

71.50 ASL

A MANIFEST FOR CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE

INFRASTRUCTURAL LANDSCAPE CONTEXTS AND CHALLENGES



Representation of the activities for the 1880 exhibition found in Guisset J. (2023). *Les Palais et le Parc du Cinquantenaire*. Snoeck Publishers

HISTORY OF ACTIVITIES

The successive transformations of the site from a 'plaine des manoeuvres' to hosting a series of exhibitions from 1880 to 1910, and presently as a leisure park housing numerous museums, institutions, pavilions, sport facilities and social gathering places, underscores its capacity to accommodate diverse activities over time. Simultaneously, the park's underground has been invested by tunnels for mobility which today generate a conflictual relationship with the overground uses, namely the 'Trémie Kennedy'.

TERRITORIAL FIGURES

The park is taking part in greater systems informing us on its nature:

- It takes place on an important urban axis across 3 valleys (Senne, Maelbeek, Woluwe) thus by extension reaches the entirety of the metropolitan territory;
- It echoes other highly infrastructured parks in Brussels whose logics are not bound to hydrographic nor forest systems (parks of Brussels, Solbosch plane, Tour&Taxis etc.);
- The topography and geology show that the park is not laying flat but is on the edge of a slight plateau allowing views across the city and that the underlying layers of soil types present discontinuity, layers coming on top of each other, similarly to how the longitudinal section of the park and the tunnels behave.

PRESSING CHALLENGES

Parks are becoming increasingly important as cities densify. The intensity at which the Jubilee Park is used will only be increasing, meaning that the relentless pressure on ecosystems threatens their safeguard. Moreover climate change brings droughts and intense precipitation episodes to be dealt with. The challenge thus lies in the densification of the activities upon an already overused park.

On the other hand, the cut made by the Trémie in the central part of the park is the starting point of the project. Along with changes in mobility in the near future, the nature itself of the tunnel is put in perspective. The role of infrastructure as solely at the service of mobility is challenged and reimagined in a more plural manner. It questions the relationship between a man-made nature oasis and an intensive urban infrastructure. While this ambivalence has been so far experienced as a conflict between these segregated uses, it is here seen as an opportunity to reinforce both.

PLURAL IDENTITY

From early on, the Jubilee Park developed a plural identity. While being intended as a recreational park and nowadays experienced as a nature island within dense urban fabrics; its history, construction and position in the larger territory make it in fact a highly infrastructured place. There lies a lack of interaction between the landscape figures and the infrastructural objects. The project makes the shift from an infrastructured landscape to an infrastructural landscape. The project addresses the question of the intensification of uses of the park and promotes new forms of hybrid public space while enhancing its natural qualities, responding to climate change consequences by giving space to nature.

CONSTRUCTION ABSTINENCE

Cities are built through a process of constant accumulation. It is particularly true in the case of the collectively owned underground maze of tunnels. Successive projects are superimposed on each other. This uncoordinated buildup and its inherent complexity often offers opportunities to clarify urban situations with few constructed means. Covering the Trémie would

TABULA PLENA

PROCESSES OF TRANSFORMATION

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Underground reused spaces of the Palais de Tokyo in Paris

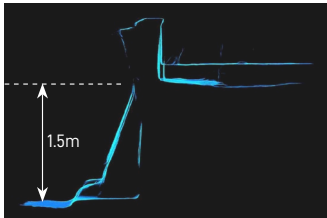
only repeat a history of hiding obsolete structures and amassing underused figures, missing the latent chance to make sense out of the inherited spaces. Instead of building a cover and a new pavilion, which would appear as a form of tabula rasa, the project is invested in understanding and revealing the potentials of the as-found situation and endorses a drastic zero building policy but only transformations. The goal is thus focused on mobilising, opening and activating the existing. The tunnels, their vast leftover underground spaces and their emergences through the surface of the ground appear as strategic opportunities to reinvigorate the park's capacities, responding to the 21st century challenges.

DENSIFICATION BY SUBTRACTION

Given the cost of monofunctional infrastructure maintenance and in a context of a necessary economy of means, it only makes sense to aim at finding ways to densify the potentialities of the existing realm before imagining constructing new structures. Proceeding by subtraction, by local deconstruction, allows new arrangements of on-site figures to emerge and produce spatial cohesion rather than adding yet another level of complexity and clutter by constructing new edifices. The project proceeds by means of reinvesting the existing underground facilities and finding opportune interfaces where they can feed the park and vice-versa.

"To create is not to deform or invent persons and things. It is to tie new relationships between persons and things which are, and as they are."

R. Bresson, 1995



Section extracted from a 3D scan of the Trémie

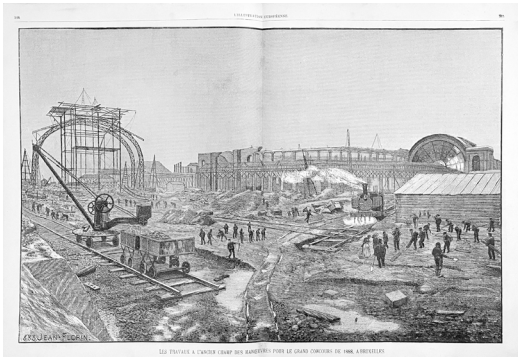
The Trémie's highest level (71.50m Above Sea Level) makes it an ideal connection point to the park as it is the closest to its main elevation. It is in continuity with the park's very own history of earthworks that the section across this central part is redefined. Thanks to the modification of the transversal profile of the slope across the park, it is made possible to deploy a unified ground surface, spanning on a unique level across the Trémie. The gesture generates an inversion of status: the Trémie formerly making a cut in the park is now the strong spatial link weaving spaces to one another, both horizontally along the North-South axis and between the surface and the underground. The Trémie becomes a manifest entry for new uses at the heart of the park and the city. Through the flawed cut now turns into the qualitative link, an architectural gesture.

The levels between the space under the square of the museum halls and the fountain allow to seamlessly slide from one to the other. By opening the wall, the newfound interface gives a new reading to the exterior landscape, that of the forecourt of the main entrance of the museums and by extension of the entire Museum Mile.

PERFORMING LANDSCAPE

The park's intended uses are spread across 3 different areas. While the outer edge of the park, hosting sport facilities, amongst others, is mostly left untouched for appropriation by the neighbourhood. The vegetation of the middle layer is densified and acts as a transition between activities. Differentiated forms of maintenance are projected and a greater amount of denser meadows of uncut wildflower beds and low shrubs are installed. Along with the trees canopy, it enables fresher islands without the need for watering.

As for the central area, the outer pathway is strengthened with a new tree alignment. The surface of the ground is restructured. The project gets rid of the superfluous inner pathways that were dividing the park in subspaces. It



Engraving showing the groundworks for the 1888 exhibition (CIVA archives)

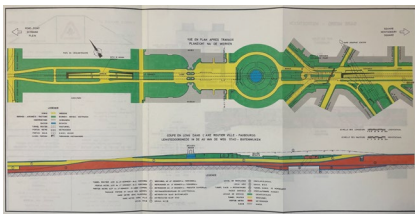


Existing wild uncut flowerbeds

sets up new rational geometries between the different accesses to the park. This makes the deployment of a unified mineral surface possible which allows the central part of the park to fully accommodate large manifestations, while increasing the total area of permeable soil. The slight slopes collect water and guide it towards vegetated wadis.

PHASED OPERATIONALITY

Such high complexity projects are the opportunity to unite otherwise scattered local and global actors and foster transversal dialogue. It is fundamental to bring knowledge and make use of the situational intelligence of the actors already involved around this particular site. The project in itself is a process of dialogue and a figure of spatial unity (longitudinally, transversally and vertically).



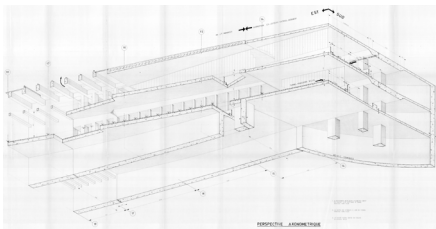
Longitudinal section of the tunnels (Brussels City's archives)

This proposal is not one of a new figure imposed on an existing matrix but rather a mediation between existing spaces and projected uses. The transformation of the park and the rationalisation of the use of the cars in the tunnels goes hand in hand with the diversification of uses of the neighbourhood like the introduction of housing in the European district and the policies on the drastic reduction of automobiles in urban settings.

An intermediate phase is envisioned in order to make the project fully operational. The reduction of the underground traffic between Schuman and Merode (from 4 to 2 car lanes and from 50 to 30 km/h) would allow recollecting the main underground spaces. The reconfiguration of the park and its interfaces with the undergrounds are the main focuses of the first phase.

The second phase sees the complete shutdown of car traffic across the Jubilee Park later enables for a full inhabitation of the available spaces. The connection to the highways would still be used by cars but only 2 of the 4 lanes. The bikes would use at least half the lanes in the whole tunnels, allowing connection between the park, Loi and Belliard, as part of the vision of the Museum Mile.

OPEN PLATFORM ACCOMODATION FOR NEW USES



Existing unused tramway facilities (Bruxelles Mobilité archives)

FRAMEWORKS & AGENCIES

The reclamation of technical and in-between spaces as commons calls for a shift from civil infrastructure to civic infrastructure. In the course of its second life, the role of infrastructure becomes one of accommodating a wide variety of programmes. Its value is in its openness. There is no proposal for truly defined or confined programmes, but an outlook towards a plurality of activities for a plurality of publics.

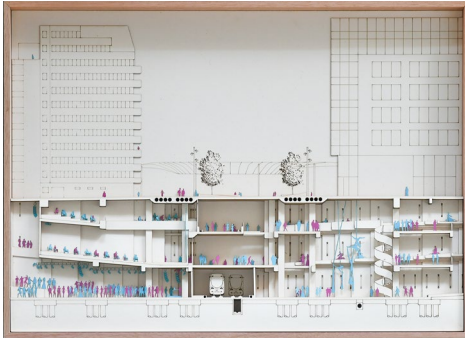
The project proposes an open platform that is directed towards local inhabitants as much as it is towards larger institutions. Its ability to host large events as well as accommodate everyday needs for the local population is of prime importance. It is deemed to be a plural platform for an open citizenship. The exact functions are discussed and chosen in dialogue with all the actors involved.

The possibilities involve an infinity of actors, initiatives and types of events: the Belgium bicentennial anniversary takes place on the central part of the park, the Museum Mile finds its entrance in the eastern access of the park, cultural actors and associations dwell in the large volumes of the rotunda, locals gather on the stepped slope facing the view of the sunset, concerts find an audience at the base of the arcades...

The project identifies three spaces of particular interest and varied geometry to host such slices of life and explores their potentials. Yet a number of other

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Screenings, plays, exhibitions, performances in the Rotunda



Multi-level civic agora



An identifiable entrance for the Museum Mile

CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE A MANIFEST

spaces would present qualities worth further investigations.

THE ROTUNDA

Located near the European Quarter and in close proximity to Schuman station, this expansive unused tramway servicing space serves as a versatile venue for performances, screenings, plays, debates, and parties. The local and careful deconstruction of slabs provide endless possibilities for activities, accommodating multiple events simultaneously and fostering a vibrant cultural atmosphere. Offering spacious areas with balconies and multi-storey volumes, as well as intimate spaces, this cultural Rotunda of 5600 m² is made accessible by a multitude of existing accesses through the 'Joyeuse Entrée' and the Museum Mile. The spaces are an opportunity to encourage creativity, celebrate diverse artistic expressions, facilitate intercultural exchange, and to act as a core for people to connect, share ideas, and enrich their experiences.

THE AGORA

The concept of the civic Agora transcends its role as a mere open-air auditorium or amphitheatre, transforming into a versatile observatory, stand, meeting place, and forum for open debate. It embodies the essence of inclusivity, offering a dynamic stage for diverse expressions of everyday politics, cultural representations, and manifestations. This vibrant space unifies all its surrounding areas, infusing the park with life and energy, becoming a genuine public platform at its very core. Here, people converge to exchange ideas, engage in dialogue, and participate in a collective celebration of community and culture.

THE HUB

The proximity of levels inside the tunnels and outside near the fountain makes it a natural entrance for the museums, the living archives and at a greater scale, an identifiable entry point for the Museum Mile. A museum, as in a cultural actor whose role is to accompany fundamental transformations of our societies, would no longer be thought as a permeable box containing artefacts but rather as an extroverted movement towards citizens. The barrier between museums and public space is set to become more and more blurred. A museum is not the imposition of a discourse, it is the place of the dialogue. The museum Hub is exactly that, a spatial tool allowing the activation of commons, communities and collections.

As the Jubilee Park undergoes a conflictual relationship between surface uses and underground spaces, the project takes advantage of its long history of accumulation of spaces and figures by scrutinising existing potentialities. The reclamation of underused spaces reconfigures spatial relationships within the park and with the city. By means of a radical zero-building policy, densification of uses is achieved through subtraction and removal of excess. Underground facilities become the trigger of a newfound spatial cohesion. The park finds a balance and a sustainable management. The Trémie Kennedy becomes an agora; technical rooms, the entrance to the Museum Mile; an unused tramway facilities, a cultural hub. The park fully acts as an open platform, a civic infrastructure.