

# URBAN AGRICULTURE IN BRUSSELS

Fieldtrip February 2016



Local organizers:

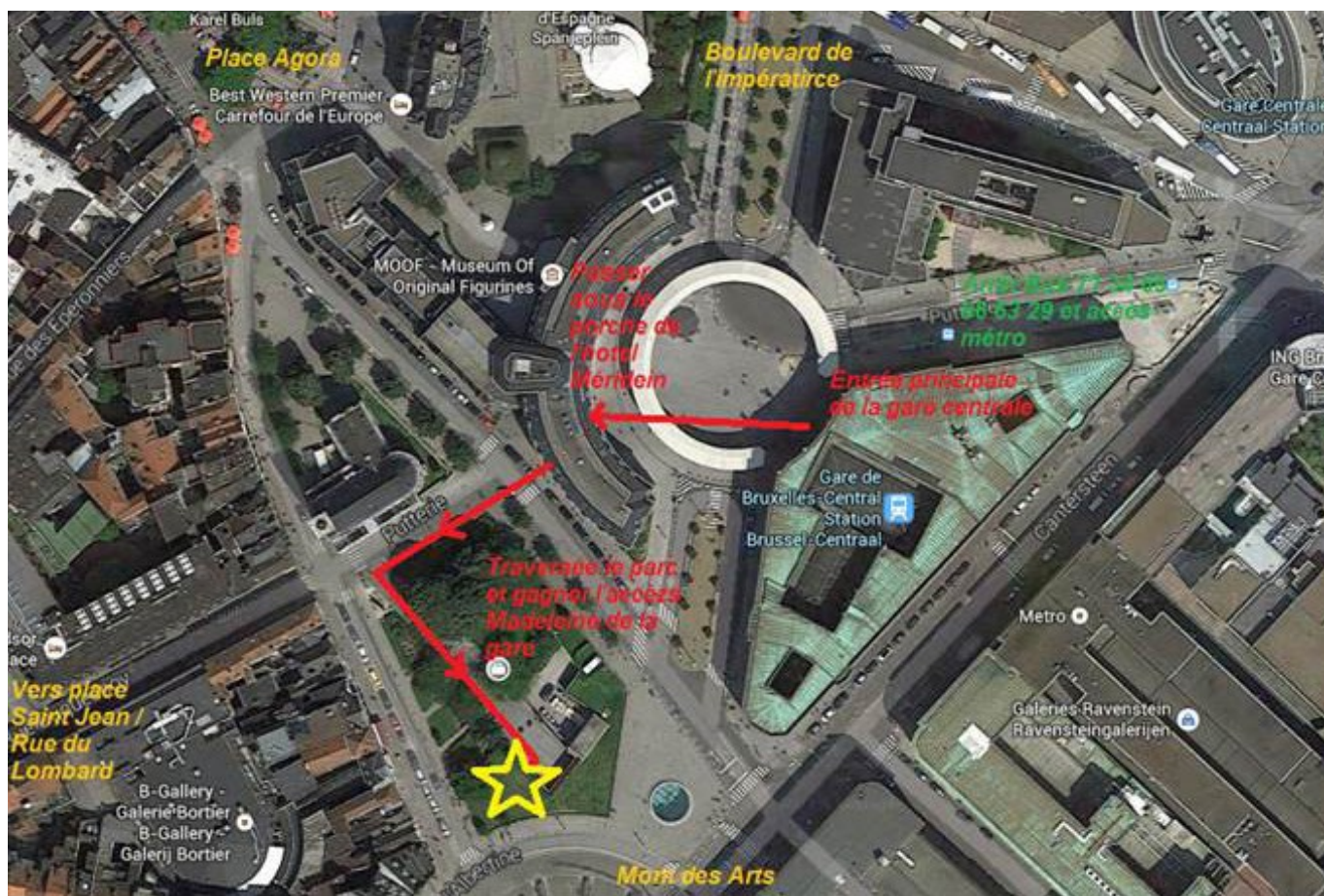
Prof. Michiel Dehaene, Martin Dumont & Charlotte Prové





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## Bike Shop CYCLO

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### Meeting time and place

We meet at **8.00 A.M.** on Wednesday February 24 in the bike rental shop CYCLO, which is at one of the entrances of **Brussels Central** train station (exit Madeleine). The address of the bike shop is Putteriesquare, 1000 Brussels (see picture). It is easier to enter the shop via the street, you can get lost if you try to find CYCLO from within the train station.

Please be on time! Note: you do not need to rent your own bike, we arranged them for you.

### How to get to Brussels central?

From Avenue Louise, it is about a 30 min walk, or with public transportation from Avenue Louise, the options are: the trolley line 93, bus 38 or 71

### Transportation

We will do everything by bike (total route will be about 25km). In case you have to leave the excursion early to catch a train or flight, we kindly ask you to bring your own bike back to the rental shop.

### Luggage

There are several options for your luggage, but we ask you to arrange for yourself the most comfortable option.

- (1) please check with your hotel if they can store your luggage;
- (2) you can also bring the luggage on the bike if you can carry it on your back;
- (3) you can store it in the CYCLO shop, they have a deposit room;
- (4) you can store it in the lockers that are in Brussels Central Station. It costs about 4-5 € for a whole day;
- (5) there is a car that will follow us. Luggage can be taken in the car, but the car will only join later in the day and might not stay until the end. In that case, please make sure you can carry it also on your back.

### Dresscode

Weather in February can be very cold and humid. Please bring a raincoat and/or a windjacket. Gloves, a hat and a scarf will be very useful as well. Wear clothing and footwear suitable for quite a lot of walking and/or cycling.

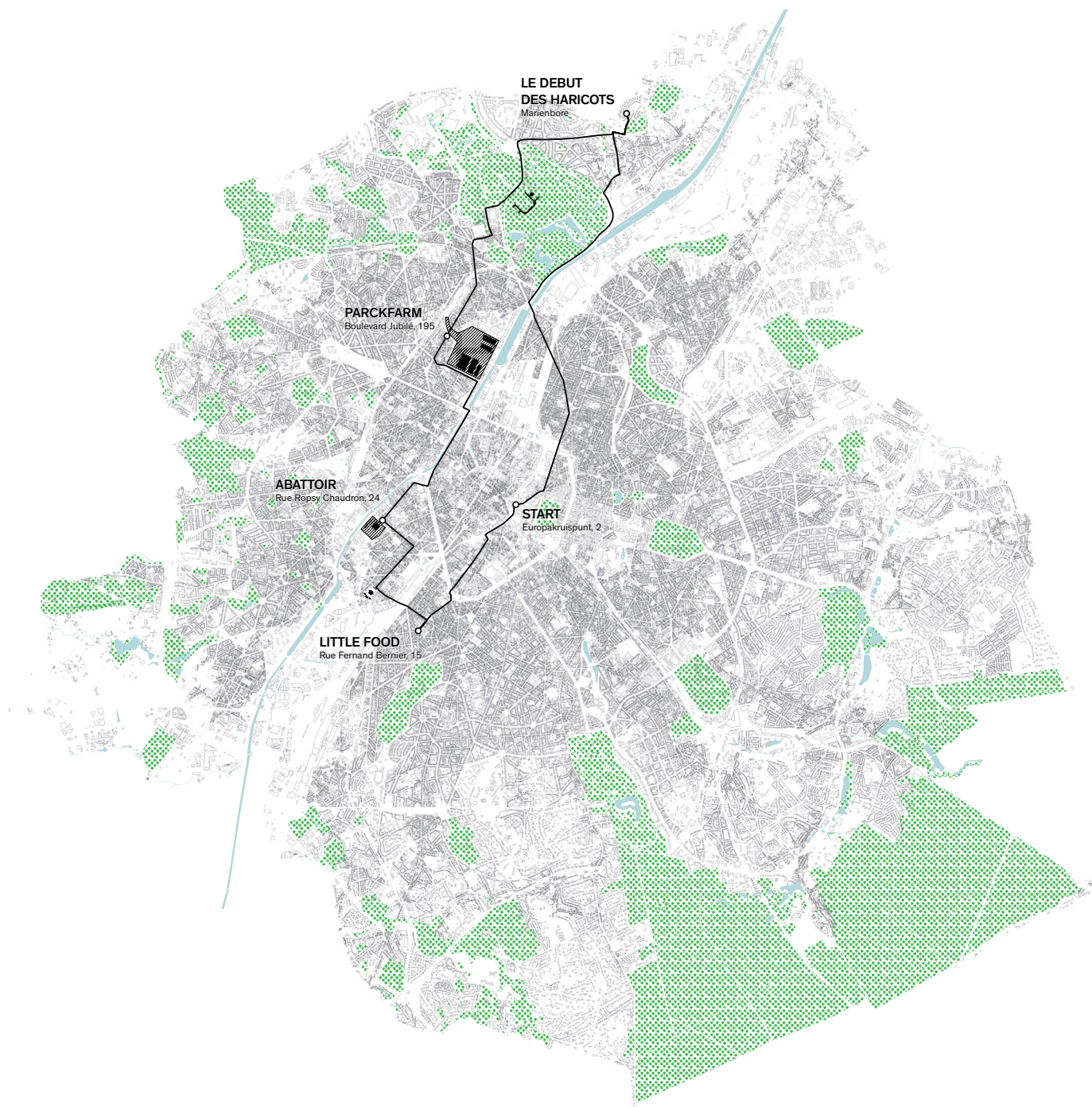
### Dinner

The dinner on Tuesday night will take place at **Restaurant Chez Léon**, Beenhouwersstraat 18, 1000 Brussel. We will gather at 18:30 at the Big Market (Grote Markt), in the center of the city. From the COST Offices, best ways to get there are trolley lines 92 and 93 or bus 71.

In case of an issue, emergency or practical questions, please call:

Charlotte Prové at +32 478 78 71 33





## PROGRAM & TIMING

<u>Time</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Activity</u>
08:00	Brussels Central Train Station: <b>Bike Shop Cyclo</b> (Putteriesquare, exit Madeleine)	Meeting point at bike shop, cycling Little Food (2,5 km)
9:00-11:00	<b>Little Food</b> (Rue Fernand Bernier, 15 1060 Brussels)	Visit of Little Food project, cycle to abattoir (2,5 km)
11:00-12:30	<b>Abatan</b> (Rue Ropsy Chaudron, 24 1070 Brussels)	Visit of Abattoir, cycle to Parck- Farm (3,5 km)
12:30-14:30	<b>ParckFarm</b> (Boulevard Jubilé, 195 1000 Brussels)	Visit of ParckFarm, Presentation of Marco Volpe and Nijs Wien and the research team of Bénédikte Zitouni Lunch, cycle to DH (7km)
15:00-16:00	<b>Le Début des Haricots</b> (Mariënborre, 1120 Ne- der-over-heembeek)	Visit of the urban farm
17:00	Brussels Central Train Station: <b>Bike Shop Cyclo</b> (Putteriesquare)	Cycle back to the city center (8km)

## URBAN AGRICULTURE WITHIN THE BRUSSELS' CANAL AREA

During the past decade, Brussels has been witness to a wide array of urban agriculture initiatives, covering the full spectrum from the more classical examples of allotment and community gardens to the construction of an integrated aquaponics farm on the roof of an urban food market. The subject has caught the attention of the Brussels Capital Region that views urban agriculture as an important component in the development of an innovative urban food sector and recognizes its potential of becoming an important employer within a region struggling with high level of (youth) unemployment.

The fieldtrip within the context of COST UAE does not have the ambition to give an overview of what is going on in terms of urban agriculture in Brussels. The scope of initiatives is very wide. The URBACT program 'Sustainable Food within Urban Communities', a network that included Brussels as one of its partners, documented over 70 initiatives within the region. Rather, the aim is to present a sample of projects that shed light on the interaction of these urban agriculture initiatives with their urban context. The fieldtrip visits four projects in and around the 'Canal Area' that exemplify the various ways in which the development of urban agriculture goes hand in hand with the re-appropriation of the urban context and the mobilization of the city as a resource.

The experimental cricket farm **Little Food** regards the city as a food system in which living organisms play a vital role. By growing crickets they seek to establish new links within the urban food chain by providing a more efficient (in terms of energy intake, water consumption, space needed) source of protein. The city is the place where an interesting diet for the crickets can be found (spent grain or draff from breweries, waste of organic vegetable growers) but also where this niche product may be marketed.

**Abatan** is the new name of the enterprise that runs the market and slaughterhouse of Curegem since 1983. The site has evolved from a logistical enclave to a true urban attractor which brings each weekend 40.000 visitors to the market under the monumental roof of the historical cattle market. Abatan recently opened a new food market which will host on its roof a 4000 square meters integrated aquaponics farm. The presence of the remarkable distribution channels make this urban site a unique location for this initiative.

For **ParckFarm** the city is most of all a network of local actors that can be stitched and re-stitched. The urban ParckFarm grew out of the Park Design biannual festival hosted by the environmental planning department of the region. The 2014 edition took a special form placing the festival in the hands of a team of curators which explicitly made it their aim to provide a bridge between this public initiative and local communities of urban food growers. ParckFarm was set up on the edge of the former Tour & Taxis site, the large historical site was first developed by the Von Thurn und Taxis family, pioneers of the postal services in Europe. The Tour & Taxis site is currently the subject of a major commercial redevelopment project. The ParckFarm challenges the rather inward looking nature of this project. The presence of existing allotments and a community garden on the edge of the site was used to set up a collective park which was handed over to the Park Farm non-profit organization which manages this collective open space until today.

**Le début des haricots** explores through its various activities new strategies to rebuild relationships between the city and its hinterland, between urban citizens and farmers. The organization is involved in setting up local food teams, the development of community gardens (jardins collectifs) and manages an community based farm in Neder-Over-Heembeek on the edge of the valley of the Senne (the river

that passes through Brussels and was 'replaced' by the Canal). The urban farm in Neder-Over-Heembeek combines these questions of local food growing with the aim of consolidating the residual productive land on Brussels peri-urban fringe.

The past months, the Brussels Canal Area was the subject of international attention as some of the terrorists involved in the Paris attacks last November originated from this part of the city. This framing of the area as a terrorist's nest is quite unfair. Not only does it stigmatize a large part of the population living in this part of the city, it also disregards the remarkable dynamism of this area including the many local initiatives that have and continue to invest in the area.

The Canal marks the dividing line between the city of the rich in the east and of the poor in the west. What is interesting, however, is that the geography of uneven development is located in the hearth of the city. Brussels has its 'banlieue' located not in the periphery but rather in the center. This is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, There is tremendous pressure on these areas. The recent completion of the UP-SITE tower (Atenor) next to Bassin Vergote boldly shows how the process of gentrification is picking up speed. On the other hand, this situation creates a context in which the disenfranchised communities along the Brussels Canal are not spatially marginalized. They live in an area that is part and parcel of the infrastructure networks and opportunity structures of Brussels. This constellation makes many believe that the area along the Canal holds the potential to define a new common ground for Brussels.

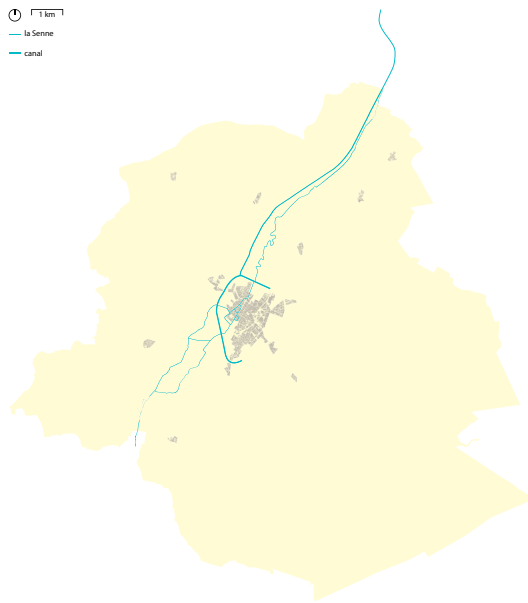
Brussels and its metropolitan area are plagued by a notoriously complex governance structure. The development of integrated regional policies has been largely compromised by a long standing policy of municipal governance. While the Brussels Capital Region provides a certain level of integration, the 19 municipalities, which in the case of Brussels were never merged

together, continue to hold a significant degree of political autonomy. However, the absence of strong territorial policies partly explains why Brussels has such a lively scene of alternative development practices. The zone around the canal acts in this story as the fertile breeding ground for alternative practices.

Over the past 20 years the Brussels Capital Region has been implementing a rather successful urban renewal program of 'neighborhood contracts' through which local municipalities are invited to develop initiatives within targeted renewal zones. This methodology has developed successful partnerships between local and supra local players. The Canal Area is home to a large industry focused on the trade of second-hand cars, which are collected in Brussels and mostly shipped to Africa. This second hand car trade is currently supplemented by initiatives more focused on recycling and urban mining. While the importance of these largely informal activities are recognized, the region is struggling to incorporate economic networks within its plans for the renewal of the canal area.

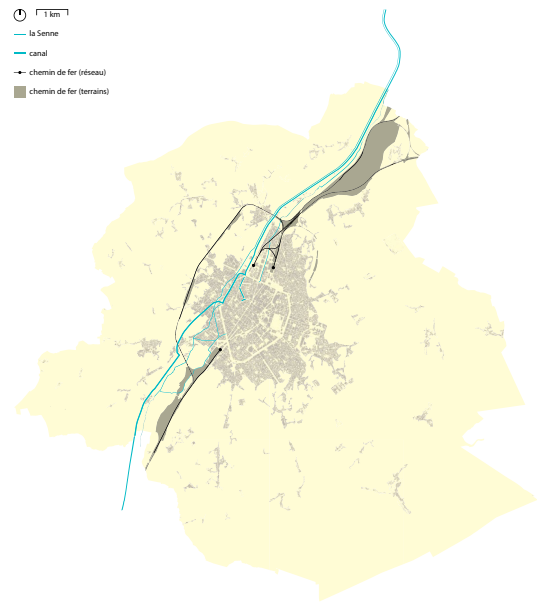
Finally, the urban ecology of the canal has presented itself as an interesting cultural landscape. In 2014, at the same time of the *Park Design festival*, a local network of cultural organizations active in the area hosted the second edition of the Festival Canal, using the canal as the canvas to present various cultural events, including the production of a temporary bridge, linking the Tour & Taxi site to the area around Brussels North Station. The question of urban agriculture provides a new layer to a complex urban landscape, offering the potential of building new local and supralocal partnerships.

Michiel Dehaene



Brussels around 1555 (Source Images: AWB)

The Canal Area is the cradle of Belgian industrialization. Its current morphology is the result of a long process of urbanization that dates back to the 16th century. At that time, the city developed mainly East of the Senne, within the limits of the 'Pentagone'. Lands in the valley and on the Western banks of the river were poorly drained and exposed to regular flooding. This asymmetrical development dictated by the topography of Brussels will substantially influence the social division that is present today. The aristocracy and the bourgeoisie settled on the terraces of the eastern part of the city, whereas the valley and western parts of the city collected industrial activities that benefited from the presence of the river.

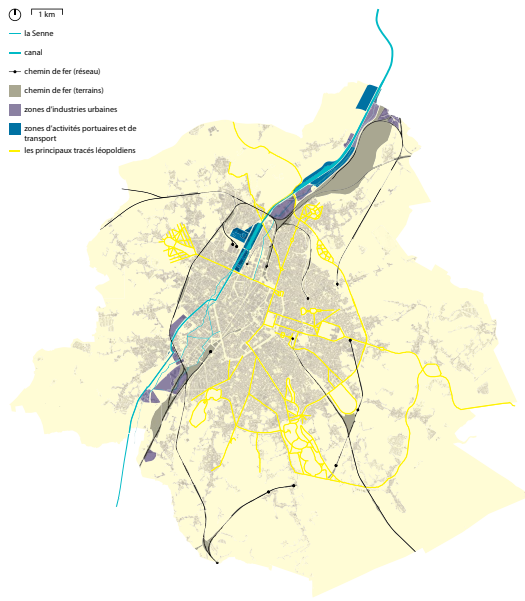


Brussels around 1880 (Source Images: AWB)

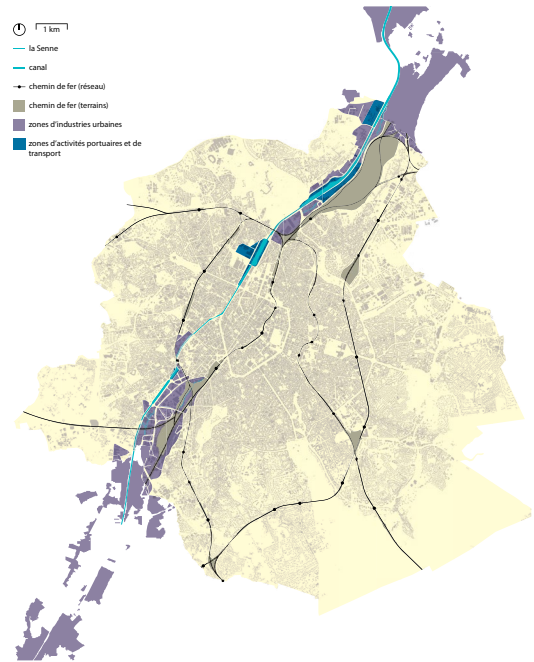
At the beginning of the 19th century, the canal that connected Brussels to the Ruppel river and through the Scheldt, to the North Sea, is extended South to the mines and coal industries. The railways, also implemented in the valley, strengthened Brussels' central position between the Harbor of Antwerp and the industrial region of Charleroi. This strategic position will accelerate the industrialization of the valley.

The Senne is gradually canalized and covered during the great transformation of Jules Anspach (mayor of Brussels 1863-1879). A new train line is created west in order to bypass the city center. Throughout the second half of the 19th century, Brussels will consolidate its position as the capital of the Belgian State. The modernization of the city goes along with the creation of new boulevards and new monuments (the monumental courthouse of Poulaert, the stock exchange, the south station, the slaughterhouses of Cureghem, ect.).





Brussels around 1930 (Source Images: AWB)



Brussels around 1980 (Source Images: AWB)

The modernization of the city will continue under king Leopold II (the king urbanist). The capital is gradually connected to the rest of the nation with a dense railway system converging upon Brussels, this leads to the creation of new train stations (Luxembourg, Schaerbeek, Saint Josse ten Noode). More boulevards are created, new parks and squares are designed (Cinquantenaire, Forest, Josaphat) and the canal is enlarged north and south in order to increase the commercial capacity of the harbor (bassins de Batelage and Vergote). The royal warehouses are built on the site Turn & Taxis and serve as the multimodal platform for the city.

During the postwar period, the industrial activity along the canal has gradually moved north and south of the city, leaving the central part out of use. The former industrial backbone of the Belgian nation state has gradually turned into an internal periphery, including the marked social deprivation in the area. At the same time, the Canal Area has evolved into a true arrival city and has provided the networks and opportunity structures for Brussel's hyper diverse population. New economic activities, including informal ones, have emerged. This fragmented landscape is today subject of an interesting, however conflicting, process of redevelopment and local re-appropriation.

# LITTLE FOOD

Little Food is a company located in Saint-Gilles (Brussels) that produces, prepares and promotes crickets for human consumption. The company fully engages with corporate social responsibility (CSR) and integrates in its business model social and environmental issues. In order to fulfill this engagement Little Food adopted a series of principles:

“Little Food is an urban farm situated in the center of the city. By producing in the center of Brussels and by opening our cricket farm for visitors, they ensure transparency and a close contact with consumers.”

Little food only works with local providers and makes sure it does not affect the prices of their products. The company also endorses the principle of circular economy by recycling food waste and excess heat. Finally, they follow the principle of biomimetic, which consists in re-



producing reflexes the way they occur in natural system, of which not polluting your own environment is one important example.

The core business of Little food is producing and preparing crickets for human consumption. This insect is not only rich in calcium, iron and fiber but also in protein, which represents an interesting alternative to meat. For a given amount of protein, the raising of crickets consumes 25 times less fodder, 300 times less water and around 60 times less greenhouse gases. It thus relieves the arable land from the grip of crops for animal feed (70%) and can redirect them to crops for feeding humans.

The company does not only produce crickets but also proceeds and prepares different byproducts with crickets. They sell them in various organic stores in Brussels and organize tastings. Finally, Little Food is also offering guided tours in order to discover their activities.  
(more info: <http://littlefood.org>)



# LE DEBUT DES HARICOTS

Le “début des haricots” is an organization founded in 2005 focusing on a wide range of activities. The organization has several locations in and around Brussels, including an office for administration. The purpose of Le début des haricots is environmental protection. Generally, the goal is to increase awareness and participation of citizens concerning the problem of environmental degradation and the negative consequences of the industrial system. The organization is mainly concerned with the theme of food.

“Our most important line of action is the mending of the connection between consumers and local farmers, who produce environmentally friendly for a fair price. We achieve this through meetings, animations, organizing dinners and also through actively setting up concrete alternatives, such as consumer groups in the city (currently there are around 40 consumer groups in the city). Producing one’s own food is another important line of action. The organization has several ecological gardens, one of which is the farm at Neder-Over-Heembeek. These demonstrate the potential of leading an active life while being partly self-sustaining. This way, citizens can take their life back in their own hands. The goal is also to reach more vulnerable people, such as young, uneducated citizens or people who live in poverty (such as the project ‘jardin des couleurs’). Other projects are more educational. There we work with the schools in and around Brussels.”

The organization participated in the founding



of collective gardens (“collectieve tuinen”) in Brussels and manages the network and assists when setting up a new garden. The idea behind the collective gardens is the re-appropriation of available land (vacant lands, parks, etc.), to resist to the pressure of urban development, forge social ties between citizens and bring them in contact with healthy food through food production. Today, Brussels counts more than 60 collective gardens.

The farm at Neder-Over-Heembeek can be called a real “urban farm”. Started in 2010, it employs and educates four people in organic vegetable production. The farm delivers weekly 40 baskets of vegetables to the consumer groups. They are transported by the two donkeys of the farm.

Besides all of that; le Début des Haricots is also involved in “Terre en Vue” that works to safeguard farmland in Belgium for the development of agro-ecological farms.

(more info: <http://www.haricots.org>)

# ABATAN

Abatan is the name of a company that exploits and manages the slaughterhouse of Anderlecht (Abattoir). Since 2009, they have been developing an ambitious masterplan (ORG-Architects) to transform and renovate the 10 ha site. This is considered as a new turn in the history of this emblematic site of the Brussels region. The site has a long history and is now considered as a strategic project for the redevelopment of the canal area.

The history of Abattoir started at the end of the 19th century (1888) when the municipality of Anderlecht granted a concession to a private company for the construction and development of a new abattoir and cattle market outside the city center. Back then, the city of Brussels was facing a growing demand for meat and the existing slaughterhouses of the center were generating too much nuisance (noise, odors and street congestion by cattle, accessibility, hygiene standards). The new location of the Abattoir was situated in a swampy site of about 20ha on the outskirts of the city. The company undertook important works to drain and connect the site. They built a new road towards the south station (rue Ropsy-Chaudron), a 100m by 100m arched steel construction for the cattle market, a brand new cooler to store the meat and a new train line in order to facilitate the transportation of livestock.

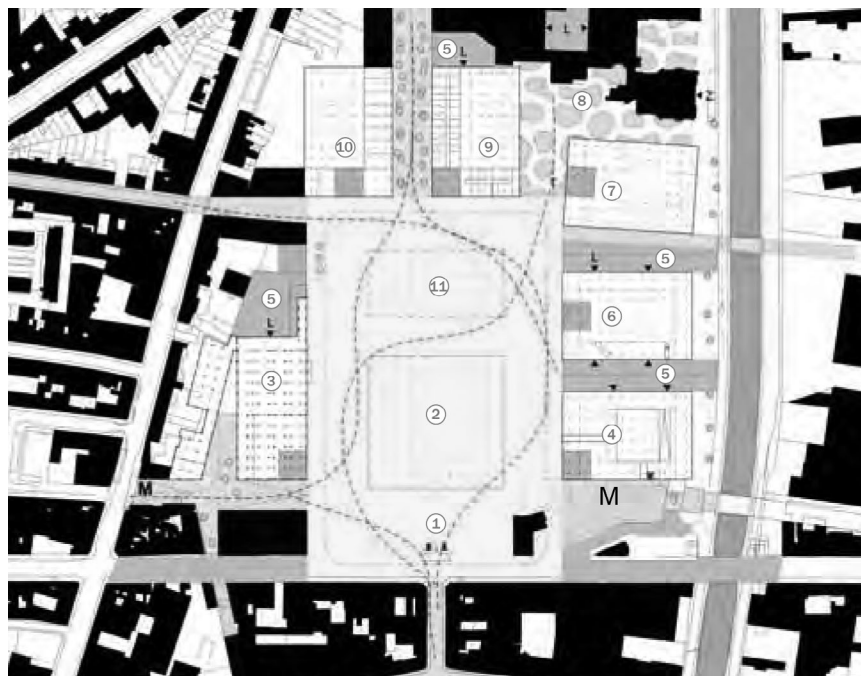
The Abattoir rapidly became the most important slaughterhouse of Brussels. The site became an economic machine for the neighborhood; animal fats were transformed into edible oils,

tallow and soap, carcasses into glue and fertilizers, skins were collected and sold to tanneries and leather goods and the new veterinary school came to settle in the nearby too.

The decline of activity started right after the Second World War with the emergence of refrigerated trucks, which made it easier to transport meat to the consumption places. The decline would impact on all the secondary economy attached to Abattoir. Glove artisans, shoe makers, tanneries and candle factories closed or relocated outside the city. The situation was compound with the closing of the train line in 1953 and later by a disinvestment policy which rapidly made the infrastructure of Abattoir obsolete.

Close to bankruptcy, the company was taken over in 1983 by a group of 150 local entrepreneurs under the new name of *Abattoirs et Marchés d'Anderlecht* (Abatan). Since then, the company exploits the slaughterhouse and the site hosts a weekly market under the large 19th century hall. In 2009 Abatan developed a masterplan for the further expansion of the site. The masterplan was designed by ORG (Brussels based urban design office) and aims at providing the site with an overall vision. The plan will increase the existing activities but also add new ones. The first element of the plan is the construction of a new food hall, a shelter for 45 stores devoted to food exclusively and with a rooftop farm of 4000 square meters with small gardens, greenhouses for vegetables and herbs and an aquaponics installation.  
(more info: <http://www.abatan.be>)





Masterplan Abattoir

1. Entrance
2. Covered market
3. South market
4. North market
5. Logistic zone
6. Urban slaughterhouse
7. Warehouse 3
8. Erasmus yard
9. Warehouse 4
10. Warehouse 5

(source: [www.abattoir.be](http://www.abattoir.be))

# PARCKFARM

ParckFarm is the remarkable result of both top-down aspirations as well as bottom-up initiatives. In 2014 the Environmental Planning Department (IBGE-BIM) of the Brussels Capital Region dedicated its biannual event 'Parckdesign' for the second time on the subject of urban farming. The organizers of Parckdesign selected a curatorial team to develop a plan for a site on the edge of the industrial enclave of Tour & Taxis on which the development of a large urban park and a substantial portion of urban development is projected.

The curatorial team composed of Taktyk (Thierry Kandjee) and Alive Architecture (Petra Pferdmenges) in association with Jacques Abelman, Eric Dil and Hidde van Schie developed a model for public space in this fragile neighborhood that combines the characteristics of a park with micro-farming. The curatorial team proceeded from the already existing informal urban gardening practices on the edge of the site (including a collective garden, set up by Le début des haricots). Their explicit desire to include these existing gardens in the proposal produced the concept of the ParckFarm, a public park that would host these initiatives and vice versa.

In order to develop the concept of the ParckFarm the curatorial team launched its own call and asked local teams and designers to develop a response to five predefined and interrelated topics that would be relevant to activate the ParckFarm: a farmhouse, an animal farm, waste, apiculture and an experimental food gar-

den. To ensure some coherence between these installations, all teams were asked to respond to the general motto of the festival 'from the landscape to the plate'. Through this second call ParckFarm was able to secure, from the onset, a strong local level of local engagement. These five initiatives were further reinforced by the inclusion of suggested activities by members of the community during the course of the summer.

What started as a festival during the summer of 2014 was consolidated afterwards. The Environmental Planning Department of the region agreed to keep most of the installations in place. At the end of 2014 a non-profit organization FARMHOUSE T&T was created for and by the inhabitants of the surrounding neighborhoods of the park. The aim of the organization is to create, through a temporary ecological festival, a local and sustainable social economy. FARMHOUSE T&T also acts as a platform for engagement and exchange between all inhabitants of the area, but also for all urban farmers interested in participating in the project.

The ParckFarm creates a new reference point in the large discussion regarding the redevelopment of the Tour and Taxis Site. It is strategically located on the corridor of the railway line that used to connect the West track to the Royal Entrepot and the Tour and Taxis facilities. This vacant land spit, provides the perfect setting for a counterproject: secondary space yet right in the center, green space in a hard environment, theatrical space on multiple levels multiplying

the ground, passage and place to stay, abandoned yet sublime and – not to forget - beautiful.

However, also the choice of the event made intelligent use of this setting: locally anchored yet looking at the greater picture, temporary yet thinking about its afterlife, event and structure at the same time, probing the different rhythms of urban life. The focus on food and gardening provided a layered narrative with multiple levels of entry and engagement, from eating together to the quest for food sovereignty, from one's own stomach to climate change. Finally also the design looked for a balance between bricolage and professionalism, investing sweat equity within a carefully planned environment, banking the efforts of many.

Park Farm demonstrated the force of a project that places fate in appropriation and sees design as integral to that process of appropri-

tion, part and parcel of a plurality of practices that physically and mentally occupy a location. One can only hope that the light that already radiates from under the bridge shines on the park that will be built to the south of the Park Farm. That it may succeed in loosening the aura of control and exclusive appropriation of the current masterplan. The Park Farm could open up the practices that a park might host, multiplying the points of attachment necessary to bring in multiple publics. Park Farm shows the way to an urbanism of appropriation that does not limit the task of the planner-designer to drawing clean spaces that lend themselves to various forms of use and appropriation, but views design as a socio-poetic act that participates in a range of practices that do not finish with the work of construction.

(more info: <http://www.parckdesign.be>)



