

Sale Ends Today

_ Shifting to a new approach

The Winkelcentrum is an essential part of the city centre of Etten-Leur. A key element for the urban, social and ecological future development of the municipality that was not conceived at all under these principles.

A participatory process was launched in 2022 to invite and involve all stakeholders in the debate on the future of this redevelopment. At the moment nothing is set in stone yet, so we see European as an opportunity to explore and experiment from different perspectives in order to enrich this process. We take a proactive role with a critical view.

_ Contemporary heritage

The Winkelcentrum was the first of its kind in the area. In terms of use but also in terms of morphology. Despite being an architecture that had little to do with its immediate surroundings, we soon noticed that it had some well-intentioned decisions in its original architecture design. The fragmented volume that acquires a less overwhelming urban scale, the interior ‘plazas’ connected by the central circulation, the transition between the exterior and the interior ‘plazas’ through a large but low porch, the raw materiality that gives a sense of a public space...

Over the years, several modifications and extensions were made to the original building, completing its volume with more square meters of commercial space and more linear meters of shop windows.

The highway was detoured and the Winkelcentrum became (unexpectedly) a central spot surrounded by several new urban developments.

Not only the original architecture was distorted losing most of its strengths, it also didn't manage to integrate in the urban fabric as a city facility.

In our view, consumerism has led the building into decline and we believe it is the first factor to be reversed.

_The root of the problem lies in consumerism.

‘Sale Ends Today’ is a public work by the artist Banksy in which he makes a biting comment on contemporary consumerism, which, he implies, rivals the zeal of religious devotion.

Sales are the exemplification of a model that degrades both the retailer and the consumer by promoting dynamics that also end up degrading urban life and the environment.

In our view, neither architecture nor commerce are the main problems in this site, but rather the deformation of both under the impulse of consumerism that has led to an unsustainable urban, social and ecological situation.

Our proposal is an approach on how the transition from a “consumption-based” urban model to a “living-based” one can be driven by urban and architectural strategies.

The “Gruen Transfer” (named after Austrian architect Victor Gruen) is the moment when consumers enter a shopping mall or store and, surrounded by an intentionally confusing layout, lose track of their original intentions, making them more susceptible to making impulse buys (source: Wikipedia).

We find in public markets more appealing architectural features that qualify the spaces and promote a healthier, more real and social experience.

_The starting point of our proposal is based on these three reflections:

1. The shopping centre has been **absorbed** into the town centre, but **has not been integrated into the urban fabric** and public dynamics.

The existing accesses to the Winkelcentrum are placed in front of (or near) the main public spaces, but they are narrow, not obvious and not enough of them.

The public space is only defined by long facades with mostly storefronts, transforming the urban experience into a marketing experience (similar to a supermarket hallway). Furthermore, the original building has been 'completed' with new volumes adding more retail surface but not adding any other urban value.

But at the same time, the shopping mall keeps the city centre very much alive, so the first challenge will be to reconnect it without stopping it.

2. The **monofunctionality** of the complex is **not in line with a sustainable living model** and promotes unhealthy consumption routines.

An architecture based on achieving linear metres of commercial façade in long streets in the city centre does not encourage any other routine than that of circulating, looking at products, buying and leaving. We envision a proposal in which meeting spaces, play areas and rest areas are promoted above all. A public space at the service of citizens' lives. But there should also be room for new housing and for existing + new businesses. With a mixture of different uses and more diverse spaces, we believe that the city centre can promote a healthier way of living.

3. The **anthropisation** of the centre has left **no room for biodiversity**, nor has it taken into account present and future environmental impact.

The Winkelcentrum and the surrounding public space have mineralized the city centre, so we see the future transformation as an opportunity to achieve a greater biological continuity of the green through the site.

Moreover, both urban growth and renewal have to be exemplary in terms of sustainability, so they must be based on: closing water and waste cycles, minimising emissions and consumption in the construction process and in the future life of the buildings (energy efficiency) and also incorporating self-production of energy from renewable sources.

Following these reflections, we establish different strategies that will articulate the urban and architectural proposal:

1. Recycling / Reusing

1.1. Identifying the original architecture and revealing its qualities:

The original building is outdated in terms of architecture and use, but it already has a place in the collective memory of Etten-Leur. We believe it can be renovated to integrate it to the future development. Moreover, its original spatial organisation makes us think that it could be easily adapted to other uses such as a business incubator or even a school.

1.2. Considering the additions as areas of opportunity:

The different extensions of the building did not add any urban or architectural value to the original situation. In order to reconfigure and densify the site while at the same time enhancing the original building, we decided to take the later additions as an opportunity space where the new architecture could take a place.

2. Adding

2.1. Redefining the perimeter to improve its urban integration:

The existing perimeter of the building was not defined by the urban flows or taking into account the public space. By replacing the later additions, we adjust some critical relationships with the existing fabric while creating new entrances and emphasising them with the resulting volumes.

2.2. Structural grid to articulate the extension:

A structural grid of 7,00m x 7,00m defines the template of the extension. The concrete structure (which can be prefabricated) with high load capacity slabs makes possible to accommodate a secondary structure that will divide and organise the double-height of the main structure. This will allow the programmed spaces to be installed completely independent of the superstructure.

3. Public and green

3.1. A new covered public multi-purpose space:

We firmly believe that the central condition of the building must be translated into a truly effective public space that can accommodate the activities and needs of an urban facility of a living city. This space will bring light to the heart of the building and will subtly hierarchise the existing and new public spaces.

3.2. Greenfronts instead of storefronts:

Taking advantage of the direct contact with the ground, we propose to remove part of the pavement creating more drained areas and allowing vegetation to develop on and beyond the site. Going further, we propose that greenery should also occupy linear metres of façade, promoting more biodiversity and less consumerism.

4. Food as an engine of transforming the model

The global food-system is responsible for almost 30% of greenhouse gas emissions. (“Science for Environment Policy”:EU Commission)

This includes emissions from land use, agriculture, animal feed, transport, packaging and waste. Drastic shifts in the dominant socio-economic models are needed if we want to achieve a real transition from a ‘consumption-based’ model to a ‘living-based’ model. With a building reprogramming that includes a system of food-related spaces and uses that promote a more responsible and healthy way of consuming food, urban regeneration can reach a wider impact on food habits and even food production.

5. Growing

Increasing density in urban centres is desirable both to optimise services and as a way of reducing the ecological footprint of sprawl. It is even more desirable when the site has already been anthropised in the heart of the urban centre with very low density.

In our view, this increase in density should prioritise typological diversity, inclusivity and adaptability.

5.1. The proper scale:

The site has been surrounded by recent urban developments with considerably large housing blocks and also detached houses with small private courtyards.

We propose an in-between building unit size that could be interpreted as a transition between these two.

This unit size will also allow to work with aggregation units with better daylight and the possibility of natural ventilation in summer.

We take the decision to disperse the buildings in order to prevent a very pronounced growth in height and to generate less impact (from shadows and vis-a-vis) with the neighbouring dwellings. The volumes are terraced, adapting the set to the existing built environment. The grading also makes it possible to create communal or private terraces at different levels.

5.2. Living clusters:

Smaller units are combined into medium-size 'clusters'. By bringing together some units we achieve groups (or systems) with a mix of different housing typologies, shared facilities (such as a common laundry or a collective dining room) and even small public facilities (such as a small kindergarten or workspaces) to reinforce the sense of community.

These facilities will be strategically located between the housing volumes to enable independent access if needed.

The structural grid makes it possible to organise the housing units and their associated spaces by means of a very simple system of aggregation. This fact makes it possible to easily adjust the buildings to the demand, reaching the estimated 200 dwellings with the volume displayed.

6. Step by step

The proposal takes into account the ambition of the development and therefore considers the possibility of dividing it into different groups. Each cluster could function autonomously, so they could be built separately. This fact also favours the possibility of diversifying the developers, achieving a more heterogeneous city.

7. From highway to greenway

In our view, future urban developments should preferably take place, as in the case of the Winkelcentrum, in areas that meet 2 conditions:

1. Plots of land that have already been anthropised or with already constructed buildings, promoting the recycling of obsolete buildings or infrastructures.
2. Strategic areas that allow bridging of discontinuities in green corridors, thus improving the flow of biodiversity through them.

The proposal would clearly have a local impact in the city centre, but we believe it could have a greater scale impact if the discontinuity of the green in the site can be successfully bridged.