

**UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON**

**BARTLETT SCHOOL OF PLANNING**

**FROM NOTHING TO A MAJOR URBAN CENTRE IN 40 YEARS: AN INCREMENTAL APPROACH TO INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT – THE CASE OF THE LOUVAIN NEW UNIVERSITY TOWN NEAR BRUSSELS – 16 January 2013.**

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**ABSTRACT**

Forced to leave the historic university town of Louvain (Leuven) the French-speaking Université de Louvain decided to create a new town, as opposed to a campus. The university therefore bought ca 1000 ha of agricultural and forest land 27 km from the centre of Brussels. The central part was set aside for urban development, the forest land being preserved. The overall master plan and architectural coordination was entrusted to the Groupe Urbanisme- architecture (R. Lemaire, J-P. Blondel and P. Laconte). The master plan was designed for uncertainty. The first phase of development started in 1972. From 1976 an underground railway station was put into service and a multi-use slab was gradually constructed. A major breakthrough was the opening in 2005 of a shopping and leisure centre to cover the rail tracks (8 million visitors in 2011). The entire centre is pedestrian. The pedestrian option was taken to save land and front transport infrastructure investment. A linear pedestrian central spine – inspired by the University of Lancaster - allows a step by step mixed urban development, automobile access to buildings and parking being placed outside of the spine, with occasional underpasses. All open-air parking spaces are planted with different tree species in order to attract different kinds of birds. They have become an ornithological reserve. All storm water is collected to an artificial lake that serves as reservoir and amenity.

The land remains property of the university while the infrastructure and buildings are leased (leases of up to 99 years) to public and private investors). High-density low-rise buildings with interlocking courts and piazzas replicate the university colleges of traditional university towns.

The development of the rail station as head of one of the Brussels S-Bahn lines is generating a specific challenge: combining transit pedestrian movements, park & ride and local residential development, besides the university development.