



October 25, 2023

Québec Roadmap: Towards a New Urban Project (2022-2024)

COLLABORATIVE NETWORK (priority thematic):

Protecting and strengthening the residential function of the city's historic centers.

Pilot City: BRUSSELS (Belgium)

Action Plan

Introduction

As "communities of practice", the aim of the Collaborative Networks is to create a free, creative space for reflection and discussion that organizes and enables constructive dialogue. It is in this privileged setting that OWHC member cities will be able to learn from each other and create a common, shared culture.

The work they produce will form the basic material for the Cordoba Symposium (September 24-27, 2024). Thus, four key periods constitute milestones in the work of the Networks:

- Up to May 2024: Gather material and experience, raise issues of debate, develop a common culture
- Summer 2024: Formulate common orientations
- Cordoba Symposium (September 24-27, 2024): Identify possible solutions
- After Cordoba: Experimenting with possible solutions.

Concept et objectives

The thematic led by the City of Brussels aims to find alternative solutions to protect and strengthen the residential function of historic city centers. These measures are essential to balance functions, avoid demographic stagnation and minimize nuisance within the buffer zone of the Unesco World Heritage site Grand-Place.

With a view to the 17th World Congress of the OWHC, to be held in Cordoba in September 2024, the Collaborative Network is pursuing the following objectives:

- Gather experience in implementing actions on a block scale
- Translate these actions and issues into development rules, in order to adapt existing regulatory tools to a supra-local scale (from plot to block)
- Create recommendations, guidelines and intervention methodologies on a block scale that could be integrated into the management plans of World Heritage cities.

Presentation of the thematic's challenges

For the past 3 decades, the City of Brussels has been pursuing an active policy of combating empty storeys in the buffer zone of the Unesco World Heritage site Grand-Place. Almost 30% of the buildings in this zone are affected by this problem, due to the strong commercial and tourist pressure in the area. To remedy the situation, the City of Brussels



administration, in partnership with the Brussels-Capital Region, has introduced both incentives (bonuses, support for owners in creating separate access to floors, etc.) and coercive measures (municipal taxes, expropriation, etc.).

These measures are aimed primarily at property owners, and therefore create a parcel-based approach that limits the scope for resolving problems. Indeed, the specific features of the urban fabric in and around the Unesco zone (narrow plots, high building density, etc.) call for intervention on a wider scale, particularly as regards the reactivation of floors. This means pooling opportunities for resolution at block level, thus becoming the support for the inhabited city.

The presence of a network of alleyways and cul-de-sacs would enable this pooling of efforts at block level, while taking into account other aspects that make this sector habitable, notably with regard to local facilities and services. In this context, the City of Brussels has at its disposal both a regional operational mechanism for urban renewal, the Axis and Block Contracts (Contrats d'Axe et Contrats d'ilot - CACI), and a municipal regulatory plan currently being drawn up, the Special Land Use Plan (Plan Particulier d'Affectation du Sol - PPAS) for the Unesco sector and its buffer zone.

These two tools are being implemented at the instigation of the public authorities. The difficulty here lies in including all stakeholders in this logic of mutualization.

The challenges are multiple, cross-cutting and interdependent:

- Strengthening the residential function and defining the limits of tourist accommodation
- Work on the quality of the living environment
- Ensure that building renovation is consistent with the historic built landscape
- Strike a balance between heritage protection and housing adaptability -> evolving city
- Motivate on the climate issue while raising awareness of heritage conservation.
- Move from a top-down to a bottom-up approach: stakeholders as sources of solutions by pooling and emulating ideas and efforts.

Schedule and calendar

1. Meeting to set up the collaborative network: December 1, 2023
Presentation of the thematic; definition of a joint action plan and practical details of the network (role of each city, working language, provisional budget, etc.).
2. Virtual working meetings (January-April 2024)
3. A face-to-face workshop between experts and technicians to develop a common approach (June 2024).
4. A "participatory approach" event: a meeting between the cities of the Collaborative Network and the inhabitants and users of the Brussels World Heritage Site to inform, share, raise awareness and raise the role of each individual in improving the living environment of our historic centers.