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'Behind closed doors? The excuse of safety!' The development of the European capital in Brussels'

The paper is presented in following workshop:

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'Behind closed doors? The excuse of safety!'

The development of the European capital in Brussels



ABSTRACT

Brussels today counts about 25.000 employees working for the European institutions and an equal share of people working in closely related businesses (Agora studies, 2002, p. 14). Different than Luxembourg or Strasbourg, Brussels chose to locate the European institutions in the 19th century 'Quartier Léopold' and not on the 'green field' in the outskirts (cfr. Papadopoulos, 1996). Brussels continued the tradition of 'superimposition of layers' as known since the 18th century (cfr. Lagrou, 2002). The paper 'Behind closed doors? The excuse of safety!' focuses on the spatial (and social) transformation of the European Quarter, and the urban and regional planning behind this development. The analysis of planning trends for this site presents different actors involved and their discourses, in which the argument of "safety" is frequently (ab)used.

To understand the current constellation of the presence of the European institutions in Brussels, we need to go back to the beginning of the 1950s. Important steps for the international positioning of Brussels were taken when establishing the ECSC (European Coal and Steel Community), but also with the Treaty of Rome in 1957, and the start of the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) in 1958 with its headquarter in Brussels. Until the end of the 1980s, most questions concerning the location of EU-institutions were a matter to be solved by the national government (1).

Brussels has transformed meanwhile into a fairly independent city region, known as 'Brussels Capital Region' (2) with extended own responsibilities, also in affairs of urban planning. Main tools here are the Regional Development Plans, the Regional Land Use Plans and the authority for urban permits (cfr. Lagrou, 2000). As a third level of planning, also at least three of the 19 municipalities (3) that constitute Brussels are directly affected by the European presence. Apart from the official institutions on federal, regional and municipal levels, several different pressure groups are also involved in the urban development of the quarter. The sector of real estate is represented by project developers and investors. Last but not least, also the different institutions of the European Union need to be considered when acting as clients, each on behalf of their specific needs.

The spatial analysis of the European Quarter starts from a brief sketch of the historic development since 1840. It then shifts the attention to the gradual embedding of the European Commission, Council of Ministers and Parliament. Both current and possible future situations are presented with respect to the enlargement of the European Union and the socio-economic impact on the city. Apart from the purely functional analysis, also the changes in the identity of the city with the emerging of the European presence in the heart of this 19th century neighbourhood, as well as the desired and perceived identity of the European institutions in Brussels are hereby touched.

A closely connected question is the social and demographic development of the European Quarter. The quarter – still mainly residential around 1950 – has known important shifts in number and composition. A repeated question here is, whether an expanding central administrative district with an ambiguous long time perspective causes speculation and/or impoverishment in the surrounding neighbourhoods (cfr. Baeten, 2001). In the prospect of further development of the European Quarter in Brussels, we examine how "safety" is used as an argument for spatial and social development.



Introduction

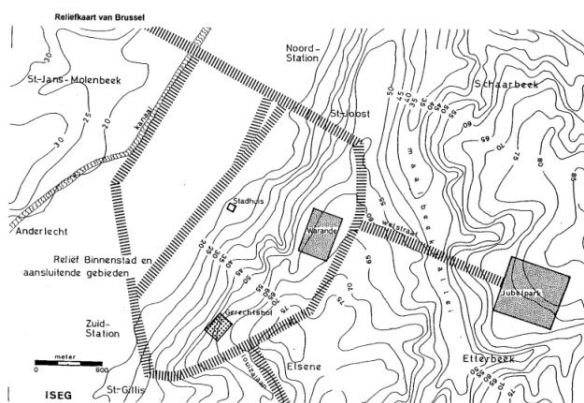
Soon after first initiatives for a new European entity were taken in the 1950s, policy makers and the early institutions in 'Europe of six' agreed on the idea of having one capital with all institutional functions united. That this would be the most efficient way of working, was without doubt. In practice though, choosing a specific city proved to be an impossible mission. The current division of European institutions over different towns did not come to birth easily. As long as no clear decisions about 'who is working where' were taken, different towns had to deal with large insecurities considering long term urban development strategies, employment opportunities and possible impact on the social fabric in urban life.

Until recently, Brussels was considered having an excellent position at the heart of six European capitals within the reach of 300 kilometres. The planned European enlargement to the East and the shift of the centre of gravity might question this position. So far though, Brussels could attract a good share of European functions. It can count today about 25.000 employees working for the European institutions and an equal share of people working in closely related businesses (Agora studies, 2002, p. 14).

The paper 'Behind closed doors? The excuse of safety!' focuses on the spatial and social transformation of the European Quarter, and the urban and regional planning behind this development. It starts with a brief orientation and explanation of how the original Leopold Quarter came into being. It then shifts to the development of European institutions in the past 50 years. The perspective focuses on actors involved, their discourses and how different arguments and choices in urban planning lead to the current fabric.

Orientation

Different than Luxembourg or Strasbourg, Brussels chose to locate the European institutions in the 19th century 'Quartier Léopold¹' and not on the 'green field' in the outskirts (cfr. Papadopoulos, 1996). Brussels continued the tradition of 'superimposition of layers' as known since the 18th century (cfr. Lagrou, 2002). The



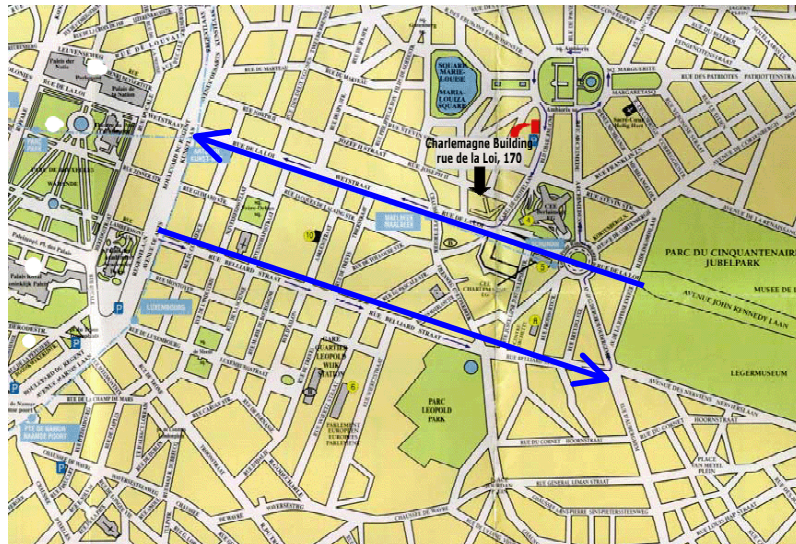
site to be discussed in this paper encloses only about 1 km² at the East of the centre of Brussels. It is located in the upper town. The area is oriented towards the Maelbeek and not – as older quarters of Brussels – towards the Zenne.

Illustration 1: Topographic map of Brussels with indication of the Pantagon and the Rue de la Loi

¹ All names and indications of places are written in French, even though Brussels is bilingual. The translation into Dutch is shown in the appendix.



The Leopold Quarter is connected with the Pentagon through the 'Rue de la Loi' and the 'Rue Belliard'. For an easier orientation on the site, the location of following axes and local points can be helpful:



1. two parallel one-way 'city highways' connecting East to West are the Rue de la Loi (into town) and the Rue Belliard (out of town),

Illustration 2: Map of the European Quarter with main axes and local points

2. the metro line under the Rue de la Loi with stops at 'Arts-Loi', 'Maelbeek' and 'Schuman' follows the East-West axis from the Pentagon until the roundabout Schuman,
3. this square and major traffic connection splits into the Avenue de Cortenberg and Avenue d'Audergem,
4. the 'Chaussee d'Etterbeek' crosses the East West connection with a tunnel under the Rue de la Loi at the metro-stop Maelbeek,
5. The Square Frère Orban at the West, the 'Squares' to the North, the Parc du Cinquanteaire to the East and the Parc Léopold to the South are also fairly recognisable local points for orientation.

Different areas of this site are called by different names. Some background information about currently used terms to avoid confusion: 'Leopold Quarter' is the name for the originally built quarter from 1840 on, the first large scale planned extension of Brussels. The later construction to the North-East (from 1880 on) is called 'Quartier Nord Est'. Current developments along the Rue de la Loi, Rue Belliard and next to the park Leopold are called 'European Quarter' with reference to the main users in this area, namely European Institutions. The term 'Space Brussels-Europe' refers to a study executed in 1988 and also to the areas used by the European Parliament as well as developments on the vast concrete plat connecting this site to the Leopold train station.



Origins of the 19th century Leopold Quarter

The urban fabric of the 'Quartier Léopold' was mainly developed in the second half of the nineteenth century. The capital Brussels of the newly formed country Belgium aimed at '*l'embellissement*' or embellishment of the inner city and '*l'agrandissement*' or extension towards new neighbourhoods². Brussels was marked from a real 'transformation fever' in the 19th century (Sint-Lukasarchief, 1982, p. 53). The most famous plan from this time is probably the '*Plan d'ensemble pour extension et embellissement de l'agglomération Bruxelloise*' by Victor Besme (1866). For the development of the Leopold Quarter, the plans of Suys and Cluysenaar are worth mentioning.

The first large-scale plan for the extension of Brussels towards East was developed in 1838 by Tilman-François Suys, under authority of the '*Société Civile pour l'Agrandissement et l'Embellissement de Bruxelles*'. This first extension outside the medieval walls of Brussels aimed at attracting Brussels aristocracy who wanted to escape city centre troubles as for instance social upheaval and diseases. It took another twenty years until the aristocracy also wanted to move to these new areas.

The so-called 'Quartier Léopold' followed the structure of the town park inside the city walls with a strict grid. The first plan for these 75 hectares East of the Pentagon – the former centre of the town- provided, besides vast residential areas, also a hippodrome, barracks for cavalry, a church, a 'palace for industry', a circus, etc. The method for planning this expansion was not different from what was commonly done at that time in other European or American towns: a regular grid of equally sized building blocks and a couple of prestigious buildings. The quarter was supposed to be very rational, logic and different than previous developments (Sint Lukasarchief Brussels, 1982, p. 26).

The architect J. P. Cluysenaar proposed a different plan for the extension in 1842. The development would comprise about three times the area of the initially proposed plan from Suys. The plan is a typical example of neo-classicist, monumental urban planning. Instead of using a strict 90 degree grid, the new plan tried to loosen up the pattern with diagonal lines as well as squares. From 1840 on, under Leopold I, mainly coach houses were built in a grid like Suys proposed it. The width of the streets was defined according to the turning circle of the coaches.

Major improvements were carried out in the 1850s to attract Brussels aristocracy:

- the new Rue de la Loi was extended in 1852 and connected the Leopold Quarter (until what is called square Schuman today) with the Pentagon,
- a part of the Leopold Quarter which used to belong to the municipality of Etterbeek became part of the municipality of Brussels in 1853,
- also the construction of a connecting sewer between Brussels, Etterbeek and Saint Josse was finished in 1853. The Maelbeek was lead into a system of arterial drainage. This new development was not in the right dimension yet and therefore still regularly lead to flooding,
- the Luxembourgstation with a direct train connection from Brussels to Luxembourg was built in 1855,
- until 1860, it was already interesting to construct outside the former town ramparts, as the urban patents did not need to be paid once outside the walls. But the East expansion could only really start after the abolition of the toll ring in 1860 under minister Frère Orban. Trade to and from the town were no longer hindered and the Brussels upper class decided to leave the Pentagon.

From 1880 on, smaller houses were built for the bourgeoisie. The new residents were less wealthy than the first generation in the Leopold Quarter. The strict grid patterns was also replaced by a more 'romanticised' pattern with symmetric streets, squares and lots of green. The plan of architect Gédéon Bourdieu from 1878 reflected this new urban pattern for the north-eastern part of the Leopold Quarter. The plan considers also natural slopes of the sites and the specifics of the local landscape. Inspired from the Romantic Movement, a more differentiated urban planning was developed. New ponds and parks were laid out.

The period of monumental-classicist urban planning was closed with the construction of the arcades of the 'cinquantenaire' at the end of the Rue de la Loi. The rather austere Parc du Cinquantenaire (for celebrating 50 years Belgium in 1880) was redeveloped later on under the 'king urbanist' Leopold II, from the French architect Girault in 1905 (Ranieri, 1973, p. 123). The triumphal arch was meant to be a new and visible city gate.

² In 1837, the 'Société civile de l'agrandissement et l'embellissement de la capitale de la Belgique' was founded to support and develop new, comfortable neighborhoods outside the city walls.



A map of Brussels from 1910, made on the eve of the First World War, shows the completion of the 19th century developments in the Leopold Quarter. Brussels displays itself at present as a modern metropolis with extensions until the 'third' town rampart: its new ring road.

After the First World War already, the Leopold Quarter deteriorated for different reasons. The area was densely built on while new residential projects were looking for a green belt on a bigger distance from the town centre. The residences of the Leopold Quarter were perceived as being old fashioned in the light of renewed construction technologies. With the more general use of cars, the higher income groups left the quarter for neighbourhoods at the fringes of the town and lower income groups came to the valley of the Maelbeek. First offices were built in the area from the beginning of the 20th century. From 1930 on, the area effectively started to depopulate. Public authorities showed very few signs of interest for the problem of urban renewal in the period 1914 until 1960 (see also Van der Wee, 1981).

Green light for the development of the European Quarter in the 20th century

Already from the early 20th century on, the Leopold Quarter changed from a purely residential area into a more mixed site with both residences and offices for administration and corporate businesses. The large mansions were prestigious locations for the latter. Only after the Second World War though, a large-scale implantation of office activities took place. A transformation of use of former residences was not efficient anymore, larger office entities were required and constructed.

The valley of the Maelbeek was confronted with several large problems, which rapidly downgraded the quality of life in the area. Through urbanisation, vast areas were petrified and the permeability of the ground rapidly decreased. As the urbanisation of this area was developed rather quickly, also drainage systems were rather chaotic and not all too functional. All this lead to regular floods. As more and more wealthy inhabitants preferred the outskirts of Brussels, the valley of the Maelbeek was deserted, and high numbers of vacancies were in a state of decay. The insecurity of owners raised when (unsubstantiated) reports about expropriations for administrative use were coming.

For an easier orientation in the following description, some central buildings are located on the map on the following page. The map is based on data from a recent study about the European Quarter, which was commissioned from Brussels Capital Region and executed from Agora. It shows both existing and planned buildings and distinguishes different users within the European Institutions. It shows clearly how both the Council of Ministers (red) and the European Parliament (dark blue) chose to concentrate their buildings, while the European Commission is spread over many different buildings, mainly along the Rue de la Loi.

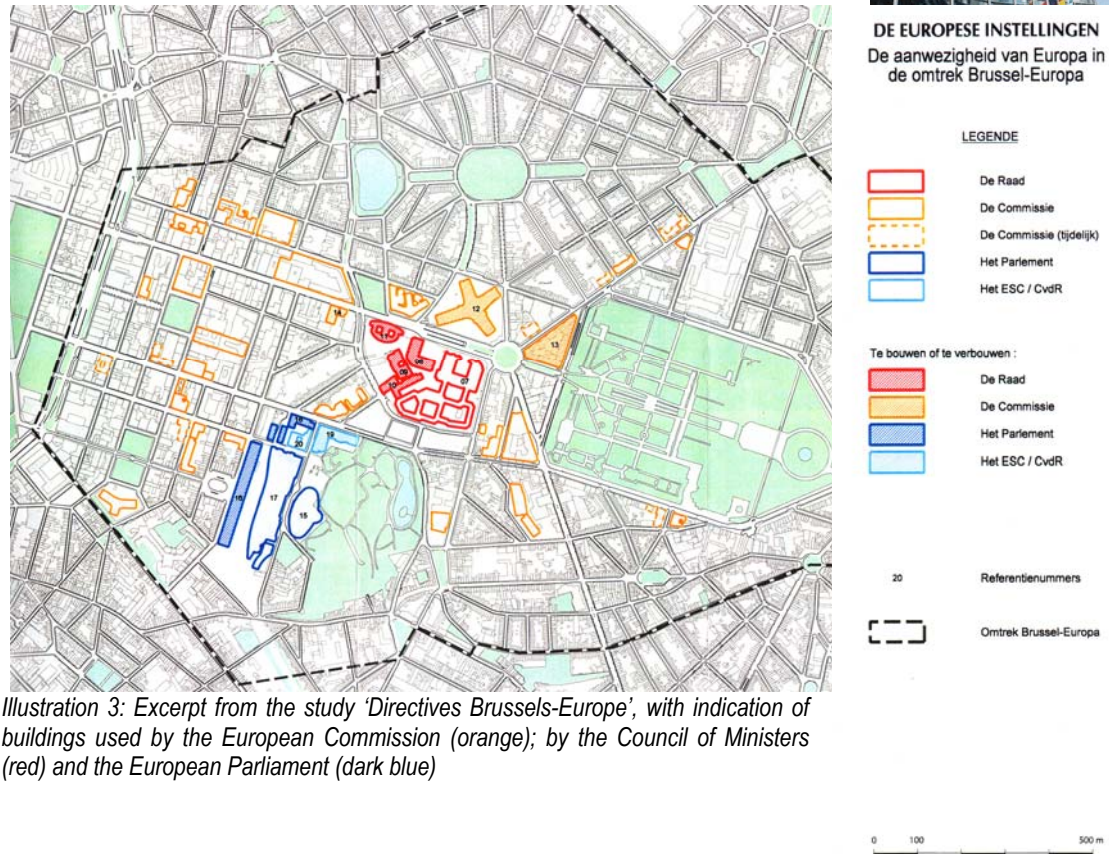


Illustration 3: Excerpt from the study 'Directives Brussels-Europe', with indication of buildings used by the European Commission (orange); by the Council of Ministers (red) and the European Parliament (dark blue)

Evolution of plans and studies

Various spatial plans about the Leopold Quarter seem to protect its residential character at first sight. The influence of these directives is rather small when it comes to reality though. Main plans for Brussels, including the European Quarter, are: the so-called 'Plan Alpha' from 1965, the Regional Plan from 1979, the Regional Development Plan from 1995, the Regional Land Use Plan from 1998, as well as the Second Regional Development Plan from 2001 and the Second Regional Land Use Plan from 2001. The municipal development plans from the municipalities Brussels town, Etterbeek and Ixelles contain a negligible amount of information about the presence of European institutions in Brussels. The municipal land use plans on the other hand elaborate what is explained in the Regional Land Use Plan.

More details about the European Quarter can be found in specific studies: the Study 'Space Brussels-Europe' of 1988, the first and second study from Iris Consulting about the Socio-economic impact of the European presence in Brussels in 1992 and 2002, the Study 'Leopold Quarter' from the federal ministry of communication and Infrastructure under Isabelle Durant in 2001, the outcomes of the think-tank-gatherings around Umberto Eco and Rem Koolhaas from 2001 and the study 'Directives Brussels Europe' from Brussels Capital Region and Agora in 2002.



In March 1962, the national law on urban planning was ratified. It provided in the development of several regional plans. The so-called Plan Alpha from 1965, which was commissioned from the Ministry of Public works, was the modernistic answer to this demand for Brussels. Ideas from the Buchanan Report 'Traffic in towns', published in 1963, were adapted for Brussels. Through superimposition of new layers upon the existing urban fabric, the planners wanted to create a network for fluent car mobility, liveable low traffic neighbourhoods and a clear distinction of functions. Old urban highways were re-discovered as a collector of social life (as for instance the Rue du Trone or the Avenue de la Couronne in the European Quarter). New city highway connections could for instance be provided one level above the exiting train platforms and rails. There was a very strong belief in 'making society' and town through imposition of new structures. The approach for this plan is very technical. It took almost thirty years until the theoretical idea of high rise

buildings, as formulated in C.I.A.M. III in 1932, came into being in Brussels.

The map to the left also indicates centres for 'lobules' of existing neighbourhoods. These 'lobules' are protected against transit traffic. The European Quarter is a good example for the division of functions, as it was confirmed as an administrative zone here. The hatched zones are expected to be sites for bigger projects, which will have a considerable architectural value. Right next to the roundabout Schuman, both North and South of the Rue de la Loi, the area is indicated to have this potential.



Illustration 4: Excerpt from the Plan Alpha of 1965

The Land Use Plan from 1979 aimed at preserving residential areas, green spaces and historical sites. It was developed under a government with a coalition of socialists and christian-democrats, with Cudell as Minister for Brussels affairs. The plan was partly a reaction to post-war modernism that had a devastating effect on the urban fabric in the late 1950s and 1960s. The so-called Manhattan plan for the North Quarter in 1967 was the most explicit expression of this tendency. The Regional Plan from 1979 could nevertheless give only few guarantees for the protection of for instance residential areas. In the following years, many changes of land use were admitted as 'exceptions'. There was no strong vision or structure in this plan. The Land Use Plan was partly hollowed under impulse of a neo-liberal Minister of Spatial Planning in the 1980s. The Land Use Plan gave only few protection for the housing blocks in the Leopold Quarter, about ten blocks were rapidly after absorbed by EU-related projects. The metropolitan plan ('grootstadplan') from 1985, executed from the Sint-Lucas Werkgemeenschap was a reaction against the Regional Plan from 1979.

The Brussels Minister of Spatial Planning, Jean Louis Thys, commissioned a study about the European Quarter in 1988. In terms of protection of building blocks, the study seemed to be full of good intentions, although opponents stated that the study merely served as a legitimisation for further extension and a plea to defend the choice of Brussels as permanent seat for the European Parliament. The minister who commissioned the study was also a key player in the transaction of the 'European Parliament'-file. The study 'space Brussels-Europe' delimited so-called 'Primary Intervention Zones'. Shortly after, there were more general studies about the socio-economic impact of the European presence in Brussels (Iris-Consulting and Mens en Ruimte 1994). The study from Iris-Consulting was updated in 2002.

The new structures for Brussels as a Region (1989) resulted in new planning tools, as defined in the regional law on urban planning from 1991: a Regional Development Plan and a Regional Land Use Plan. The first Regional Development Plan (also called Structure plan) of 1995 was described by Baeten as follows: 'The 1995 Structure Plan is the most promising spatial plan that has so far been produced for Brussels, but it shows all the weaknesses that are typical for spatial plans which do not strictly define land use but only provide vague directions for it which are open to interpretation.' (Baeten, 2001, p. 7)



The zoning plan from 1979 – and all exceptions which meanwhile have been permitted in Particular Land Use Plans – was still applicable as the legal base for land use determinations. The first Regional Development Plan, which was formulated from the socialist government of Brussels, underlined once again the necessity to protect housing, to enhance the economical situation of Brussels through changes in the industrial structure, enhancement of infrastructure and modernisation, but to stop the spread of offices in the town. The definition of the Leopold Quarter largely continued what was earlier said in the Structure plan of 1979. The main idea, according to Baeten, is 'the incorporation of the European Parliament Zone into the office area' (Baeten, 2001, p. 7). Just like the plan from 79, the protection of housing in this quarter seemed to be merely an intention, and few legal tools were provided to guarantee this aim. Baeten puts it as follows: *'Plenty of anecdotal evidence suggests speculation by developers in residential blocks adjacent to the existing office areas, and the plan does not provide a guarantee against the continuation of semi-legal or illegal manoeuvres by growth coalition of developers, investors and politicians, which have dominated the development of the Leopold Quarter in previous decades.'* (Baeten, 2001, p. 7)

The Regional Development Plan of 1995 was described as 'projet de ville' and nothing more than a town project. In the plan of 1995, there was still a legal binding part included, namely map 7 about Land Use. This chapter was later made exclusive for Regional Land Use Plans. The second Regional Development Plan does no longer include this legal binding map of land use anymore.

The European Quarter is indicated as 'lever zone' in the second Regional Development Plan that was published on the 16th of October 2001 in the 'Moniteur Belge'. The 'lever zone Europe' follows the contour of the Parc du Cinquantaire along the Avenue de la Renaissance, the Avenue de l'Yzer, the Avenue des Gaulois and the Avenue des Nerviens. Further on, it is limited along the Rue Belliard, follows the Chaussee d'Etterbeek and follows from the Place Jourdan



along the Chaussee de Wavre until the railway tracks. From this point, a direct line is drawn to the crossing along the Rue du Trone. The area is closed alongside the Pentagon, follows the Rue de la Loi until the Rue de Spa, continues along the Rue Jozeph II and its imagined prolongation until the Avenue de Cortenberg.

Illustration 5: Excerpt from map 2 from the Regional Development Plan 2001, delimitation of the European Quarter as 'lever zone' (source: MB, Okt. 2001)

The directives of the Regional Development Plan indicate that the delimitation of this area is only a start. A more detailed scheme and study later on would define this area more precisely together with most important tools and initiatives to be taken. The European Quarter is indicated in the Regional Development Plan as a 'Zone d'interet Regional' (ZIR) or a Zone of regional interest. The idea of delimiting Primary Intervention Zones was already developed in the study 'space Brussels-Europe' from 1988.

The federal Ministry of Communication and Infrastructure under Isabelle Durant commissioned a study about the Leopold Quarter in 2001. Shortly after, also Brussels Capital Region commissioned a study. The office AGORA was asked by the cabinet of Minister-President Francois Xavier de Donnea from Brussels Capital Region to investigate rather technical aspects of future developments in the European Quarter. The results of this study were publicly presented at a press conference on the 14th of May 2002.



The study 'Directives Brussels Europe' defined as central characteristics of the European quarter – besides variety of functions – also variation in urban structure. This variation is a consequence of the relief – with the valley of the Maelbeek defining a high and low town from West to East –, the morphological structures of these urban areas (the grid of the Leopold Quarter, the neighbourhood around the squares, the so-called 'organic structure' around the Chaussee d'Etterbeek) and different structuring elements.

The presence of European Institutions is determining what is considered to be part of the 'contour Brussels-Europe' in this study. The area includes parts of the municipalities Brussels town, Etterbeek and Ixelles. It is limited from the Pentagon along the Avenue des Arts, follows the municipal border of Brussels town (towards Saint Josse and then Schaerbeek), along the Avenue de Cortenberg and the Rue du Bois de Linthout, along the municipal border of Etterbeek (towards Schaerbeek and Woluwe Saint Lambert). The southern limitation follows no municipal borders, but cuts through Etterbeek along the Chaussee Saint Pierre and crosswise on the Avenue d'Auderghem. It also cuts through Ixelles, following the Avenue du Trône. Which conclusions are drawn on base of this delimitation? With this large delimitation, the study also focuses for instance on the residential areas of the Leopold Quarter and the Squares, and on important green and cultural areas like the Leopold Park and the Parc du Cinquantenaire (see also Agora, 2002, p. 17). It is stressed that the importance of this area can not be limited to the European functions but that this area is as well of regional importance.

At first sight, the support for Brussels as a European capital seems to be weak on the regional level. The regional Development Plan from 2001 for instance stated that the word 'Brussels' is used as a description for European bureaucracy, that Brussels is connected too often to the deciding centres of the European institutions.

Apart from the purely functional analysis, also the changes in the identity of the city with the emerging of the European presence in the heart of this 19th century neighbourhood, as well as the desired and perceived identity of the European institutions in Brussels were subject for investigations. The outcomes of the think-tank-gatherings around Umberto Eco and Rem Koolhaas, collected in the Report 'Brussels, capital Europe', partly deal with these issues. The president of the European Commission, Romano Prodi and the prime minister of Belgium, Guy Verhofstadt, invited a group of intellectuals in May and September 2001 to answer following questions: What are the functions and needs of a European capital? How can Brussels express these?

The group of intellectuals included a couple of well-known persons from the Belgian context as Gerard Mortier, Francois Schuiten and Geert van Istendael, all other participants represented various European countries (F, I, Es, UK, Sui, PL and NL) and gathered all different kind of expertises. At first sight, the logic of the composition of this think tank might not be clear and it seems to be a rather arbitrary combination of people who are considered to be 'intellectual'. The report of this think tank, published in 2001, stated clearly that the proposals do not necessarily represent the ideas of European institutions. Different than other studies, this report focuses mainly on questions of image-formation, both for Brussels as a European capital as well as the image of Europe through its physical representation in Brussels.

About the development of the European presence in Brussels not much positive comments from the think tank around Prodi and Verhofstadt: *'Past experience of the European Institutions in Brussels was not considered an example of good practice. The quality of buildings, urban planning, relations between the European Institutions and Brussels' citizens, stakeholders' participation in different stages of the decision-making process, were all considered problematic areas.'* (European Commission, 2001, p. 3)

Rem Koolhaas gives a sharp description of today's situation: *'Brussels today is a European capital by default, a curious aesthetic landscape sometimes generic and sometimes of such a scale that you can only talk about megalomania. In this condition, it is unable to articulate any idea about Europe. The result of this situation is cruel: European Institutions inhabit a neighbourhood that they know very well is imperfect, and this fact has given the citizens of Brussels a traumatic experience in the heart of the city.'* (Koolhaas, in: European Commission, 2001, p. 13)

When presenting the image and profile, which Brussels could gain due to the presence of European institutions, Eco puts forward a clear point of view: *'My first conclusion is that the European capital must be more like a server put in the centre of a network than like the root of a tree'* (Eco, in: European Commission, 2001, p. 10).



He stresses in this vision that Brussels should try to define its profile through so-called 'soft sectors'. These are for instance the acceptance of diversity, tolerance, integration and multi-lingual developments in the town. According to Eco, Brussels has the moral and cultural authority to be involved in subjects from all European countries. He presents Brussels as a kind of 'cradle for Europeans': *'Brussels should become the city where Europeans learn what it means to be a European citizen'* (Eco, in: European Commission, 2001, p. 10).

Development on the spot

To understand the current constellation of the presence of the European institutions in Brussels, we need to go back to the beginning of the 1950s. The transition from a residential into an administrative area – from the Leopold Quarter to the European Quarter – required two main spatial changes, that is the increase of scale and the (formal or applied) change of land use. Political decisions and processes, whether in a latent or manifest way, back up these transformations. The following gives an overview of the main spatial developments in the European Quarter and the central political processes behind since the start of 'Europe of the six'.

The transformation of the 19th century urban fabric into today's scale, was given the green light already with the construction of the high-rise blocks along the 'De Meeus plein' in 1937 (according to Sint Lukasarchief, 1982, p. 84). These two symmetrical corner towers – partly offices and partly apartments – introduced a different scale and height in the neighbourhood.



The year 1958 was of pivotal importance for Brussels. Not only because the town was chosen to be the seat for the European Coal and Steel Community ECSC and of the European Economic Community EEC, but also because of the impact of the 1958 World Exhibition. Europe of six could start with Brussels ready to go.

Illustration 6: Front page of Report of Europe of six in Brussels in 1958

The choice for Brussels as a seat for European Institutions was positively influenced due to its position as capital of a rather small country and because of the neutral position of Belgium. It is all the same a meeting place for central European cultures with its mixture of Latin-French and Germanic-Dutch backgrounds. Brussels gained a better infrastructure that year due to the world exposition. The 1958 world fair was taken



as an opportunity to show the economic strength of Belgium³, exceeding all differences of cultures and languages. The Atomium was symbol for this unity and industrial progress. The go-ahead for continuous expansion of offices in the 'Espace Bruxelles-Europe' was clearly given in 1958. The World exposition was the culminated celebration of 'modernity', as Baeten expresses it:

'A strong belief in complete destruction of old neighbourhoods and replacement with modern buildings as the only solution to inner city problems, fuelled the destruction of vast parts of pre-war Brussels, including the Leopold Quarter, while urban highways, tunnels and underground car parks brought the car to the city.' (Baeten, 2001, p. 6)

Post-war plans were often putting the city's past behind, promoting office spaces and car accessibility. This attitude was also precondition for the change of scales in the Leopold Quarter. The newly initiated organisations in the light of the European Unification were novel clients for this larger scale. Another important step in internationalising and up-scaling Brussels in 1958 was taken with the start of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation NATO with its headquarter in the Belgian capital.

Supported from private investors, national authorities offered different buildings to the European Community in 1958. The buildings were located centrally, such as offices in the Rue Belliard in April 1958, offices in the Avenue de la Joyeuese Entrée and Rue de Marais in July of this year and buildings in the Rue Ravenstein by the end of 1958 (for the European bank of investments) (Demey, 1992, p. 181). Originally, the European parliamentary assembly intended to decide upon the location of different European divisions. This decision was delayed until 1963 to study the possibilities and impact of a 'European district'. Meanwhile, different divisions with European functions were also reorganised, partly rationalised and gained a more stable character.

The so called 'Plan Tekhné' from 1962 for instance was still very much a product of modernism, as it strongly promoted inner city urban highways and inner ring roads. Baeten describes this work of 'ex-colonial urban planners' as follows: *'They must have considered Brussels to be a 'wild west city' in urgent need of a new 'colonisation' by rational, orderly and disciplinary urban design. Three quarters of the inner city were declared 'slum neighbourhood'* (Baeten, 2001, p. 6). The plan had no public character (it was only presented in a magazine 'Wonen' in 1963) and it was never fully implemented. Nevertheless, it had an important influence on urban, developments in Brussels until roughly 1975.

³ The economic power of Belgium suffered a serious backlash only two years later, when the former Belgian colony Congo became independent. As a source of important raw material, the colony supported and helped to strengthen the Belgian economy for about 75 years.



Brussels Company for Public Transport, the MIVB, revealed in 1964 a plan to connect the old centre of Brussels with the European Quarter, to make a connection between the Place Sainte Catherine/ Pentagon and the Schuman-square. This strategic connection of 3.6 kilometres was constructed from 1968 on and in use from 1969. For technical reasons, the digging underneath the Rue de la Loi had to be very deep. This necessity was turned into an asset, as the Ministry of Public Works commissioned the construction of an immense parking basement.

The continuation of the development of the European Quarter can best be followed when focussing on the main actors of the European Institutions. For Brussels, we are then talking about the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament.

▪ The Commission

From 1958 on, the divisions of the European Commission were accommodated in about a dozen different buildings. A lot were located near the roundabout Schuman, as for instance in the Avenue de la Joyeuese Entrée, the Rue Belliard and Rue de la Loi, but also in the Avenue de Cortenberg and the Avenue de



Tervuren. At that moment, other sites would have been thinkable too, such as the site of the Heyzel, the national TIR in Schaerbeek, the barrack squares in Etterbeek, but also the domains of Argenteuil, the park of Tervuren and vast sites at Sint Genesius Rode and Lindebeek, some of which are shown in the scheme to the left.

Illustration 7: Excerpt of map with different alternatives for the location of European Institutions in and around Brussels (report from 1958 about Brussels in Europe of six)

The Belgian government attempted to offer possibilities for regrouping the multiplicity of locations for the commission. For this reason, the construction of the Berlaymont building was started in 1961⁴. The site of the former convent of the Berlaymont was chosen for its good location and its specific situation. The site was close to the former administration in the 'Avenue de la Joyeuese Entrée' and easily reachable for the

⁴ The federal government had bought the site from the monastery for about 112.5 million Belgian francs on the 25th of mai 1960.



functionaries who live in the South and Southwest of Brussels. The choice for this site underlined the regrouping of European institutions around the roundabout Schuman.

In 1967, this symbol for the EEC made room for about 3.300 functionaries, accommodated in the 130.000m² of what was for a long time the only European administrative centre of this size. Parallel to the construction of the Berlaymont, also different smaller privately owned office buildings were constructed and the national level invested in the infrastructure for this quarter. It became clear rather rapidly that the newly built capacities in the Berlaymont would not suffice for a long time, as the commission was in full expansion.



From 1963 on, also the construction of the 35.000 m² counting 'Charlemagne' was discussed for the extension of the commission. By the year 1968, functionaries of the commission occupied the Berlaymont, Charlemagne and also the Archimedes building.

Illustration 8: Berlaymont-building during renovation

Another important step for urban planning in Brussels –still in the line of modernist thinking of the 1950s and 1960s – were the investigations on spatial problems of bigger Brussels by Group Alpha. Their studies laid the foundation for the regional plan of the Brussels Agglomeration (see also Plan Alpha 1965). Basic idea of the first proposal of the plan was to divide the town for mono-functional zones that would be connected through urban highways. One of these highways would be the 'Chaussee d'Etterbeek' with a width of 24 metres. The lively neighbourhood around the Place Jourdan would probably disappear due to the cloverleaf planned for this spot.

When expropriations for this plan started, the neighbourhood was in turmoil and local committees mushroomed. Their actions were partly co-ordinated from ARAU, the 'Atelier de Recherche et d'action Urbaine', together with the BBL or 'Bond Beter Leefmilieu' and IEB or 'Interenvironnement Bruxelles'. Especially ARAU did not settle for defensive actions only, they actively proposed alternatives, the first plan was presented on a press conference on 19th of October 1972. Residences would be renovated in alternating phases and the offices of the European Institutions would be located on sites that would not disturb the existing neighbourhoods.

▪ The Council of Ministers

Another crucial question to be solved was the location of the Council of Ministers. Soon, it was clear that an own and prestigious building was needed for this actor. The initial proposal was to construct a building right behind the Berlaymont (away from the Rue de la Loi, in the direction of the squares). This location was



rapidly deserted, as it was feared to be too small and a hindrance to expansion of the commission in a later phase. Other proposals were the park of Tervuren, the site of the Parc du Cinquantaire, the old barracks Baudouin at the Place Dailly and a site right next to the Rue de la Loi and Chaussee d'Etterbeek. As the federal government stick to their guns to establish a European Quarter around Schuman, many options were dropped.

The current site of the Council of Ministers, South of the Rue de la Loi, was selected in 1973. The European Council of Ministers signed an agreement about the site in February 1974. A considerable part of the site was already owned by the State then. Both to the East and to the West, extensions would still be possible for a long time, a process that was gradually fulfilled. Belgian authorities even proposed to install a separate European Zone of about 30 hectares around Schuman. The exact legal status would still need to be cleared. The main idea is to have all European institutions together on one site, which is large enough to allow extension. The Belgian State – at that moment still the owner of the neighbouring Residence Palace – could also sell or rent this property to the European Institutions if necessary. This was materialised in an agreement with the European partners on the 23rd of September 1975.

The option of concentrating the European institutions around Schuman was proposed from the federal Belgian government and supported from the delegations of France and Luxembourg. All other delegations of the member states actually preferred other sites for the Council (Demey, 1992, p. 201).



With the massive extension of the Berlaymont for the Commission and later the Council of Ministers, the question of whether to have a mixed use neighbourhood or otherwise an administrative 'ghetto' became once again more urgent. The concentration of European Institutions was not finished though.

Illustration 9: View from above on the Justus Lipsius Building for the Council of Ministers

▪ The Parliament

In 1985, a consortium of two banks (BACOB and the Société Générale) takes the initiative to realise the infrastructure that would be necessary for the sessions of the European Parliament. The building 'Henri Spaak' between Leopold Park and the train station of the Leopold Quarter which houses today the parliament, was initially presented as an 'International Centre of Congress' or ICC. There was a lot of protest against this project, for instance from neighbourhood associations, environmental organisations,



social housing groups or the persons in charge for the architectural patrimony. The reaction focussed mainly on the assumed impact on the price of land, the deterioration of quality of life in the neighbourhood and the rapid growth of car traffic. It was also a reaction against the gigantism in favour of profitability and the procedures followed. With a certain sensitivity and knowledge about the possible influence of these groups, both project developers and local authorities used techniques which were previously 'tested' in the 1970s. Along Lagrou, reunions, publications and follow-up helped gaining the approval for the project with not too much resistance.

The development of this site motivated many project developers to buy residences in an array of 3 to 4 kilometres from the Leopold quarter. According to Lagrou, the rate of buildings that were abandoned for speculative reasons reaches about 27% in 1992. (Lagrou, 1992, p. 3). It was expected that the 1.940.000 m² available in 1987 would be extended to almost twice the space by the year 2000. As offices can be rented for about five times the price of residences (back then about 10.000 Bef instead of 2.000 Bef/ m²), a



fierce battle for the distribution of these two vital functions of the city continued.

Illustration 10: View from above on the European Parliament See also appendix for a visual illustration about the development in construction of the European Parliament (pictures taken by E. Lagrou)

Actors in the European implantation in Brussels

With the description of the development of the European Quarter, different actors appeared on the scene already. The urban arena for the development of the European Quarter is rather complex, both from the institutional level as well as from the side of private interest groups involved. For an easier comprehension



of these structures, the analysis of actors here is based on a classification of the political scientists Howard and Ramesh. They distinguish elected from appointed officials in the state, and interest groups, research organisations and mass media in society, as shown in the table below.

Within the state	Elected officials	Executive
		Legislative
	Appointed officials	
In society	Interest groups	
	Research Organisations	
	Mass Media	

TABLE: Classification of political actors, based on Howlett and Ramesh (1995, p. 52)

This clear scheme was adapted for the analysis of actors involved in the file 'Urban development of the European Quarter in Brussels'. An overview of all actors in the adapted scheme is given in the appendix. First, the political level - originally referred to as 'within the state' - needs to be subdivided in the study of urban planning of the European Quarter for three distinctive tiers, namely the federal, regional and municipal levels. The federal level is the official partner for European agreements, and acts as party to the treaties unless these explicitly focus on regions (with permission of the national level). The national government was the main political partner in questions of urban development in the European Quarter until the federalisation in 1988. The regional level has competencies for permits, regional plans as well as questions of infrastructure and mobility. Brussels has transformed from capital of Belgium into an agglomeration and meanwhile into a fairly independent city region, known as 'Brussels Capital Region' with extended own responsibilities, also in affairs of urban planning. Depending on the dimension of the issue though, the federal level might need to intervene. The municipal level (at least three municipalities are involved in questions about the European Quarter) then focuses on municipal development plans and particular land use plans. Some matters of security are also solved on this level, as the police corps is under authority of the different mayors. It is remarkable that the European level does not appear as a purely political level for the urban development of the European Quarter. The European Institutions act in the first place as clients, each on behalf of their specific needs.

Second, the societal level can also be further subdivided. For the analysis of actors in the urban arena of the European Quarter, we can distinguish different pressure groups, economic groups, users of the site, designers or architects and research institutions. The positioning of mass media in this file is subject to further investigations.

Pressure groups can be further divided into regionally acting and locally acting groups. Umbrella-organisation are for instance BRAL, IEB or ARAU. Specific neighbourhood associations are for instance AQL, GAQ and the Association Riverains Loi. The economic groups contain both project developers,



constructors, financiers, real estate agents and owners. Many of these organisations have also links with French capital. The main users in the European Quarter are, as said earlier, the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. Research organisations can be further subdivided for private and public offices as well as universities and colleges.

The relations between different actors show great variety. There have been different structural or at least formal attempts to co-ordinate between actors. Not surprisingly, there have been also informal contacts and what Baeten also sometimes calls 'unholy coalitions' between different actors, such as growth coalitions between politicians, developers and investors (Baeten, 2001, p. 7). According to E. Swyngedouw, there is an obvious need to develop growth coalitions, but he stresses the variety and width of these coalitions. Surprisingly enough, some individuals seem to have great power on their own to influence the file 'European Quarter'.

Different actors might find themselves – whether intended or not- within the same discourse or working on the same area in the quarter. This often not intended or unnoticed shared interest leads to the formation of 'clusters' of actors from the discourse, the action or the field of action. Actors might even work on the same field and/ or develop similar discourses, but work in parallel circuits without further co-ordination. With the complexity in the composition as well as institutional changes, it is often difficult to see which actors could actually co-operate. Some remarkable attempts though to co-ordinate between different actors in a structural way have been for instance:

- The cooperation about the construction of the Council of Ministers: the Ministry of Public Works (under Jos De Saeger) initiated a reunion of different actors involved for the planning of the Council of Ministers in 1972. This group only gathered twice as there were serious differences of opinion about the planning and use of the Chaussee d'Etterbeek.
- The Round Table Maelbeek: Immediately after, Jos De Saeger hold another co-ordinating session about questions of the valley of the Maelbeek. The gatherings were followed up from members of the Agglomeration of Brussels (with Serge Moureau as president), different communities involved (Brussels, Etterbeek, Ixelles and Saint Josse), different ministries (e.g. public works and the traffic department), the central administration of urban planning and spatial development, the national train company NMBS as well as the regional company for public transport MIVB, the society for regional development and different neighbourhood associations. This group was informally called the 'round table of the Maalbeek'. The establishment of this group is a side effect of earlier actions of neighbourhood associations and interest groups such as ARAU, BBL and IEB. The gathering resulted in renewal plans for the valley of the Maalbeek in 1973. The implementation of ideas from this group was only achieved about 20 years later though.



- The Comité de Suivi: Different pressure groups and neighbourhood organisations of the European Quarter tried to co-ordinate the efforts between neighbourhoods and users (the European institutions). The aim of this gathering was to exchange information, but also to create a larger platform and have a better base for political decisions. This was an initiative from umbrella-organisations like IEB and BRAL, and was followed up from neighbourhood associations like AQL and GAQ. The inhabitants are central actors in these gatherings, they decide which aspects to put on the agenda. The other participants are mainly observing.
- Task Force Brussels-Europe: The Minister-president Francois Xavier de Donnée initiated a new commission for consultation between the regional level and European institutions. This initiative started on the fifth of December 2000. This study group contains representatives of Brussels Capital Region, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and representatives of all five European institutions in Brussels. The co-ordination was inspiring for the Regional Development Plan of 2001 and resulted in several smaller reports. Main focus is on the future needs and possibilities for administrative functions, social facilities as well as mobility.

These attempts of co-ordination, initiated from different actors and with different aims, have following objectives in common though: clarification, creation of opportunities for growth, democratic involvement and stronger bases for political decisions. The initiatives are often closely related to specific situations and therefore endangered in their continuity when the situation changes. There is no structural round table for the multiplicity of actors.

Discourses for enlargement and importance of security

Pressure points in the discussion and planning of urban development of the European Quarter are, amongst other things: the density and scale of the development, whether or not a mix of functions is desirable, the evaluation of future needs in terms of office spaces, social facilities and mobility, security for different users or the possible appeal on architectural competitions. The importance of Brussels was underlined in the Treaty of Nice:

At the Nice Summit of December 2000, it was decided that the role of Brussels as capital of Europe should be strengthened. Brussels will become, after 2002, the main seat for European Council meetings and this will give more institutional stability to the role of Brussels as capital of Europe. (European Commission, 2001, p. 7)



When presenting scenarios for urban planning in Brussel with the enlargement of Europe, different actors proposed to split for another site in Brussels. Proposed are for instance the Heyzel, the site of Turn and Taxis and possible future developments around a newly planned HST-station in the North of Brussels. Different users develop proposals according to different time frames and interests. Motivations and choices for the urban development changed rapidly in almost 50 years of European presence.

Arguments in the discussion about the spatial development are for instance functionality, accessibility and the liveability of the quarter. Security is often used as an underlying or strengthening argument in this discussion.

About functionality: a clear division of functions was mainly proposed in the 1960s and 1970s. Different neighbourhood associations and umbrella-organisations fight for the preservation and liveability of their neighbourhood and a mix of residential and office spaces. Security is used as an argument from both neighbourhood associations and some European institutions.

On one side, the former Leopold Quarter is presented as being an 'insecure neighbourhood' when most functions close with the office hours. It is feared that the area would turn into a ghost town at evenings and weekends. There is a strong fear amongst neighbourhood associations for a kind of ghetto-formation. This would be a (partly) vicious circle of speculation, vacancies; decay and eventually what Baeten described starting from a definition of a problem area:

'Its most probable consequence is that these areas will sooner or later be subject to land speculation and development, whereby the definition of 'problem area' will serve as an excuse for profitable regeneration.' (Baeten, 1998, p. 4)

On the other side, it is argued that a concentration of functions would be easier to handle in terms of security when top conferences are taking place. Already in 1974, with the discussions about the Council of Ministers, the European partners stated clearly that they wanted to have an isolated site for reasons of security. This goes as far as discussing whether for instance the tunnel under the Justus Lipsius (Council of Ministers) could be sufficiently safeguarded at top conferences. Advantages of a European Union Central Administrative District would be both the closeness of services and the easier control at top conferences. According to some projects developers for instance, it does not make sense to mix office spaces and residential areas, as the residences could enjoy much more quality of life, they argue, if the residences would not be right next to administrative functions but for instance in a residential area. The Leopold Quarter, of course, used to be a purely residential area. A clear or even exclusive concentration of offices would demand a different scale than the residences from the 19th century. As a plan from scratch or in the green field, the idea of division of functions can sound very tempting. In an already existing urban fabric, this looks different. Apart from the actual development of capacities, also tendencies (what was expected) and



voluntaristic scenario's (what is wished for) are interesting to be compared in the discussion about the urban development of the European quarter. In some analyses, it is hard to distinguish predictions from wishes, when the 'good scenario' is presented as 'likely to happen' according to the view of the interest involved. Not surprisingly, this is for instance the case when real estate agents are making their prognoses for the development of office spaces. Their predictions based on current tendencies point into a direction that is fortunate to them. The European Quarter shows good examples for this mechanism.

It is a demand from the regional level to compensate the construction of offices with the construction of residences. This rule is applied rather flexible (hotels also count as residences), with very long delays or – in the worst case- not at all. The budget proposals from Brussels Capital Region for the year 2003 planned more investments for housing. The Housing Fund for instance would receive about 35% more than in the year 2002. With the liberal government of the Region, the protection of housing so far seemed to be weakened in comparison to the socialist rulers before.

Real estate agents such as CODEMER put the attention also on the necessity of a mix within the use of offices to have both public and private users attracted to the European Quarter, again stated with arguments of security. A purely administrative use would make the neighbourhood much less lively, they argue.

Through the description of the development of the European Quarter, one easily gains the impression that there is a clear interest from for instance the national level to keep European institutions in Brussels. The impact on town and a clear vision about how the European presence could be translated into the urban fabric seems to lack though. Different interest groups point at official institutions on the federal, regional and also municipal level when complaining about the lack of transparency; vagueness, lack of information (and long term vision) and a chain of apparent contradictory plans and exceptionally granted permissions. Even though some attempts to co-ordinate, the development of urban issues in the European Quarter is perceived from umbrella and neighbourhood associations as being undemocratic.

From a different perspective, one could see that decisions on the Belgian or Regional level can only be taken after European agreements have been signed, as for instance about the division of functions and the choice of a seat for the European Parliament. One can discuss about the functionality, location and aesthetics of the European Institution buildings. The economic impact and employment opportunities are considerable though. Both the institutional dynamism, the large variety of different actors involved and their discourses, as well as the fact that the European Institutions are developed in the heart of the city, add to the complexity to define a liveable, yet economically interesting urban development for the European Quarter in Brussels Capital Region.



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- z.p.: <http://www.eu2001.be/Main/Frameset.asp?reference=01%2D01&lang=nl&sess=175364603&>
- Zie ook 'Think tank Europe', Brussels, capital of Europe [WWW]

HISTORIC MAPS

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1854 | Carte topographique et hypsométrique de Bruxelles et ses environs, 1:20.000 |
| 1866 | Plan d'ensemble pour extension et embellissement de l'agglomération Bruxelloise, Victor. Besme |
| 1880 | Bruxelles et ses environs, 1:25.000 |

REGIONAL

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| GewOP 1995: | Ministerie van het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest (1995), <i>Besluit van de Brusselse Hoofdstedelijke Regering tot vaststelling van het ontwerp van Gewestelijk Ontwikkelingsplan</i> , Brussel: Moniteur Belge, 03-03-1995 |
| GBP 1998: | Ministerie van het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest (1998), <i>Besluit van de Brusselse Hoofdstedelijke Regering tot vaststelling van het ontwerp van Gewestelijk Bestemmingsplan</i> , Brussel: Moniteur Belge, 16-07-1998 |
| GewOP 2001: | Ministerie van het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest (2001), <i>Besluit van de Brusselse Hoofdstedelijke Regering tot vaststelling van het ontwerp van Gewestelijk Ontwikkelingsplan</i> , Brussel: Moniteur Belge, 16-10-2001, |
| GBP 2001: | Ministerie van het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest (2001), <i>Besluit van de Brusselse Hoofdstedelijke Regering tot vaststelling van het ontwerp van Gewestelijk Bestemmingsplan</i> , Brussel: Moniteur Belge, 16-06-2001 |

MUNICIPAL

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| BBP XL : | Bijzondere Bestemmingsplannen van de gemeente Elsene, Etterbeek and Brussels |
| GemOP BXL : | Gemeentelijk Ontwikkelingsplan van de gemeente Brussel stad, Elsene en Etterbeek |

STATISTICAL SECTORS

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