



RADICAL
CONSERVATION

STUDIO URBAN ASSEMBLAGES
SPRING 2020



(1) This approach is known as Urban Metabolism (UM), clearly defined by Kennedy and fellow scholars as “the sum total of the technical and socio-economic processes that occur in cities, resulting in growth, production of energy and elimination of waste.” (in Kennedy, C., Cuddihy, J., & Engel-Yan, J. (2007). “The changing metabolism of cities”. *Journal of Industrial Ecology*, 11(2), 43-59).

(2) UM is embedded in the general socio-technical framework that considers the design of the future as a risk management activity challenging its very uncertainty. Sociologist of the public action pointed out emerging public governance agreements generated by coalitions of actors that were mixing scientific and profane expertises, called “hybrid forum”. Caalon, M., Lascoumes P., Barthe, Y. (2001), *Agir dans un monde incertain. Essai sur la démocratie technique*, Paris : Le Seuil

(3) A Circular Economy (CE) “is regenerative and waste-free by design, where materials are indefinitely cycled at high quality, all energy is derived from renewable or otherwise sustainable sources, and natural and human capital are structurally supported rather than degraded through economic activities” (webpage of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation).

APPROACH

Urban Assemblages (UA) is a research by design studio linked to the Laboratory of Urbanism, Infrastructure, and Ecologies (LoUIsE). The studio starts from two convictions: (i) the capacity of cities to cast light on our present and (near)future; (ii) the need to start a socio-economic and ecological transition in them as the premise for a sustainable future anywhere else. To be able to accompany such transition, the studio invites spatial designers to move beyond the object-centered legacy of urbanism and towards a systemic understanding of cities that goes beyond the dichotomy city vs. nature.

This requires seizing up flows, actors and places into their proposals of urban transformation. Cities are indeed woven into material and energy flows and stocks, and depend upon specific technical and socio-economic processes of production and consumption (1). Stocks and flows are considered very broadly, so as to include their societal dimension, seen as the capacity of actors to get articulated into hybrid and operational organisations (2).

To explore how we can partake in those processes as spatial designers becomes urgent in the turbulent and unstable times we inhabit, with the Earth system being pushed into the Anthropocene. How to incorporate the unsteady assemblages those flows and actors trigger (or are the result of) into the design of physical places? And how can we render those same assemblages more sustainable, eventually more 'circular' (3)? Can circularity indeed become the next normative framework for the way we systemically 're-design' cities and the processes that get articulated in them?

These and yet more questions for all those willing to explore the operative potential of a systemic approach to urban design.

Gery Leloutre + Nadia Casabella



TASK

This semester we aim to explore the western periphery of Charleroi, a decaying territory that will be the target of major investments in the years to come (e.g. a brand-new stadium or an industrial allotment developed on recently cleared wastelands). Our starting point is that those “big projects” will not help this place to leave dereliction, and that an approach based on a combination of different scales of actions, types of actors and strategic levers would be more effective to anchor the urban renewal operation in the dynamics of the local, social context.

Moreover, urban renewal should not assume conservation. In a context of drastic reduction of green-house gas emissions, is a systematic conservation of the built heritage the only way to go? Faced to peri-urban territories, known by a complex combination of an old, devalued built stock, low mobility integration, hazardous air and soil pollution, and a vulnerable position next to

rivers, we should afford to choose “radically” what to keep and how to keep it.

Articulating and bridging project resources

Marchienne, located on the banks of the river Sambre westwards of Charleroi and seen as the periphery of the metallurgical industrial cluster, was actually the cradle of the industrial revolution that shook up this territory during most of the 19th century.

Today, Marchienne suffers from massive de-industrialisation and structural disinvestment, and seems caught up in a paradoxical dynamic. The abundance of public facilities historically linked to the industrial welfare state do not suffice to pull the population into a virtuous cycle that would help to rescue the former working-class districts out of poverty and overall decay.

Mobility-wise, Marchienne occupies a special position within Charleroi

territory. It is close to major road infrastructures, it is one stone away of highly remarkable landscapes, it is crossed by a railway line used by IC trains riding between Brussels and Charleroi, and is densely irrigated by many active mobility routes that are currently being realized along the rivers Sambre and L'Eau d'Heure.

Intermediate scales

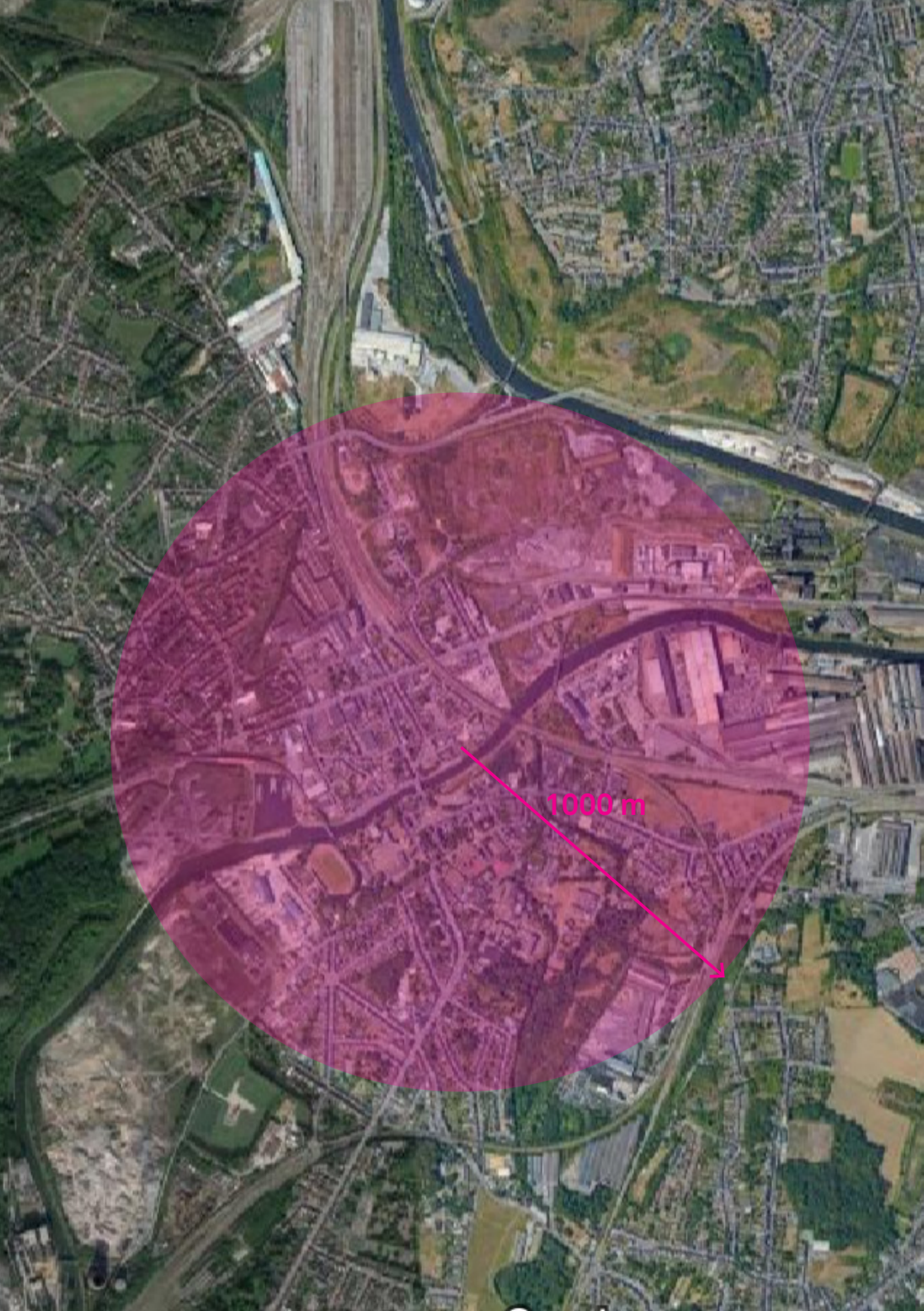
Marchienne's strategic position is pushing the municipal authorities to develop a series of major projects financed by both regional subsidies and private investments. The city of Charleroi looks at this place as the "western gateway" and has just drawn up a masterplan including all the big-scale puzzle fragments: stadium, new allotment of the large industrial wastelands, and a park with sports facilities. At the same time, entire residential neighbourhoods are left behind. Houses seem run down, people move out, and there is a blatant lack of operating services.

The objective of the studio will be the articulation of project scales, of bridging ambitions and dynamics in a context of land availability and declining property values: To which extent can local dynamics help to redefine the ambitions of

major developments? How to use the large investments foreseen in the masterplan as a lever for local urban renewal? And above all, can urban renewal start from erasure? Can we radically question the past urbanization dynamics and propose instead the "charged nothingness" of Berlin's Archipelago City or the "nothingness as a plausible certainty" of Melun Senart's Ville Nouvelle?

Our work will therefore oscillate between the will to (re)weave and (re)fill the existing (infra) structures, sustained by the believe in a prosperous future, and the acceptance of de-growth and erasure as the only possibility of having any future at all.





METHODOLOGY

If we accept the premise that the existing city casts its own future, whether prosperous or unprovable, the way to work will aim to constantly merge project and diagnosis, letting our hypothesis of transformation inform our territorial research, and the other way around.

The first 4 weeks of the studio are therefore devoted to the “scenario zero”, an atlas of all existing or upcoming projects for the territory under consideration, but also of all major ambitions spatial policy is supposed to integrate (e.g. climate adaptation, neutral carbon development, drastic reduction of GHG-emissions, etc.). The scenario zero should give us a fairly precise idea of this place’s coming future and provide a clear indication on the type of topics we should take into consideration into our proposals of spatial transformation.

During the subsequent 4 weeks, specific themes will be spatially explored through an in-depth prospective description in groups. Description is

considered here not as a survey of the existing situation, but as an awareness of the environment’s capacity to react to changes. The description therefore aims, among other things, to reveal the intrinsic capacity of a territory to react to a given problem, for example, the issue of the decline of the old districts of Marchienne or the challenge of reducing carbon footprint.

The last 4 weeks will be dedicated to the elaboration of an individual project.

UPCOMING EVENTS

08/02 On Reproduction: U&U research seminar, UGent
9:00-13.30 - 35€

11/02 Guided walk + Presentations

10:00 gathering at the train station of
Marchienne-au-Pont

10:15 - 12.00 exploration of study area

12:15 presentation by team Charleroi bouwmeester
@ the public library

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Presentations (tbc)

Sareh Moosavi on NBS (nature-based solutions)

Fabrik on vacancy in Charleroi central district

Stephan Kampelmann on Sonian Wood Coop

Alexander Wandl on TiB (Territories in Between)



MARCHIENNE-AU-PONT

W1: 04/02	KICK OFF
W2: 11/02	SCENARIO 0
W3: 18/02	SCENARIO 0
W4: 25/02	SCENARIO 0
W5: 03/03	REVIEW
W6: 10/03	THEMATIC PROJECT
W7: 17/03	THEMATIC PROJECT
W8: 24/03	REVIEW
W9: 31/03	S.I.P.
W10: 07/04	Easter
W11: 14/04	Easter
W11: 21/04	INDIVIDUAL PROJECT
W12: 28/04	INDIVIDUAL PROJECT
W13: 05/05	INDIVIDUAL PROJECT
W14: 12/05	INDIVIDUAL PROJECT
W15: 19/05	GREEN LIGHT

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