

## **How to rework the city we have – Inductive planning to provide jobs and skills in old industrial areas.**

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### **Abstract**

*This innovative planning approach aims to create jobs and develop skills for industrial and blue collar workers. We want to activate the largely empty, unused or underused spaces in old industrial areas of the Brussels Metropolitan area. The activation has to be done by*

- (1) convincing private partners (owners, developers, business owners) to rent out or use the empty floors or underused parts of their plot and buildings,*
- (2) attracting businesses from outside the area to develop activities here, and*
- (3) promoting new entrepreneurship so new start-up businesses root in this area*

*This requires a good knowledge of what happens on the field, understanding how the potential investors and partners think, and starts from a deep respect for the people that are still working and investing in the area*

*From our first experience in the Brussels northern Area, we learned the following:*

- Many spaces inside buildings are vacant*
- The normal market for renting large buildings does not attract new strong entrepreneurs, but only residual uses*
- Many buildings and plots are kept empty, because of soil contamination. In most cases the contamination does not prevent a temporary use.*
- Business owners, investors that are present in the area, do not know each other.*
- Potential collaboration is often not seen by investors.*

*Our project wants to figure out in real conditions what this intermediate or interface actually consists of. We will explore different possible frameworks within our territory. The first step however is to get in contact with existing companies, by producing new territorial knowledge, doing interviews, organising workshops, and discover the urban landscape by walking through it in small groups.*

*Two municipalities will take the lead, helped by regular programs in Flanders and Brussels. Scientific support will be provided by the two Brussels universities.*

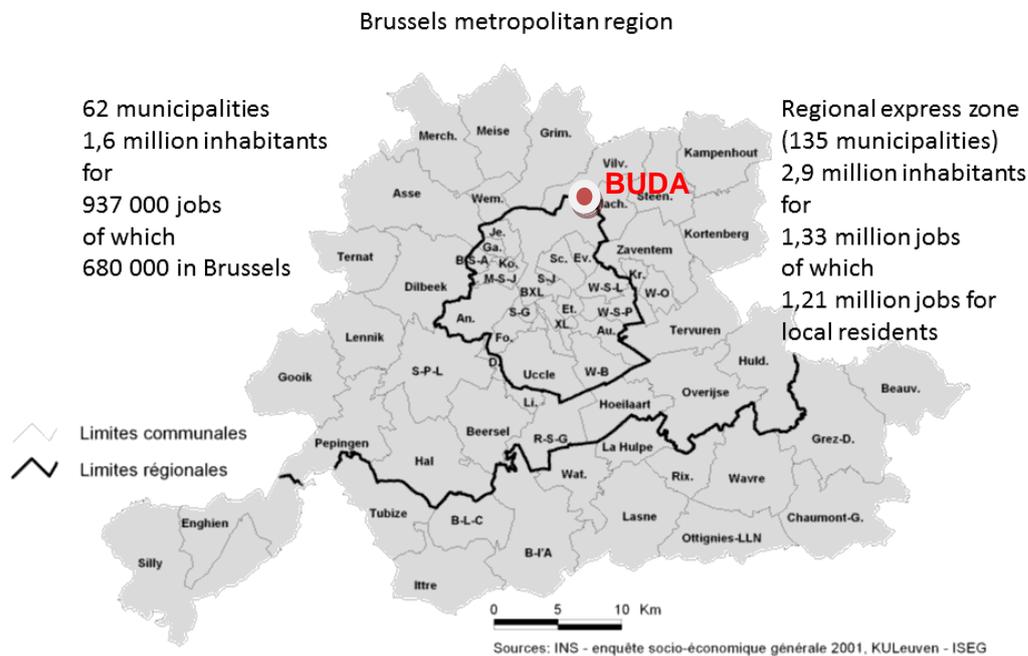


Figure 1: location of Buda in the Brussels metropolitan region, on the border of Brussels Capital Region and Flemish Region, within the functional metropolis (= the 62 municipalities shown in the map). The regional express zone (not shown on map) relates to the employment catchment area.

## 1. Brussels' metropolitan area in times of uncertainty, fragility and insecurity

During the 2014 CassCities/RuimteVlaanderen summer school<sup>i</sup>, Eric Corijn<sup>ii</sup> formulated the major challenge for the Brussels metropolitan area as follows: *"to truly understand the dynamics of Brussels, one must acknowledge the extremely rapid growth of the population. The downward demographic trend which began from the historical population maximum in 1968 (1.079.181 inhabitants) is turned. ... On January 1, 2013 1,154,635 people were registered in the Brussels-Capital Region (19 municipalities). Between 2010 and 2020, a net growth of over 140,000 people is expected. Specific for the Brussels situation is that the net growth of the population is associated with an ongoing suburbanisation. The Brussels-Capital Region keeps losing around 5,000 people annually to the other regions. Between 2005 and 2013, the Flemish suburbs gained 25,000 inhabitants to a total of 415,000 people."*

The industrial production based society evolved since the late 1950s to an advanced service economy, while Brussels slowly profiled itself as the capital of the European Union<sup>iii</sup> Unemployment in the industrial working class remains structural, especially among young people and workers with a migration background. One-third to over half of young people in some neighbourhoods are unemployed. Nevertheless, the economy continued to grow in Brussels in the service and healthcare sectors and as a result there are more than 710,000 jobs, of which 365,000 are occupied by commuters. 54 percent of commuters living in Flemish or Walloon Brabant. According to Eric Corijn over 105,000 jobs are directly connected to international functions of Brussels. Corijn: *"This internationalization of the Brussels economy is also present in the suburbs and the fringe, more specific in the logistics activities and the airport region."* Lack of sufficient demand for low-skilled productive work in Brussels results in a strong dualisation of society and poverty. Social and economic

integration of the periphery in the dynamic of Brussels-Capital Region will also be visible in the form of urbanization. The new residents of the fringe bring higher densities and social multi-culturalisation. Part of the population moving out to the fringe do so because of upward social mobility from the (impoverished) canal neighbourhoods of Brussels. These social developments are at odds with the detached housing trend that dominates the Flemish periphery today. Densification is necessary to strengthen urban functions and services, especially in the existing smaller cities, like Vilvoorde and the old villages.

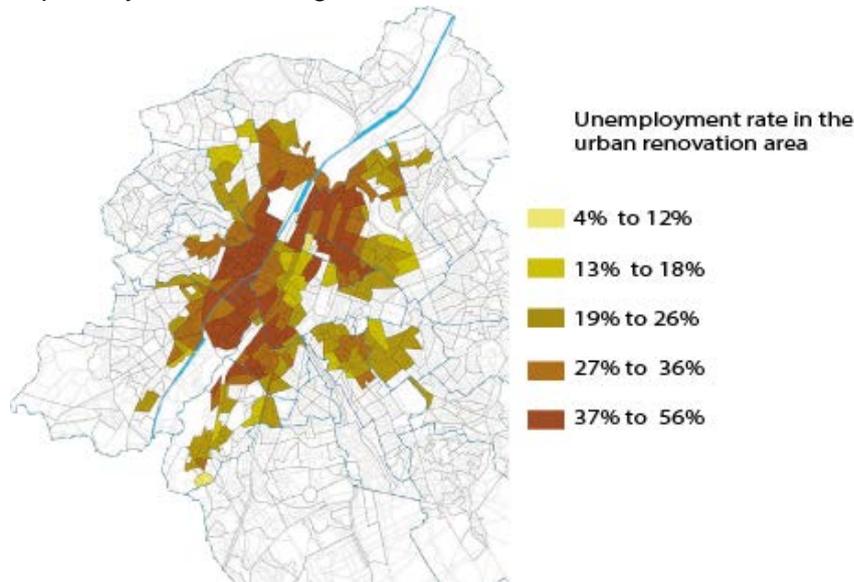


Figure 2: map of unemployment in central Brussels, along the canal. (GSSO, 2007)

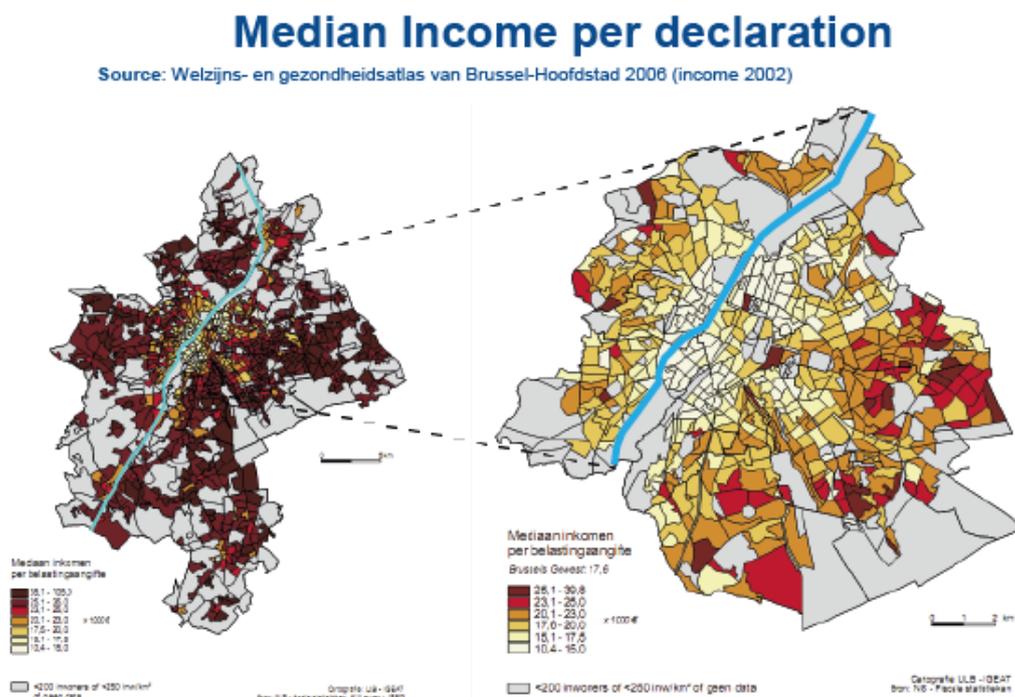


Figure 3: map of median income (2002) in the morphological urban area, poverty concentrated in the canal area, and continuing to the north and south (Corijn, 2014)

Unemployment in canal area neighbourhoods coincide with the geography of lower income areas and poverty. As figure 3 shows, poverty is concentrated in the canal area in the Brussels Capital Region, but continues along the canal to the north and south. Unemployment and low income are linked to school dropout and low skilled work force. Unsurprisingly, the poor living conditions and hopelessness are leading some young people to extremism. Both the november 2015 Paris attacks and the March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2016 attacks in Brussels were prepared by people who grew up in these impoverished areas.

The key to improve living conditions and to counter extremist tendencies is to provide sufficient and good training and jobs, especially for low skilled people. The old industrial core of the metropolis from Vilvoorde to Halle remains the main location for companies providing low skilled labour.

However, over the last decades, former industrial sites or harbour sites in or nearby city centres were abandoned, because of problems with congestion, size of infrastructure (or size of ships and trucks), delocalisation of activities or industry (Zajac 2015). This economic reality provided the opportunity to rethink the future of those former production sites, called brownfields. Most of those sites were not reconverted into production sites, or even into sites where production sites are mixed in. The redevelopment mainly concerns housing, with a rather limited addition with offices, hotels, restaurants, cafés, shops and services. Smaller industrial buildings in the urban fabric are often redeveloped into lofts or apartments.

From a developers' point of view, residential development is far more lucrative (Maring et al. 2015, Pisman et al., 2015, Dugernier 2014) than development of production sites. When an old industrial company in the canal area ceases its activities, the building is often bought by a developer, hoping to create a new, high profit residential area. The fact that many plots needed soil remediation and considerable investment before a new activity could start, turned industrial redevelopment impossible

Inadvertently, this 'regeneration' pushed out industry and diminished the potential number of jobs for low skilled workers.

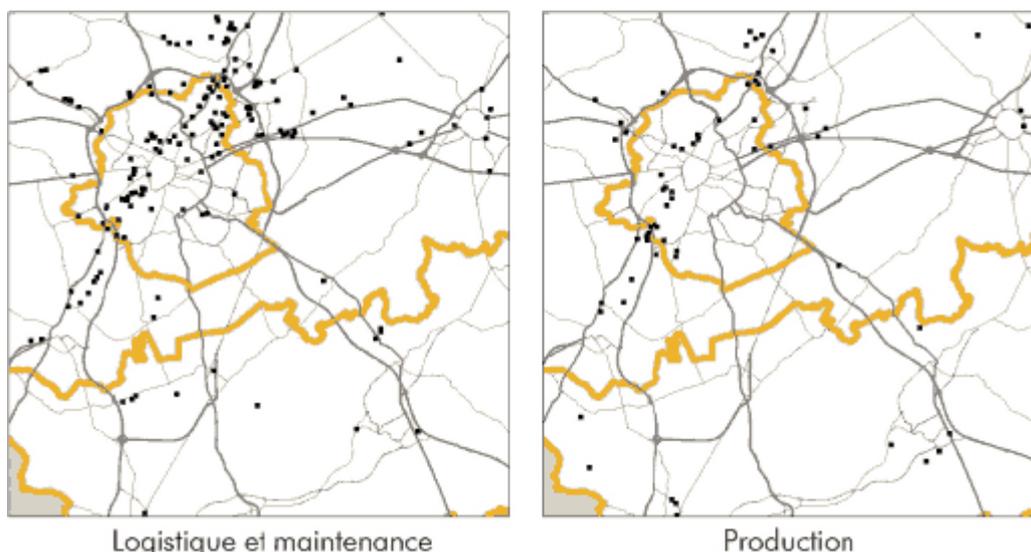


Figure 4: map of location of employment in industrial production (right) and distribution of goods (left) (Vandermotten, 2014)

## 2. How to bring back jobs in Buda

Buda is situated in the northern part of the Canal Area, and strides the border between the Brussels Capital Region and the Flemish Region.

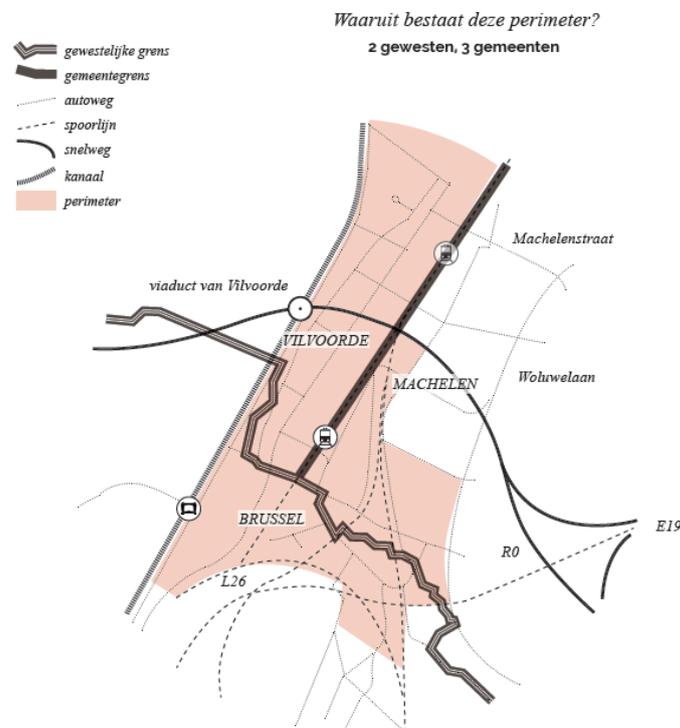


Figure 5: map of Buda, along the canal, on the border of two administrative regions

The area was developed as an industrial estate from the 1920s. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many companies moved out or went out of business, especially in the chemical and automotive sector. Heavy soil pollution and derelict buildings remained on site for many years. In the early 2000s a redevelopment scheme, based on total demolition, soil remediation and residential development was set up for some parts. By 2016, due to the financial crisis, it became clear that this strategy was very expensive and time consuming. Only a small portion of the 200 hectare site will be redeveloped in this way.

When we aim to provide additional jobs in existing economic areas, we must be cautious not to push the functioning companies out. A careful redevelopment approach is therefore needed. Current business owners should be the main force that pushes the regeneration. All relevant authorities, owners, workers, employees, ... will be invited to join the collective learning process.

Gibbons' 'Making space for Dalston' project (Gibbons, 2010) could not give a better description of our ambitions with the Buda project: *"Making Space in Dalston is a design led example of deliberative planning; the process of constant feedback between thinking and doing, where partners prefer to get their hands dirty in collaboration with local people rather than spending money on reports or subscribing to conventional top-down approach typical of the masterplanning process. Having been conceived over three years ago the methodology of valuing what's there, nurturing the possible and defining what's missing, from grass roots up, [...] it offers an early insight into the practical and design implications of shifting the*

*balance of power. By involving local people in decision-making, it allowed local partners to take ownership of the projects, discuss governance and evolve together the mechanisms for future sustainability. [...]*

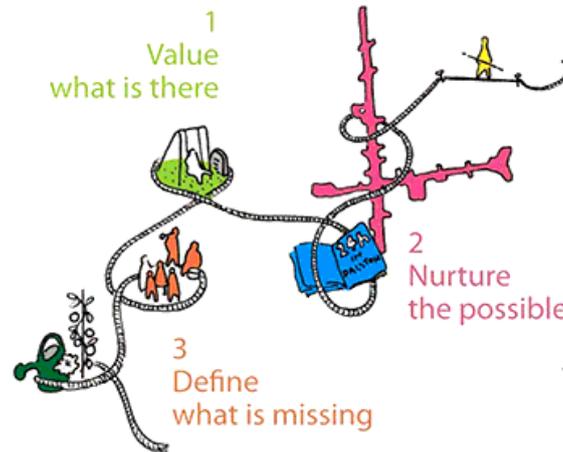


Figure 6: Making space in Dalston: the principles of the study (Gibbons 2010)

*[...] The project has promoted the role of an open dialogue in delivering responsive and meaningful change. By building trust and enthusiasm about public space in Dalston, and with a modest spend matched with a significant quantum of sweat equity from stakeholders, the project provides a test case for how the idea of the Big Society will play out at the point of delivery of new urban plans. It demonstrates the possibilities of incremental regeneration in evolving fine-grained deliverable innovations, particularly given an area of natural cultural diversity, and the entrepreneurial approach of the designers. The process forged new alliances, formal and informal, delivering relevant projects within a tight timeframe to composite client groups and interested parties, under a strategic umbrella, with restricted means, not reliant on economic fortune.”(Gibbons, 2010)*

Together with local actors and administrations from both regions, we will (1) develop a common knowledge base, (2) formulate a spatial vision as the curating objective, and (3) create the right context for job creation in the area. Collective learning, will be the key approach (Kuhk 2016)

### 3. Building a knowledge base

*'Industrial areas [...] are not well-understood. Most people have no idea what is made and assembled in their borough, because industrial areas are unwelcoming and do not have a public face. It is difficult to gain an appreciation of their scale and purpose without observing them first hand.'*

*Scott, Gort, From Around Here: Tottenham Employment Study (London: Haringey Council 2013), p. 4*

Working on industrial areas is very difficult, as most people do have an opinion on what to do with the area, but almost nobody seems to know what really happens there. Even business owners who are present on the field, know very little of what their colleagues are doing next door. Building a shared knowledge base is very important. If we want to value what is there, we first have an understanding of the present activities and dynamics.

From July to September 2015, two interns of the Spatial Development Department Flanders went on the field in Buda to collect interviews and photograph all buildings in the southern part.

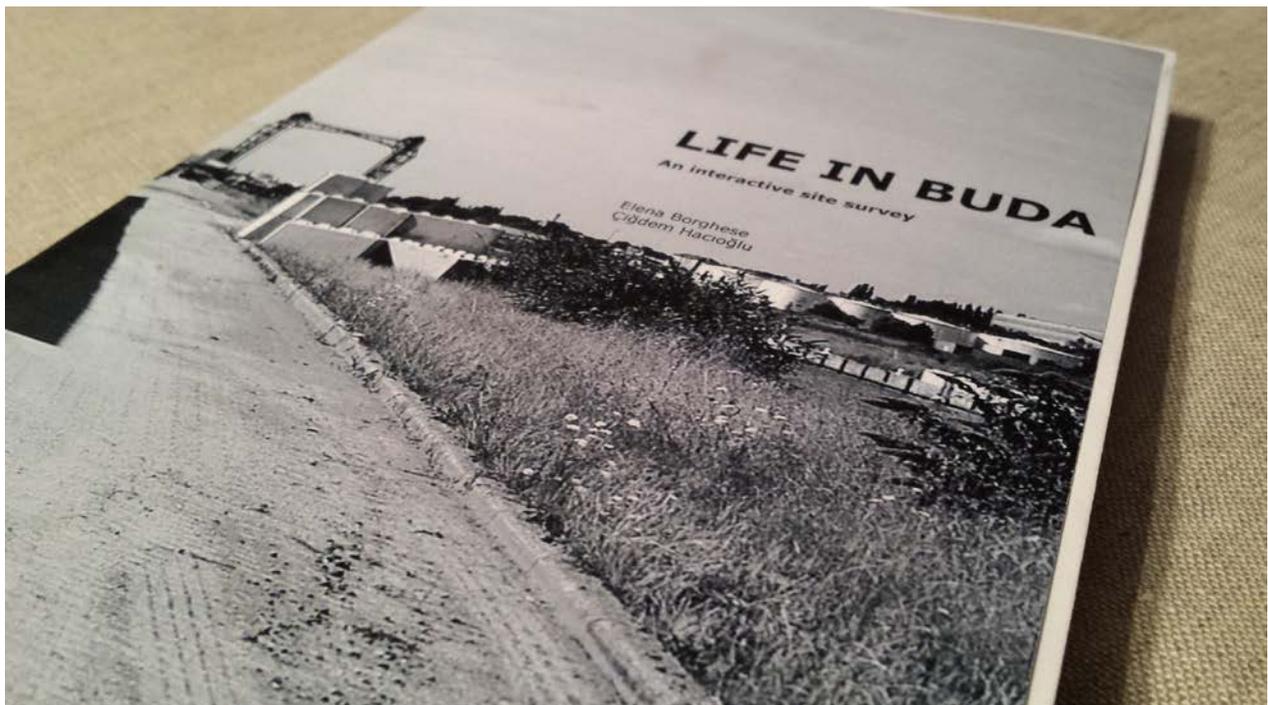


Figure 7: Cover of *Life in Buda* (Borghese and Hacıoğlu 2015)

This first attempt to give a broad understanding of what happens in Buda, proved very important to get other people (eg the Mayor of Vilvoorde) involved in the planning process. Recently, we started collecting comprehensive data. Federico Giaretta continues the research by Borghese and Hacıoğlu, and completes the work with a geodatabase of visible economic uses in Buda. Figure 8 gives a view of his work for the Buda area, and shows the mix of different economic uses. Many mapped buildings are empty (black).

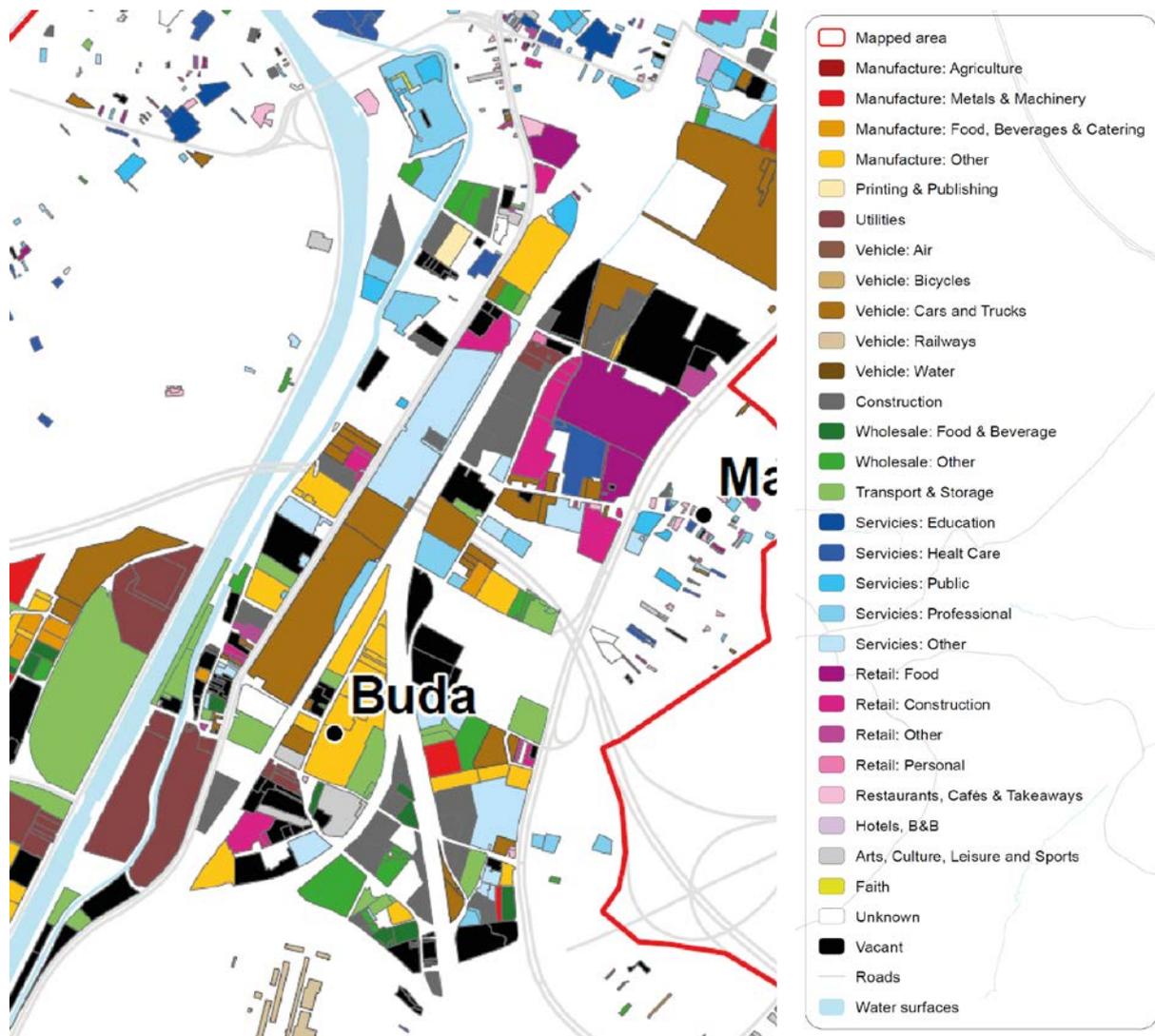


Figure 8: Mapping of dominant economic uses in the central Buda area (F Giaretta, Architecture Workroom Brussels)

The time consuming efforts to audit the existing economic activities was used in several workshops with stakeholders and local entrepreneurs. Each session, an update of the knowledge base was presented and used to invite more business owners to participate in the process. Through the 5 Cass cities student workshops, and 4 interactive working sessions with company owners we learned to know the main actors, and gain insight in the economic and real estate dynamics.

The most commonly shared views among business owners are:

- Lack of a clearly expressed vision of all government actors
- Unawareness of what other companies do and who operates them
- Real estate speculation
- Low price of industrial land, due to land availability in the wider area
- Low rent yield for existing buildings (especially for upper floors)

Even if everyone prefers an industrial redevelopment of Buda, the current dynamic seems to slow down the economic redevelopment. A key factor is the low land value. As the price of industrial land per square meter is less than a quarter of the cost of new build multi storey

industrial building, densifying is not likely to happen. Real estate speculation, due to the possible development of a big shopping mall and other retail projects, actually lowers the rent yield – as current owners are only willing to let space in short term contracts. These bad contract conditions do not attract companies with a long term perspective that can provide additional jobs in Buda. Exceptions to this harsh reality are companies that have a good long term lease, family owned businesses and parcels owned by local or regional government bodies.

#### 4. Curating a vision

For almost four years, Flanders and Brussels are cautiously starting to cooperate on territorial challenges. The cross border northern area, with old industrial estates, the airport, new vacant offices and old villages, is the testing ground. In the partnership<sup>iv</sup>, the province of Vlaams-Brabant took the initiative to start an industrial redevelopment scheme for the Buda Area. The main goals are:

- Doubling the floor space used by economic activities,
- Doubling the number of people employed in Buda
- Coordinate the development across regional and municipal borders
- Improve the accessibility for heavy goods vehicles
- Cross-border freight transport initiative for the northern Brussels canal area

The spatial vision will be drawn in cooperation with the actors in the field: business owners, municipalities, chamber of commerce, port of Brussels, Waterways Flanders, Belgian Rail, Citydev,...

The intensive exploring of economic dynamics for the knowledge base will help us construct a shared narrative, that all people involved can use to steer their developments. Our efforts already convinced one property owner to start with a shared workspace (completely financed with private money). He said that we probably can convince other owners, but that even for him, it was difficult to leave the old 'easy' solution of finding a tenant for one complete building.

The urban economy of the early 21st century does function in a different way. Small scale businesses and manufacturing are at the core of the reindustrialization of European cities. This implies that the existing industrial economic infrastructure, with large sheds and access to railways and inland waterways are no longer demanded by individual companies. An intermediate, an interface is needed to link the new urban entrepreneurs to this existing buildings, infrastructure and transport modes.

A Buda vision can never result in a rigid masterplan, but will need a curator team that helps and pushes the proposals in the right direction.

In order to fulfill the objectives a platform (assisted by a curator team) will be established to link local authorities to entrepreneurs. This intermediate organisation will be in charge of the redevelopment of the area and the creation of jobs. Research institutions that work on related topics will support this platform. Regional authorities will provide and collect public

data to enable the integrated approach. The further development of the shared knowledge base is a good example of the role regional administrations can play.

This project can only succeed and be sustained if all parties formalise their commitment to the platform and to the common objectives. A clear allocation of responsibilities, financial agreements and other liabilities is needed to start the platform. Probably, the most appropriate legal structure for this association will be a non-profit organisation.

## 5. Next steps

From September 2017 we will intensify the planning process, with the province as a lead partner. The construction of a shared vision with all stakeholders will be supported by the extension of the knowledge base with semi-structured interviews and an update of the economic mapping. As more and more private partners will be joining the platform, different government bodies will have to do a coordinated effort towards this shared spatial vision.

To achieve the goals set for the project, the following will prove to be extremely important:

- The government focusses on persuading companies/entrepreneurs to start investing (particularly in modern manufacturing industry);
- The government does this by creating the right context for companies to work in (display options, providing the necessary services, show good examples,..);
- property owners should be forced to activate unused and underused land and buildings.
- Government and investors provide jobs and training for unskilled workers. A portion of the available space should be intended to create innovative, non-traditional apprenticeships

The regeneration of Buda would be helped and pushed forward by having a physical place to showcase the project. A building (eg the Fobrux site in fig. 9) can provide space for the operation of the platform, but can also serve as an example for the revitalization of the area.



Figure 9: Regeneration project for the iconic 'Fobrux' building in Buda (Spacelab, 2016)

We hope that the intense working sessions with entrepreneurs and administrations, together with the extension of the knowledge base will bring us new results and realisations on the field.

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<sup>i</sup> Students 2014 Summer School: Jennifer O'riordan, Aoife Marnane, Tuong Vi Phon Le, Jacob Neville, Eleanor Figueiredo, Molly Judge, Simeon Shrebunae, Holly Harrington, Lorenzo Santosuosso, Eimear Egan, Alix Denercy, Cigdem Hacioglu, Iulia Galinescu, Elise Candry, Jan Ackenhausen, Alberto Innocenti, Anneloes Van Noordt. Teachers: Mark Brearley, Adam Towle, Francesca Benedetto, Sarah Considine, Dann Jessen, Merritt Bucholz, Peter Carroll, Jan Zaman.

<sup>ii</sup> Corijn E. (2014)

<sup>iii</sup> Hein C (2014)

<sup>iv</sup> The Noordrand territorial development program is a partnership between Departement Omgeving Vlaanderen (Spatial development department), perspective.brussels, province Vlaams-Brabant, OVAM (Flemish Waste Agency)