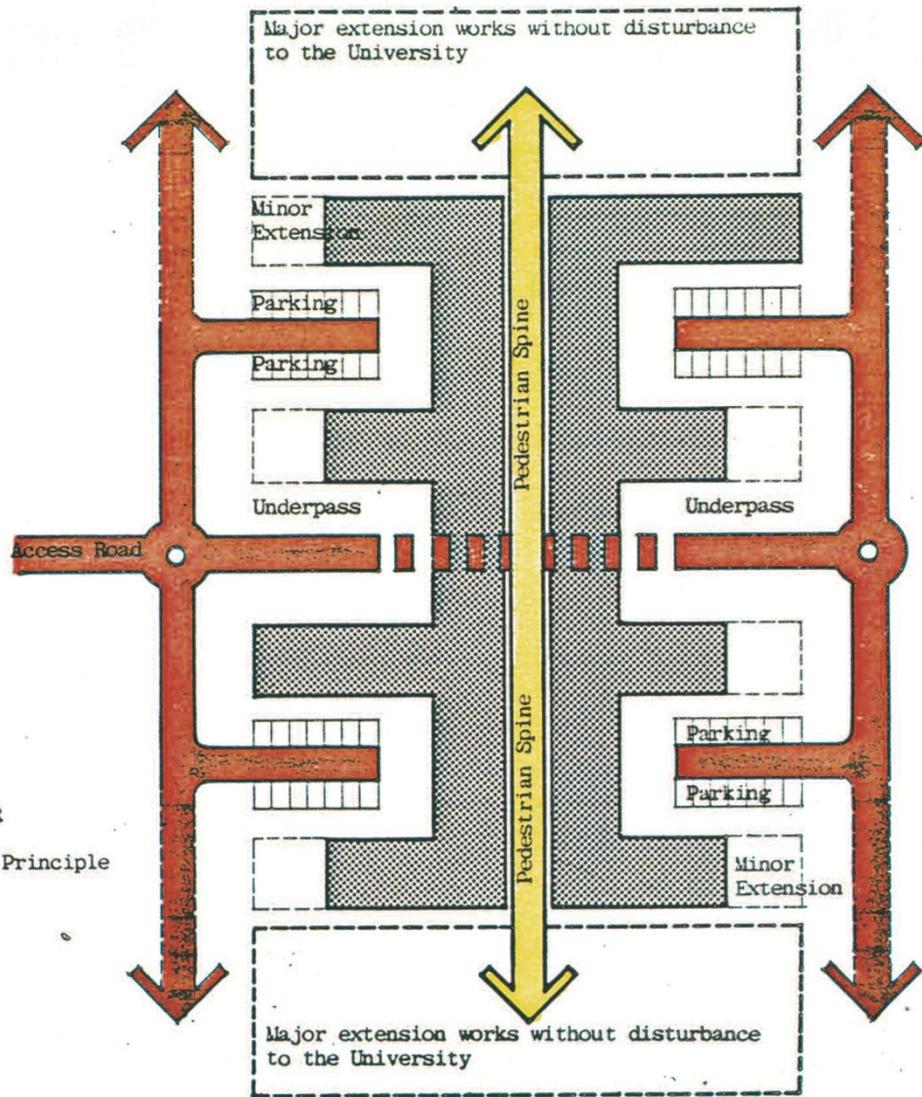
- The existing old Louvain was the intellectual model for the new Louvain: a compact city with a stable small plots framework and regular rebuilding plot by plot (view of a Louvain square, rebuilt after the First World War).

- The University was able to buy 1000 ha of farm land and developed it, using the university budgets as equity.
- The Government did not like this and had a law voted to make any sale impossible before 2020 but forgot the 1824 Erfpacht law...
- Its 1970 master plan by Lemaire, Blondel and Laconte imposed a high density low rise urban form and mixed use modelled on Louvain.



- It was space thrifty as only 350 ha were built up.
- Its forest land was kept as a nature reserve.





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Diagram of Development Principle

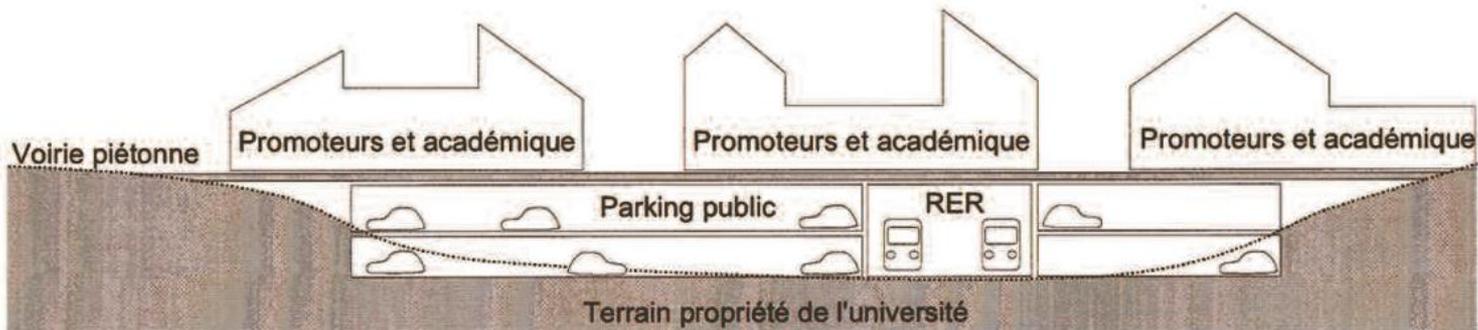
- It grew along a spine as the next step could possibly not happen.



- Only one iconic “architectura major” building was surrounded by individual small buildings, along the tradition of the Roman city and its temples and the Middle-age city and its churches.



- The station as central infrastructure of the town.
- Underground was reserved for automobile access, parking and deliveries.





- Peripheral parking was conceived as birds reserve with hays and a large diversity of trees, now fully grown.

- All streets were reserved for pedestrians.
- Large trees were planted on fifty centimeter of earth, through a grid of steel bars.





- Narrow streets and blocks with courtyards follow the traditional European urban pattern.



- An urban shopping centre was built next to the station and is presently being expanded on university owned land (Erfpacht).

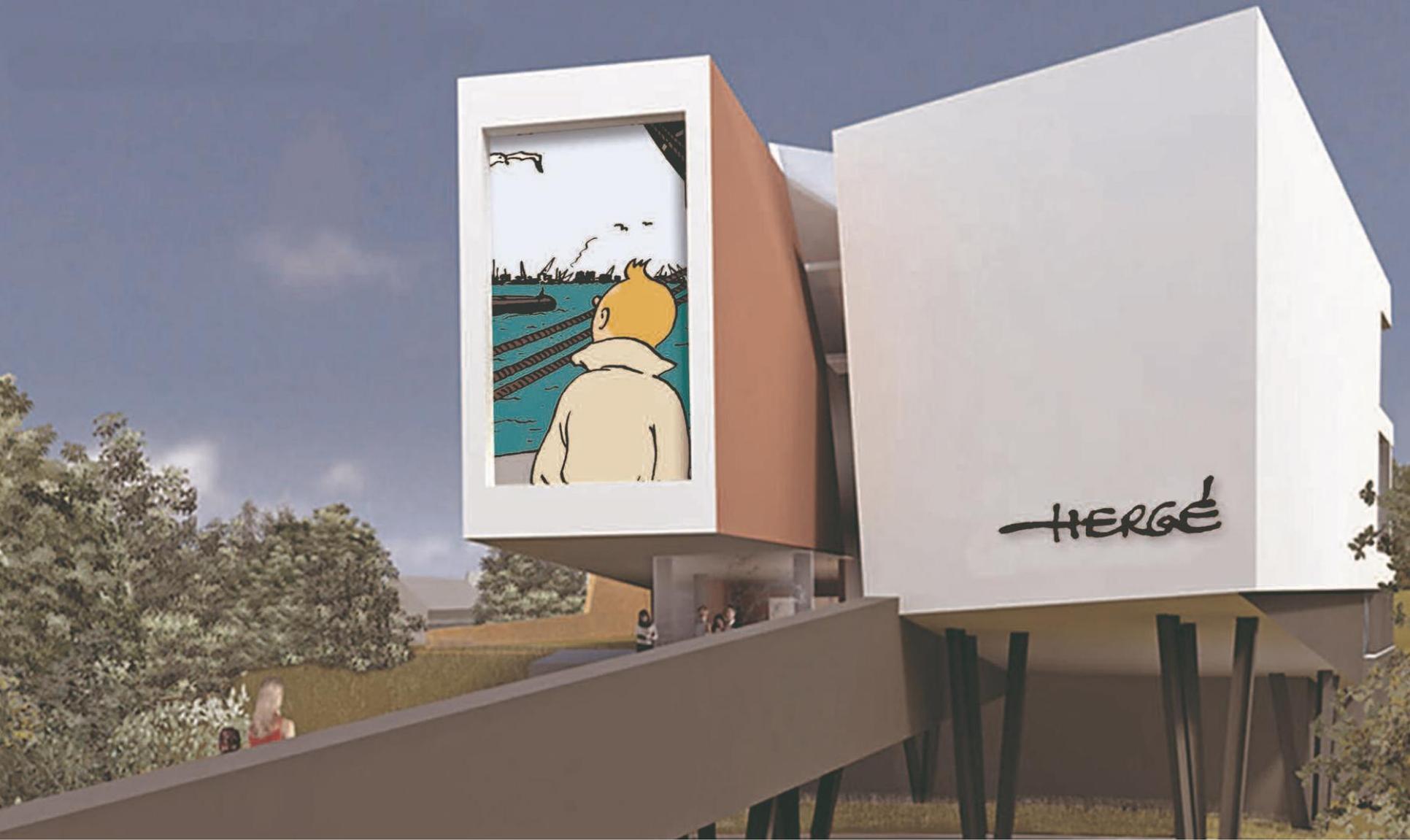




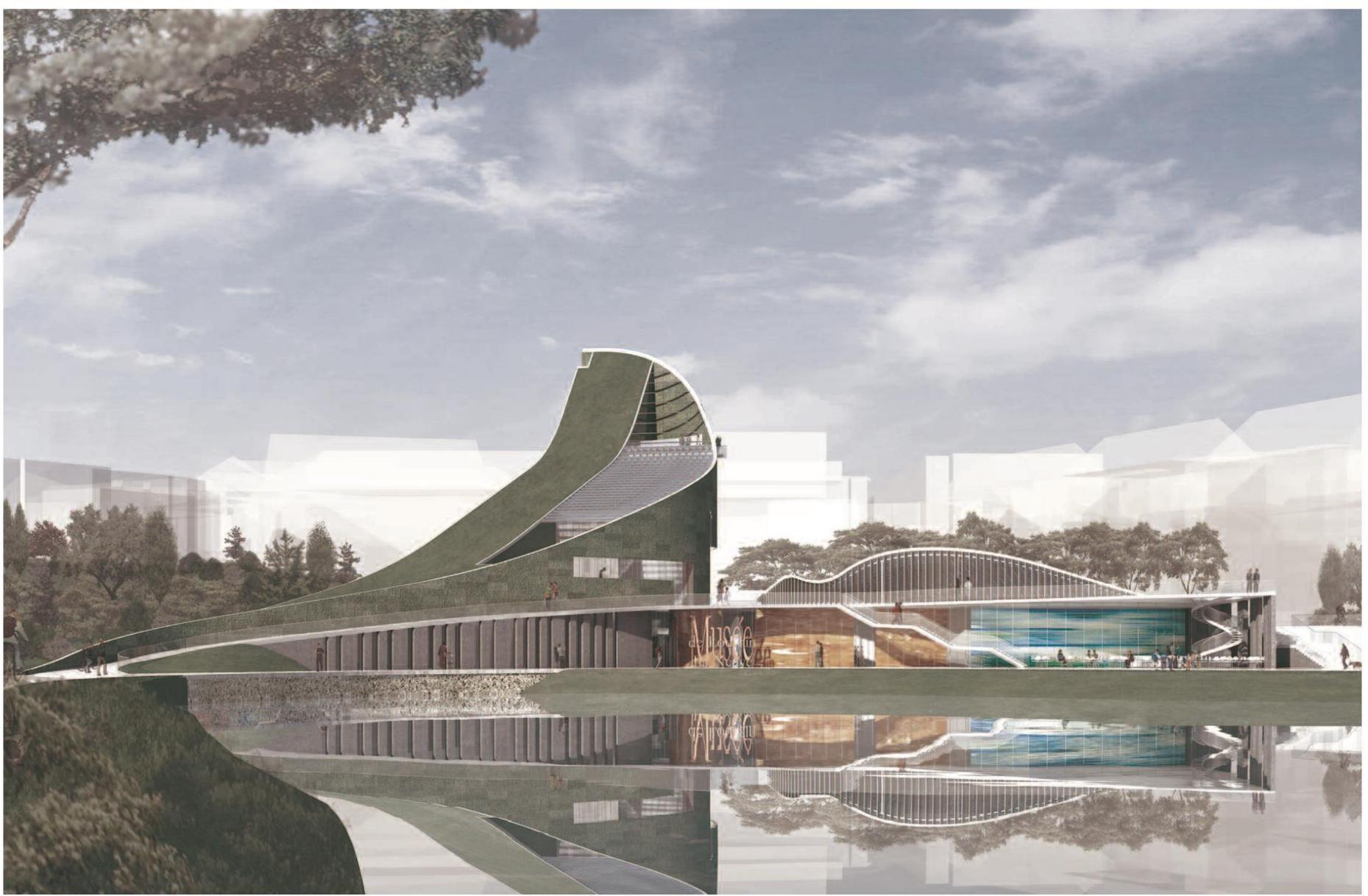
- Separation of water flows allowed minimizing the sewers width.
- An artificial lake is occupying the lowest part of the site.



- It is combining reservoir, flood control and amenity.



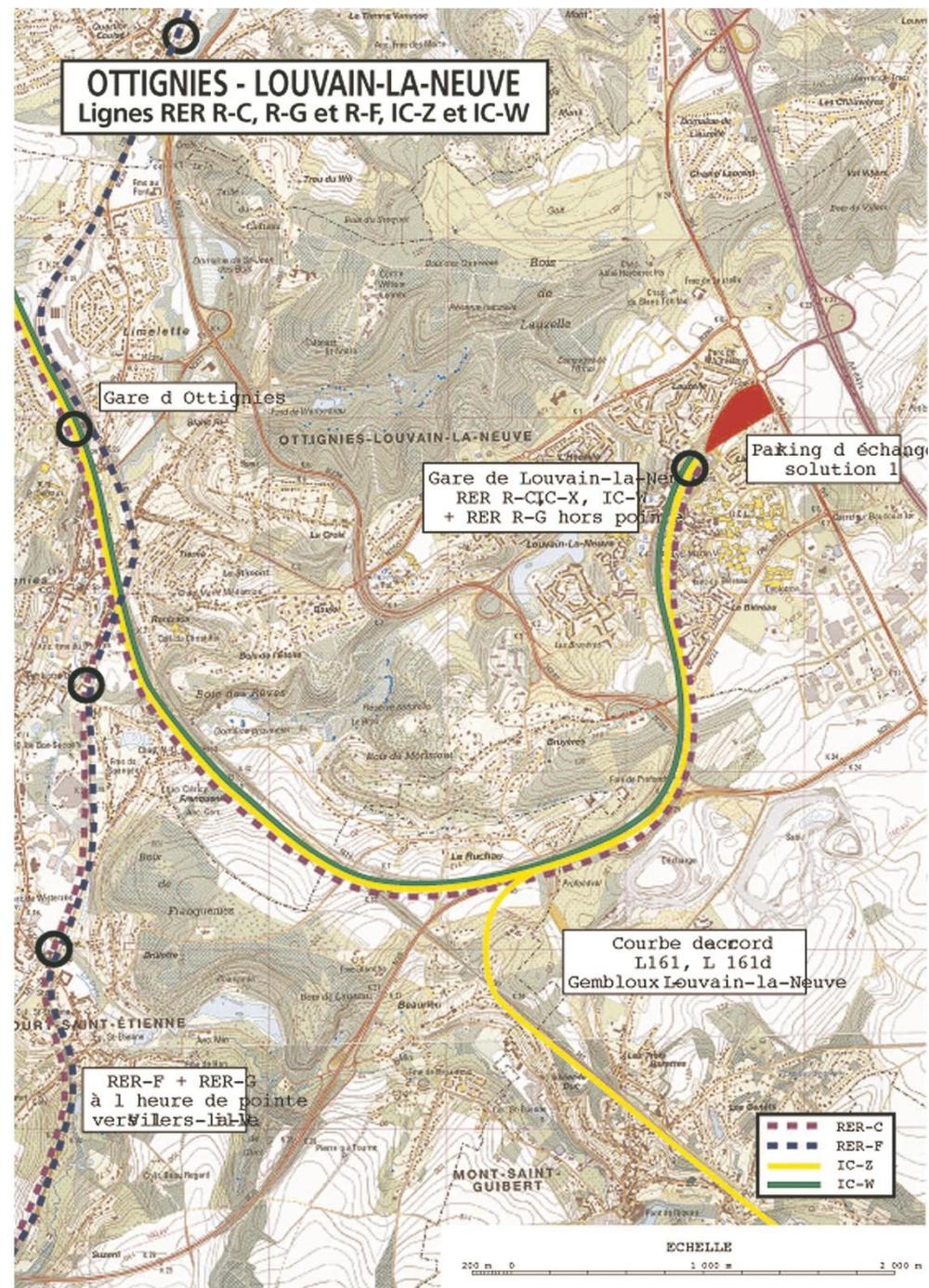
- Attracting science firms and cultural activities (image: private Museum Tintin / Kuifje).

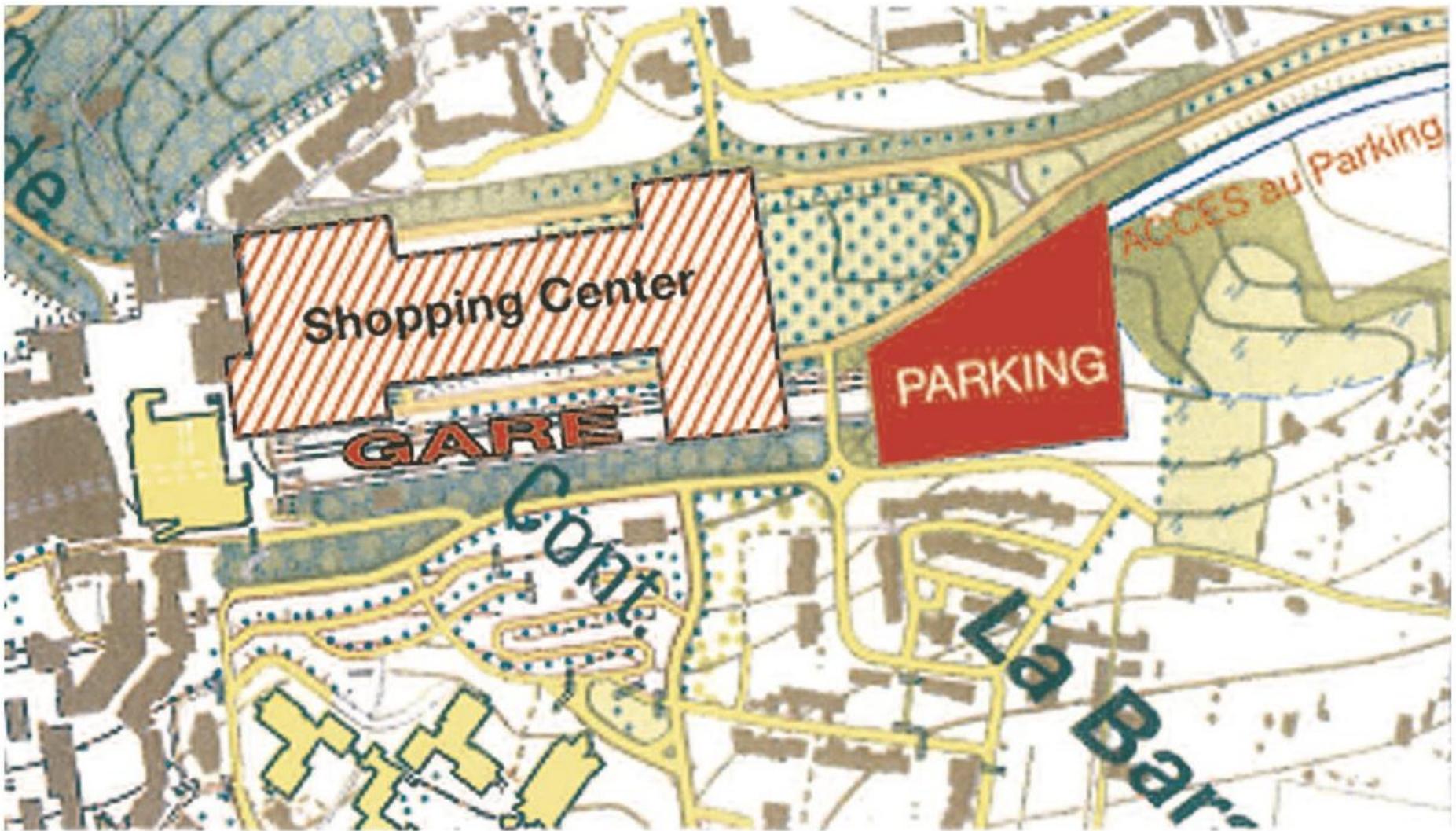


- Project of University Art Museum.

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- Louvain-la-Neuve never was an independent municipality, but part of the Ottignies municipality, now city of Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve.
- New challenges posed by the S Bahn plan of the central Belgian region





- End station parking challenge.