

ACADEMY 02

2022 JULY 04–08

HASSELT UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

In the second workshop of the Erasmus+ project “Social and environmental impact academy for architects (SEIAA)”, twenty architecture students and six teachers from the Bergen School of Architecture (NO), Hasselt University (BE), the Royal Danish Academy (DK) and the University of Liechtenstein (LI) came together in Genk (BE) to address the issue of re-wilding in relation to the social and ecological dynamics of the Winterslag neighbourhood, which was originally designed as a garden city in the first half of the 20th century. In a five day workshop the participants explored ways to (re)design the built environment so that a sustainable use of it becomes key to a good life.

The workshop was organised as a shortened Live Project. A Live Project is a collaboration between an educational institution and an external client, characterised by design negotiations over a short time period with limited resources or budget. In this case the client was the local social housing organisation “Nieuw Dak”.

The Live Project was part of a larger research framework of the faculty of Architecture of Hasselt University dedicated to facilitating the climate transition of Social Housing in the province of Limburg towards 2050. The focus of the five day workshop was on five selected sites in Winterslag.

This method gives a unique perspective on design whereby the designer is in fact immersed within the

local community, interacting with inhabitants, actors and stakeholders and working bottom-up with material, natural and human features of the sites “as found”, to provide an in-depth understanding of the design issues at hand, often leading to creative and sometimes unconventional responses as the faculty of architecture’s Live Projects Program – established in 2016) – has shown throughout the years. The results of the participants’ work are five future fictions reframing the issue at hand and offering a fresh take on specific questions at each of the selected sites.

THE GARDEN SETTLEMENT OF WINTERSLAG

The garden settlement of Winterslag (Genk, BE) was built between 1919 and 1950 by the regional coal mining company, inspired by the international garden city model. This model originated when after the industrial revolution population numbers increased in urban areas. They were created to give proximity to nature in a built-up environment and to counteract the pollution in cities and the isolation of rural settlements. The garden city model consisted of specific utopian elements like small communities in a circular pattern to accommodate housing, industry, and agriculture. These developments were surrounded by greenbelts that would limit their growth. As such, Winterslag is one of several settlements that were constructed in Genk, after the discovery of coal – the “Black Gold” of the times – in the soil. This led to the development of three mining sites (Winterslag, Zwartberg and Waterschei) and housing developments, responding to the the ensuing housing need due to the massive recruitment of workers from other parts of Belgium as well as overseas to work in the mines. Today, these settlements are home to many different cultural communities and are often protected as ensembles of great heritage value. The settlement of Winterslag was built in phases with major funding discrepancies. Today distinction is made between Winterslag 1, 2 and 4 with significant differences between them. Phase 3 was never built. Winterslag 1 was the most prosperous settlement,



SELECTED SITES FOR THE WORKSHOP. Graphics: Workshop Team



TEXTILE MAP OF THE CITY OF GENK WITH WINTERSLAG SETTLEMENTS.
Graphic: Workshop Team

for housing better paid miners and engineers, visually reflecting the inhabitants' higher status. The remaining phases of 2 and 4 had less and less funding. This resulted in a hierarchy throughout the neighbourhoods. Originally to separate the miners from the engineers, it now separates the classes of modern-day society, igniting social tensions. The lack of funding has resulted in poor design and the subsequent lower living quality found in the selected sites for the workshop which are located in Winterslag 2 and 4, with the Noordlaan road as the main connectivity route.

RE-WILDING

While many houses in these settlements are still owned by the social housing organisation Nieuw Dak, some are privately owned. Often, houses have been renovated and extended, but they still lack energy efficiency and adaptivity to family dynamics. The houses were built in a time where individuals did not own cars for example and did not have the same requirements of modern-day life. This creates a tension between the buildings created over 100 years ago and the 21st century post-industrial communities living there. It is this lack of cohesion along with the heritage status of the "garden city" design which gives true purpose to the workshop taking place here. Public space however is still abundant, but it resists a more differentiated and collective use by its communities. Originally, the design of public space mainly answered transportation needs. These historically different social groups were unambiguously allocated to certain areas. So, the spatial and social model of the garden city no longer corresponds with the reality of contemporary life. Hence, these settlements face major challenges in both cultural and ecological regard to become the sustainable and resilient cities and communities we strive for today. One strategy that can address both cultural and ecological diversity is embracing actors who have been marginalised in the design of such over orderly public spaces. By involving these "silent actors" in the design process, one enhances opportunities for cultural identification

and collective use of public space. In this strategy an explicit role is given to nature and diverse cultural groups, one is able to allow for diverse appropriations of public space, as a means of “re-wilding”. In this respect “re-wilding” is not limited to “greening” the neighbourhood using design interventions, but is the basis for a new and flourishing community life. At the same time, re-wilding strategies tackle environmental concerns by introducing a fundamental shift from grey to green matter. Workshop participants used previous research results that focused on identifying “green” patterns of differentiated use of public space by prototyping real-life “re-wilding” interventions with and for the inhabitants of Winterslag. Although these “re-wilding” interventions subvert the overarching orderly nature of garden cities, they are first and foremost a means to encourage communities to gain control and responsibility of their living environment. Students were introduced to the sites and their inhabitants and by the end of the workshop produced a re-wilding intervention to increase this neighbourhood’s connectivity to nature in both implicit and explicit ways.

FOUR DESIGN CAPABILITIES

Inspired by the work of Annemarie Mol, the workshop was pedagogically structured for participants to learn about four ways of being in, thinking about, relating to and acting on their respective sites. “Being” is about the bodily experience of being in a situation. “Knowing” is something which develops not from a distance, but involves acting and valuing knowledge with others on location. “Doing” with others takes an iterative form of acting with the materialities on the site: building, deconstructing, repurposing etc. It involves a lot of actors, here and there, now and then. Doing is ambivalent, it is not good for everyone, not good enough and goes on and on. “Relating” with others is about relating with different worlds in sustaining future designs.

To support being, knowing, doing and relating to the sites, students are trained in four design capabilities

that are the result of ongoing UHasselt research: re-tracing, re-connecting, re-imagining and re-institutioning.

- **Re-Tracing:** Instead of teaching students to only project their expert views of the world and on certain groups, we teach them to enter into relation with diverse actors by actively tracing their material and social ways of experiencing the world, using design anthropological approaches. During the live labs students gain capabilities to research and represent these world experiences and views through maps, videos, interviews and so on.
- **Re-Connecting:** We train students in connecting between actors and their projects, designing translations between their worlds. Students are trained in organising gatherings where different actors can share experiences and projects via workshops, markets, interventions etc.
- **Re-Imagining:** We train students in capabilities to reimagine together with diverse groups of stakeholders based on their newly formed relations, alternatives for their environment. Through “making” live built interventions, students learn to make future imaginations tangible.
- **Re-Institutioning:** We train students in developing capabilities to sustain newly formed relations between actors to continue by connecting them to institutional actors and shaping them into living labs and other types of organisations.

To train and explore these design capabilities on site, each group started with three “lenses” for the initial mapping of their site; material borders – both public and private, natural processes, and human appropriations. These mappings resulted in a first pitch-event in the presence of local social workers, inhabitants and representatives of the municipality and the local social housing organisation Nieuw Dak.

Taking into account the new information from these events, each group adapted their initial proposals to address the issues at hand and built and presented a final design intervention on site on the last day of the workshop.



TOGETHER TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Re-wilding is a key strategy to contribute to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. In a strict sense, re-wilding is directed to good health and well-being of people (SDG 3) by strengthening their relationship with nature. Favoring green over grey spaces is also a tried and tested concept in fighting climate change (SDG 13). The broader notion of re-wilding as a pre-condition for strengthening communal life and togetherness means we are also dealing with the question of sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). At the same time the re-imagined public domain of the garden city offers more equal opportunities (SDG 10) for the highly diverse cultures and communities living together in the super-diverse city.

WORKSHOP DIARY



DAY 1

ARRIVAL DAY

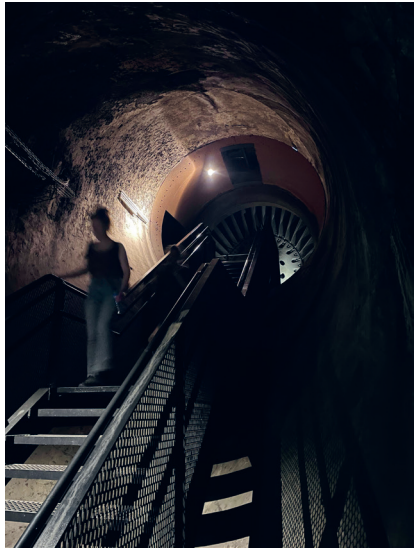
The workshop began with a communal dinner at Hostel H where all participants stay during the workshop week. Participants meet each other for the first time and introduce themselves formally. They are welcomed and given a general introduction. After dinner, everybody enjoys a drink at the “Barousel”-festival site in the park next to the hostel. As a nice coincidence, the festival ran in parallel the whole week and hosted several side-events of the workshop.



DAY 2

INTRODUCTION DAY

The day started with a briefing on the goals and planning of the workshop, Live Projects and the Winterslag settlements. Practical arrangements and issues for the week are addressed. Participants are divided in groups and assigned to each of the five sites. In contrast to the three other workshops, teachers are also assigned to a specific group and site. After this introduction, participants travel to Genk by public transport to collect their bicycles. These will be the main means of transport for the week. The bike ride from the rental to Winterslag is at once the first acquaintance with the city of Genk and the typical housing developments from the heydays of the mining era. Arriving in Winterslag, participants had a small lunch and met the actors from the community centre, the social housing company Nieuw Dak and the municipality. Each of them introduced their perspective on the issues at hand on the different sites by walking from site to site. Meanwhile, in a first instinctive reaction, the different groups reacted to all this information by building a very quick and light bamboo-installation on site, to start acting spatially on site right away and to stimulate inhabitants and passers-by to join the conversation and share their opinions.



DAY 3

MAPPING DAY

The first half of the workshop was more or less dedicated to “mapping”, the second half to “prototyping”. The third day started with a visit to C-Mine culture centre and C-mine experience, to learn more about the history of Winterslag as a coal mining settlement. The C-mine centre is a reconversion of the original conglomerate of industrial mining buildings to a culture centre, with access to an underground visitors centre documenting the daily life of the people who worked in the mines.

During the afternoon, following the instinctive interventions and first mappings of the issues that started the day before, we became more focused on trying to interact with local inhabitants more directly. Participants are physically present on site most of the day and draw, talk, walk, photograph “things” to initiate more conversations with the public, both on the problems at hand as well as their perceived solutions, leading to more elaborate maps, sketches and analysis.



DAY 4

PREPARATION DAY

Between mapping and prototyping activities, the groups pitched their mapping and analysis as well as their first concepts of intervention to the actors and stakeholders they met on day 2. The same format is applied: this happens on site, during a walk along the five different sites and groups. The inhabitants of the different sites are also invited, to share their thoughts. At the end of the day, Arya Arabshahi gave a lecture about various transitions to a more nature oriented society, and how re-wilding on all levels can shift our land usage and planning cultures, from our eating culture to net zero emissions. The lecture focused on how integrating quantitative research into the urban design process can make it more reliable and convincing to make people want to make this change. It was followed by a lively discussion on the topic. In the evening a communal dinner is hosted on the Barousel festival-site with a public lecture by Josymar Rodriguez on working with children in her own research and participatory architecture practice.



DAY 5

PROTOTYPING DAY

The day after the pitch, the groups sharpened their initial concepts for interventions and start prototyping them. One or two delegates from each group visited the municipal materials depot to make an inventory of available materials to report back to their respective groups. Experiments and brainstorms on how to build interventions are the main focus of the groups on this day. How to get things done by the final presentation is the main issue to tackle, so no other activities are planned.



DAY 6

PRESENTATION DAY

During the first half of the day, the interventions are finalized on site and the final presentation and documentation for the actors, stakeholders and inhabitants is prepared. Just as at the introduction and the pitch, all presentations are programmed on site and end with the participants, actors and stakeholders coming together informally at the community centre sharing some snacks and refreshments. Together these presentations are the closing event of the workshop week in Winterslag.

INTERVENTION 01

THE HAMMOCK



CHILDREN DRAWING ON THE HAMMOCK. Photo: Workshop Team

ARZU ARSLAN

LARS HALLARÅKER HELLESØ-KNUTSEN

LAURIDS REINICKE-BAGER

MARGO VAN DE BROEK

The Dynamo community centre presents an opportunity to foster and deepen relations between the inhabitants in this low-density residential community of Winterslag; it is a starting point of the necklace forest surrounding the built environment. The structure of public spaces is currently introverted, with no relation to the peripheral forest, intensifying the division between the natural and man-made world. Walls, fences, dense bushes and a vast array of built elements are used to assert public and private functions in the area which limits the possibility of engagement with the centre and between neighbours. It is this labyrinth of barriers, fences and other space divisions which is the focus of Group 1's intervention strategy.

Once a school for 6–12-year-olds, the now “Dynamo community centre” was shut down for being perceived as a low-quality educational facility, with another school in the area currently facing a similar fate. Twenty years ago, it was repurposed to become the new community centre with offices for community workers, youth groups and green workers.

“Re-wilding is
not ecology,
it’s the
experience of
wilderness.”

TIME KIERULF





The presence of children during the workshop week is evident. During break times they were eager to interact with the participants, asking them to play football together – irrespective of language barriers, the children still had this desire to interact with those on the site, the language barrier is also a common problem for adults in the area due to the variety of languages and diversity in the neighbourhood. After discussions and drawing activities with the youngest residents (6–8-year olds) and their parents, The group used these children’s sketches to inform their intervention, responding directly to the wants and needs of the children. This was combined with mapping of textures in plan, revealing an inconsistency between large paving areas and the visions of the children. These sketches were interpreted and developed into a cohesive proposal for pitching on Wednesday, with a hammock being the object of intervention. The children could build the hammock together or even draw upon to integrate it in their play space and to soften barriers between different parts of public space.



Testing if this boundary between the public and private and the man-made and natural can be blurred through a structure that physically occupies this border, integrating the playground with the forest behind. It is this hammock idea that was followed through with, to construct an intervention that enables the area to be an oasis for meeting and play, with the prominence of children really highlighted through how the intervention will serve its users. Children need a place to rest. This oasis would offer a space between all these barriers, making the thresholds and barriers “soft”, showing the possibilities of integrating nature into the Centre as a way for children to find a place to rest and reclaim the forest as a site for enjoyment and relaxation. At the same time, the hammock questions the role of fences in the community. This project moves away from the typical connotations of “re-wilding” through addition of greenery and restoration of an environment, but focuses on the breaking of the thresholds between the natural environment and the man made.

“The Hammock
ideology can be
expanded as a
system for
re-wilding, to
encourage
movement.”



INTERVENTION 02

THE PERISCOPE



COLLAGE OF PROPOSED INTERVENTION. Graphic: Workshop Team

HEWADG CHANDIMA
PHILIP DAM LÜTKEN
CECILE LIND HÅNES
SANDER PANIS

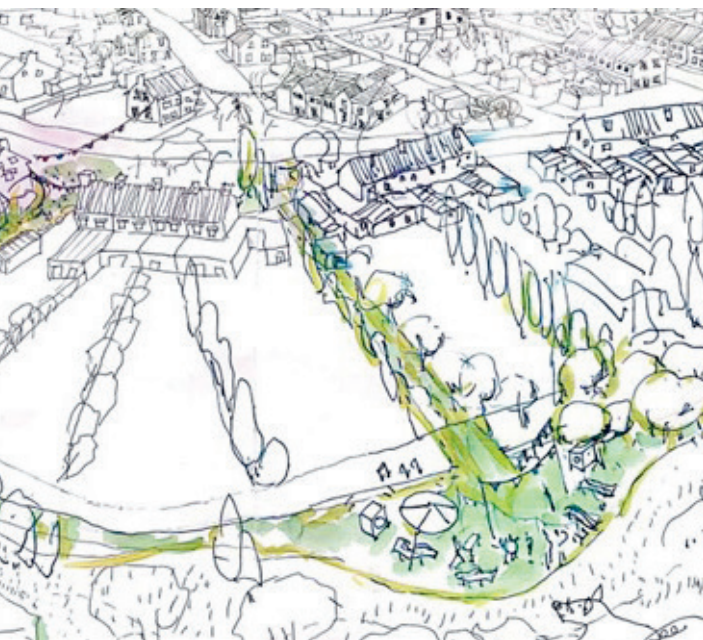
The site of group 2 is situated at the southern most periphery of the neighbourhood. Inhabitants of this area say it is well defined, occupied mainly by the Polish, Italian and Moroccan communities. A green area here sits as an island between roads, unused by the community, with the houses serving as a wall to the greenery beyond. The group established the need for a link between the natural and man-made worlds in the neighbourhood in Winterslag. This can be done through the creation of a dialogue through connecting green areas between public space and private gardens.

As with many of the sites of the workshop, parking is a prominent problem here again, but especially here in Winterslag 2, cars are a means of identity and status, not simply a practicality. Unlike the culture of the country, “no one uses bikes here”, exacerbating this parking problem. It is this prominence of cars which alienates the community members from the natural world, they need something which brings the natural world back to the space, allowing them to see beyond the divides created by cars and the wall created by housing.

The vast spread of nature to the rear of the properties lacks a visual connection. This is the main issue and could be done through physical pathways for example, right from the centre of this walled green patch that allows it to flow outward to the next space.

“The experience
of nature
beyond the
‘wall’ of houses
creates an
immersive
experience for
community
members.”

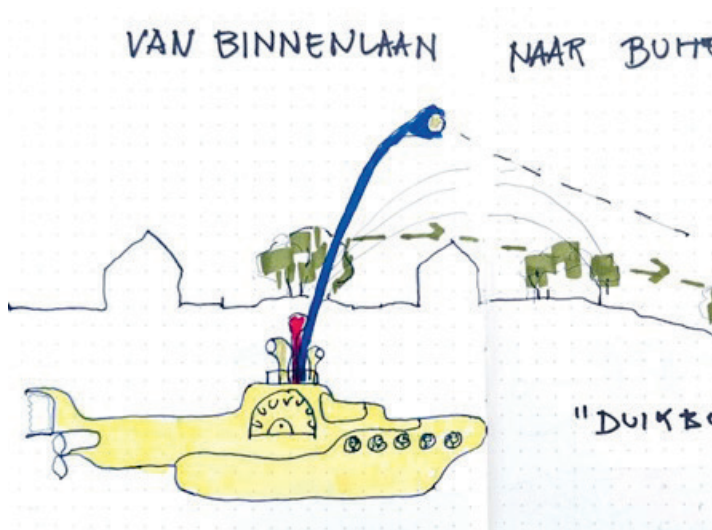




The goal is to experience nature beyond the “wall” of houses and create an immersive experience for community members, whilst still in the confines of the residential area. This was tested by this group through the creation of a self-build periscope.

Initial experimentation revealed the formation of an arch when manouvering the stick, leading to an interpretation of using arches to bridge the road or connecting via an ecoduct bridge for biodiversity to what is beyond the wall of houses.

A mobile phone is strapped to a self-build periscope device and raised in a form of exhibition, where the image from the mobile above the roof line of the houses can be seen. On the ground, physically connecting the two locations through this arch form. This creates a desire for the connection with nature and opens the minds of those in the community to what this space could become.



The degradation of green spaces is used as inspiration to break the boundary between natural and man-made space. Paths between houses have closed over time and people have forgotten the existence of any connection to the greenery beyond the neighbourhood. The periscope acts as a catalyst to bridge this gap and physically bring nature back into this suburban area.

By taking pictures via the periscope the project aimed to reconnect with the horizon beyond the fenced gardens: some places were controlled green spaces, others surprisingly wild.

For the final project presentation, the group closed the road with bamboo structures adorned with their mapping materials, bringing a standstill to the usual workings of the neighbourhood and disrupting the rhythm of daily life here, bringing attention to the subject with the aim of surprising residents with what exists beyond the human eye line.

ENLAAN!



OOTBRUGGEN"

"The periscope
acts as a
catalyst to
bring nature
back into this
suburban area."



VIEW FROM THE PERSICOPE. Photo: Workshop Team

INTERVENTION 03

DE-PAVING



TAKING OUT THE PAVEMENT. Photo: Workshop Team

TINA ATHARI

FREDERIK JANUM FRIIS

SARA STOLL

BRITT VOSSEN

A key feature of the site is the white church where group 1 picked their station to work on. Between the church entrance and the north border of the plot, lies a bus stop facing the Noordlaan road, the most common visited part of the site. This creates a big contrast between the road and church, especially as the church arranges service once a week, and where not many participants attend anymore due to secularisation. This juxtaposed to the noisy Noordlaan road with many traffic problems, which brings to attention how differently defined both are. Even though religion is very prominent in the neighbourhood still, it is not through the church, but the mosques of the Muslim community instead, which surprisingly are at the furthest ends of the neighbourhood. The initial plan for the proposal was to make a ruin, where nature could grow through. What evolved was an investigation of the relation between church and bus stop to become the core of the proposal. The church used to be the place central to connections has now been replaced by the bus stop. More people meet there instead. The church site is the only public space in the vicinity but hardly used and least appropriated.

The imbalanced use of space on site alone was analysed, the church empty but filled with plenty of seats while the bus stop outside only has three. This led to the suggestion of a flexible seating idea. Students were prompted to look for the interactions taking place on site. Hence why they worked on the existing bus stop, which has the most activity, by hanging a whiteboard with questions such as: “Where are you going?” or “Where have you been?”.



Involving locals with the project and finding out more about them. On the glass an outline of the church was drawn to see how the people would like it to be reused. Ideally the whole bus stop concept could be rethought. There is a clear need for shelter however, how could they be occupied during their waiting time?

Vision of seating was based on what was there before. The remains of cement behind the bus stop were acknowledged, telling us the space was previously planned. In the same spot a bench was installed in the place where one used to exist. This was accomplished by moving an existing one, adapting them with bamboo sticks. Bricks found on site were used to build extra seats. Based on a conversation with the locals, the team learned that there was a bench on the site before, So, the moved bench fitted perfectly into the remains of cement in the ground.



“Religion is not necessarily how people come together now, the concept of bringing people together in an individualistic society is particularly important.”

“Two worlds
come together
in a newly
connected
sitting area.”



CREATING NEW SITTING ELEMENTS USING PAVEMENT BRICKS.
Photo: Workshop Team



Because of the continuous movement on the bus site, it is a place of rhythm and continuity. The church takes part in important life events. Whereas the bus stop serves the mundane: the rituals of everyday life, going back and forth from work, meeting friends etc. The religious building is made of brick, with small windows and therefore feeling more enclosed. The bus stop on the other hand is made of glass and shows everything that is going on. Both of them are public spaces, meant to serve people in the neighbourhood. Nowadays the Church is not so often used, whereas the bus stop serves many times throughout the day. A feeling of “togetherness” is particularly important in an individualistic society. That is why the intervention formed a space to sit on, when waiting, to think about one’s own rituals. The two worlds come together in a newly connected sitting area.

INTERVENTION 04

BOUNDARY ACT



LIVE DRAWING FOR BETTER COMMUNAL USE.

Photo: Workshop Team

EMMA TRÆLAND
STINUS BERTELSEN
JULIUS GROSS
TIES VANDENBOSCH

The social housing in the Krokusstraat is an ensemble of 8 buildings and 48 apartments with just 25 parking spaces between them. This predominantly social housing area, like other sites in Winterslag, faces problems with parking and public / private space appropriation. There are also problems here identified with storage in the properties and subsequent unconventional use of garages which further exacerbates the parking problems. This was evident when participants had the opportunity to enter one of the flats and see the lack of storage space for themselves. The group here began by establishing the public and private space for an understanding of the frustrations faced by residents with space appropriation. Some residences have no private garden, with kitchen doors running straight into the public domain, leaving residents asking for just a little greenery area that they can use and occupy. These green spaces can be used to unite the currently diverse community also, public space to unite rather than segregate as it does currently. The area between the buildings is owned by the municipality and is usable by everyone, yet is only used for circulation and traffic, causing a lack of social interaction, intensifying residential frictions with some inhabitants claiming green areas as their own. The inhabitants perceive this space as big spaces that are not used that much. They create a feeling of separation in the community and there is a lack of responsibility for them.



With these challenges alongside previous concepts for redevelopment including a garage as a swap-shop considered, group 4 set about a strategy whereby they seek to redefine the public versus private areas. This is done by redesigning circulation pathways, parking areas and storage spaces as well as the introduction of private areas to distinguish common public areas allowing social interaction and greenery growth.

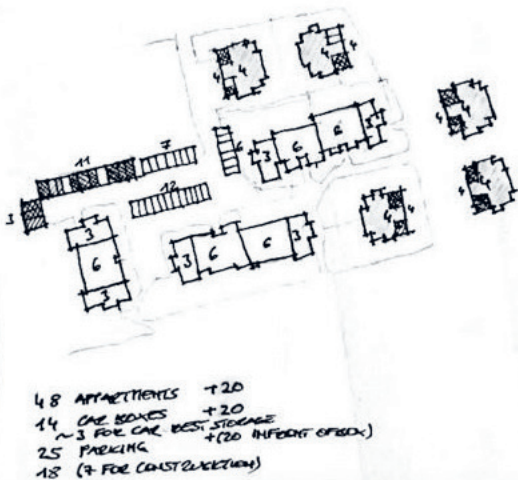
This began with initial mapping of flat entrances, greenery borders and barriers, paving and paths, way-finding routes and public versus private space. This process revealed the true problems of the site to be the lack of definition as to what belongs to who, surfacing the strategy of “re-wilding by redefining the boundaries. A boundary act.”

PRESENTATION OF CONCEPT SCHEMES FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS.

Photo: Workshop Team



“We need a
strategy of
re-wilding
by redefining
the boundaries.”





The redesigning of the parking lot is set out at 1:1 scale in the setting itself through chalk outlines. This way, it can be physically seen by the residents, and walked through in plan to aid in their spatial understanding. This is a very temporary installation, only visible until the next rain when it will be washed away. If we are to translate the one thing that unifies them (being the problems associated with parking) into the object of the scheme, it becomes inherently unifying. The proposal includes 15 more parking spaces for the residents, an attempt to define the space and offer more clarity into what is public and what is private as well as the division of garages to become a storage space for three apartments to share.

Paths are to be minimised where possible as not all require the 4 meter width fire engine access, with public space to include plant boxes to cater to the desire for a little green area each and encourage cohesion together.

The temporality of this method allows for the resident to see the potential changes without physical works being carried out as well as allowing for multiple iterations of the design to be tested in plan at 1:1 scale – something uncommon for masterplan schemes providing a new perspective and understanding, especially for those not from an architectural background.

INTERVENTION 05

SOFT ROAD



HANGING AROUND AT THE SITE AFTER THE FINAL PRESENTATION.
Photo: Workshop Team

INE GRAJCHEN
KIMIA NOORINEJAD
LORIS VOGT
LAURITZ WAGN MØLLER

This project seeks to counter problems with street encroachment caused by lack of enforcement of urban regulation in the neighbourhood. Situated in a context characterized by Flemish social housing typologies dating back to the 1940s, a cluster of families have appropriated part of the public space by transforming it to private parking outside their plot boundaries.

As the informal streetscape does not have formal boundaries between public and private, the physical divisions are produced by negotiations between residents and local authorities, resulting in encroachment on the streets, whereby the residents slowly alter the physical barriers marking their plots to take over parts of the street space.

This development causes a multitude of problems for the residents, including decreased social interaction in the public sphere, informal voids with underdeveloped potential, and issues of formalizing the landownership. Accordingly, street encroachment leads to the degradation of the garden city as a great heritage value. A visit to the site helped to understand the issues around the divide of the public and the private this area had. The visit also allowed the group to see the lack of interaction with the green spaces. The current residents park their cars on the green spaces, blocking it for other usage, there also isn't a clear indication who can park where, creating a tense atmosphere between residents as they take each other's spaces due to it being a first come first serve basis.

“It was not a problem about cars, it was a problem about mobility.”



During the visit the locals interacted and showed their great concern towards the areas issues. Once we proposed what we were doing, the locals said they wanted fewer green areas and that they needed more parking so that it is clear where everyone could park. They stressed that their children are growing up and will also want cars. After the site survey was complete, it was clear there was a better connection to nature on some of the other streets and rethinking the structure had to be considered, so that green areas could be used.

SUGGESTING NEW COMMUNAL USE OF UNDEFINED SPACES.

Photo: Workshop Team



The idea of re-wilding and “more green” was very contested by the residents: “It’s already green!”, “We don’t want greenery – there is no space for it!”, “We need car parking! Are we meant to tell our children they can’t have cars anymore?”.

The group started to put together what they felt was the main issue around the site as well as using the feedback from the public to find a way forward that would best benefit the area. Sketches and mappings were produced on each site to understand what could be done. The group decided that from the concern of the residents the parking was one of the main issues. The group started to come up with ideas of what to do through their sketches.

Using various gathered materials helped the group to start to explore their sketches in a physical manner. Bouncing off each other’s ideas, the group started to come up with different scenarios by moving the materials around and starting to get a scale of realistic measurement to how things could work.

MEASURING AND RE-DIMENSIONING EXISTING ROAD (1:1).

Photo: Workshop Team



The group explored 3 scenarios where they investigated how they could re-organize the street and make the boundaries work better. At the moment it is not clear where cars are supposed to park and this needs to be made clear.

(1) the classical way

Used the existing layout of the street and change the green areas to be parking. Then introduce a new green barrier between the footpath next to housing and in-between the car spaces.

(2) a semi-option

After realizing there are currently 2 parking spots for 4 apartments, and they wanted to make the boundaries all clear. They considered the minimal width of the street to make it possible for cars to cross and introduced parallel parking to generate one parking spot per unit.

(3) the radical way

No front parking, all parking at the backside.
Pedestrian-friendly street with soft pavement.



The radical way was represented at the final presentation as it was the greenest option. The idea of having a soft road meant that kids could go outside and play and that social interaction within the community could increase. Parking is provided at the back of the houses by using the back street of the Mosque. The removal of bollards on this street also creates better access to the forest.

The new bus stop round the corner gives residents and visitors an option to reduce the number of cars in the area and visitors to the mosque a greener way to travel. New areas of play are created for the children through markings and interventions on the road: children could play hopscotch, use the new swing apparatus or come together for some games with the ball on the new road. This is all a way to connect the community and give the road more purpose to them with greener areas than they originally had.

EXPLORING MATERIALS AND TEXTURES OF THE NEW SOFT-ROAD.

Photo: Workshop Team

VALUING IN PRACTICE

As designers we are invested in the “materiality” we design: buildings, streets, bricks, maps, technologies. However, in times of immense socio-ecological challenges, designers are increasingly confronted with polarisation around the sustainable futures they envision that do not always entail adding materiality, but also taking it away. As we demonstrated via the Live Project at Arck, UHasselt, often designers, policy makers and other professionals separate our world into those who care for, for example, sustainable building, mobility or water and those who do not care, even enhancing these polarising tendencies. There is thus a need to design beyond opposition, but for relations between worlds and world views around these futures. In our research we explore how to design for “careful” relations between actors whose worlds, projects – and thus also how they consider the things we design – seem opposed to each other, such as a daily need for a feeling of home and shelter in our society versus an ecological need to build less. During a Live Project, as Participatory Designers – inspired by the work of Annemarie Mol – we explored a design process as a process of “valuing in practice”, negotiating various world-making projects and ways of valuing the world and reconnecting these in new patchworks. This caring approach to design is also what we discuss in the book we launched recently *Re-framing the politics of Design* (Huybrechts, Devisch & Tassinari, 2022).

COLLECTIVE DESIGN CAPABILITIES

In this Live Project we particularly zoomed in on some collective design capabilities that we can build to support such an approach of designing beyond oppositions for complex socio-environmental challenges, inspired by a book by Annemarie Mol “Eating in Theory” (2021). In an ecological crisis, in which we have lost our link with our environment, Mol discusses “eating” as a practice that shows exemplary situations in how we as designers can engage again with more-than-human actors, such as trees. Eating provides imaginaries with which to think, beyond the arrogance of the human, in relation to the more-than-human world. It reveals how situated people behave on a fragile earth, and how they are dependent on each other and actors such as an apple. We pick an apple from a tree, we eat it, digest it and excrete it. The “politics” of eating is not distant, such as engaging in a distant conversation about e.g. food, energy or water. It rather shows that there are “many ways to do eating” and “many ways to engage with nature in a neighbourhood (e.g. de-paving, reconnecting nature with the street, ...)”. This goes beyond society’s – and also design research’s – virtues of clarity, distinctness, and fear from seduction, evocation. It enables a shift towards designs, such as eating, as being valued in practice, as labour with e.g. nature, energy and water, which has politics of its own during ongoing, practical socio-material negotiations. Mol summarizes these exemplary situations of eating, in parallel with our daily relations to nature as being, knowing, doing and relating with others.

We use these as inspiration for design with and for the ecological environment. In *The Nutmeg’s Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (2021), Ghosh calls this way of dealing with politics, a politics of vitality, where the relationship between nature and human beings is defined beyond ownership, but shapes harmony and co-existence, where otherwise considered inert objects such as the green spaces in neighbourhoods, are lively actors.

BEING

Being was explored as the bodily experience of being in a situation, which is necessary in our Live project approach to understand how people experience their world. In the Live Project, we tried to detect how people “are” with the more-than-human actors such as trees or grass, on a daily basis: they search a cool environment, they rest, they contemplate, ...

To gain a deep understanding, in one of the five subprojects, at the Community Centre, we engaged in observations, discussions and drawing activities with the youngest residents and their parents. This revealed the need for children to bring neighbouring nature into the community centre as a way for children to find a place to rest, reclaim heather and woodland as a site for enjoyment and relaxation and question the role of fences in community. It became apparent that many of the children in the community centre had busy lives in the evenings in their family homes and came to the centre in the morning, needing rest. This resulted in an intervention of a huge hammock where children could rest.

This raises some questions: Did this way of being with the children, playing and drawing together, a rather soft and kind approach, enable students and researchers to understand the children’s “being in the environment”? Did this way of being with the children lead to insights that were too anecdotal? Did the students and researchers need to engage with additional design research approaches?

KNOWING

Knowing in Live Project approaches is not something which develops only from a distance, but involves active engagement with facts and values on the site. Knowing evolves in not entirely predictable ways, with all subjects and objects, coming from different worlds, being involved. In that sense the act of knowing is about “connecting knowledge between worlds”.

BARRIERS CATALOG



- 4
- Solid
 - Tall
 - No possibility of seen
 - No connection

3

BARRIERS MAP





URBAN MINING WHILE REINTRODUCING SPACE FOR BIODIVERSITY.
Photo: Workshop Team

In the Live Project, knowledge was actively connected between students, teachers, neighbourhood developers, city administration, social housing companies, older and younger inhabitants, coming from different backgrounds through speculative interventions or co-design activities; such as workshops.

For instance, in The Periscope, the worlds of international groups of architects, social housing companies, spatial planning actors, inhabitants, ... came together, using a self-built periscope to bring the (hidden) “wild” heather and woodland back to the street and front garden. Concretely, the periscope project enabled taking pictures behind the fences, which allowed reconnecting public space with the horizon beyond the fenced gardens: some places are controlled, some wild, others surprising.

This again raises a few questions: Did the periscope as an intervention enable us to bring the different worlds together? Was the periscope as an intervention a good way to stir attention. Does it need additional and more “soft” methods to understand the studied worlds?

DOING

In our Live project approaches we “imagine future worlds by doing with others”. In The Church project the participants prototyped real-life interventions with and for the inhabitants of Winterslag focusing on re-wilding the over-orderly “nature” of the garden city as a precondition for more social and ecological diversity. By “doing” – taking away pavement, connecting green areas and building new infrastructure to rest – an old neighbourhood church and a bus stop were brought together. Both public spaces serve people and the neighbourhood, but the church is rarely used, while the bus stop is used many times.

Through de-paving connections between church and bus station and re-using the pavement to build seats on site, people can connect with each other in a new

way while they wait for the bus or for a ceremony in church. Two worlds come together in a newly connected green park.

Again a few questions emerge. Does the de-paving as a way of doing together on location, enables a deep, material and in-situ conversation with actors in the environment? Is de-paving as a way of doing together, too dependent on who is involved at each moment? Does it inhibit a well-thought through and planned approach?

RELATING

In the Live Project approach relations are created between neighbourhood work, policy work, design work and daily practices on a longer term, in new experiments with organisational constellations.

For instance, in the project Boundary Act inhabitants complained about lack of parking, storage, and common spaces. We discovered an area inbetween the 8 buildings that form an ensemble of 68 flats, which is publicly owned and mainly used as circulation and parking area. Together with different partners, the project re-designed – via chalk – a public area by re-organising circulation pathways, parking, storage and private areas to distinguish common public areas that allow social interaction and nature to grow.

Also, in the project Soft Road, located in the northern outer edge neighbourhood, which is characterized by a mosque and woodland, families in semi-detached houses transformed public front gardens into private parking. The lack of formal boundaries between public and private decreased the social interaction of the public sphere, and raised issues of formalizing landownership and degradation of the garden city as heritage. Through interventions, the project engaged locals into taking leadership over the street and regaining a manageable relation between the private and the public by redesigning a bus stop, a playground and relocating parking spaces.



LIVE DRAWING FOR BETTER COMMUNAL USE.

Photo: Workshop Team

This brings about the questions: Does the focus on relating sustain projects over time? Does the focus on relating slow down or even inhibit the design process?

To summarise, we have listed some final reflections that can be taken up in the future in engaging with design education that focuses on social and environmentally sustainable futures:

“Being together” in the site – engaging bodily with the studied site – enables educational design projects to engage with the socio-environmental context with fresh eyes. However, this fresh perspective has a downside. Without historical insights, the international students would have missed a lot of the diversity already present in the site: on first sight, they experienced the garden cities as peaceful, clean, not wild. It is only through stories of locals that they learned that many opportunities, challenges – diverse actors, nature areas – were situated in the private sphere or behind the fences, which revealed the need to reconnect them to the public space. Being in the context, needed to be combined with storytelling about hidden and past experiences of the site to get a more nuanced insight.

“Knowing together” – bringing different knowledge worlds together – supports design educational projects to expand their ways of knowing. In this activity, a difficult balance needs to be made between searching friction and searching connection with the situated ways of knowing. The ways in which knowledge was brought together and how people dared/ wanted to bend/test rules, depended on the cultural background, personality, age, gender, education of students, teachers, participants. Some explored more careful approaches of connecting knowledge, such as the hammock, which were easily accepted by diverse groups and external participants. The Periscope went further in shifting perspectives, but also required more guidance to relate to the situated reality. Sometimes, this caused frictions between the groups and members. One teacher said

that he felt evaluated by other teachers and external experts passing by and questioning the design of the periscope. This shows how important it is to take care as design educators for shaping moments of coming together, adapted to backgrounds, differences, discomfort, ...

“Doing together” in design educational contexts – taking material action together – is also very much produced in a continuous tension between what you bring from the outside versus what you use from within the world you study. Some ways of doing were “interventionist” in nature (e.g., the periscope) and some were deeply thought from relations within the world (the hammock made of ideas drawn by the children).

“Relating together”, finally, was a design practice that wanted to create active relations between diverse worlds of human and more-than-human actors. This practice needed to balance in-between activities that matter on a short term versus what is needed for a long-term implementation of the design educational insights and products. For instance, although it could give inspirational input, students and teachers could feel bothered by external policy makers or planners to stop by during the Live project week to ask questions, because this could disrupt their design process that needed to be finalised in one week time. However, on a longer term this engagement with policy and social housing organisations was necessary to sustain the re-wilding interventions over time. Because it was summer; policy makers and institutions were involved less frequently than in our Live Projects during the academic year, which obstructed some short-term decisions. For instance, the students working at the church site felt very insecure about how and if they could take stones out of the pavement without policy permission, which often delayed and inhibited their action on the ground.

TO CONCLUDE

In “Re-wilding the garden city” the Live Project approach was used to design for more ecological and cultural diversity in the studied neighbourhood. It showed that we need to re-wild the relations with human and more-than-human actors. Moreover, in order for design education to support more socio-environmentally sustainable futures, more attention should be paid towards a more careful articulation and shaping of diverse roles, capabilities, and relations of teachers, students and societal actors within and outside our educational programs.