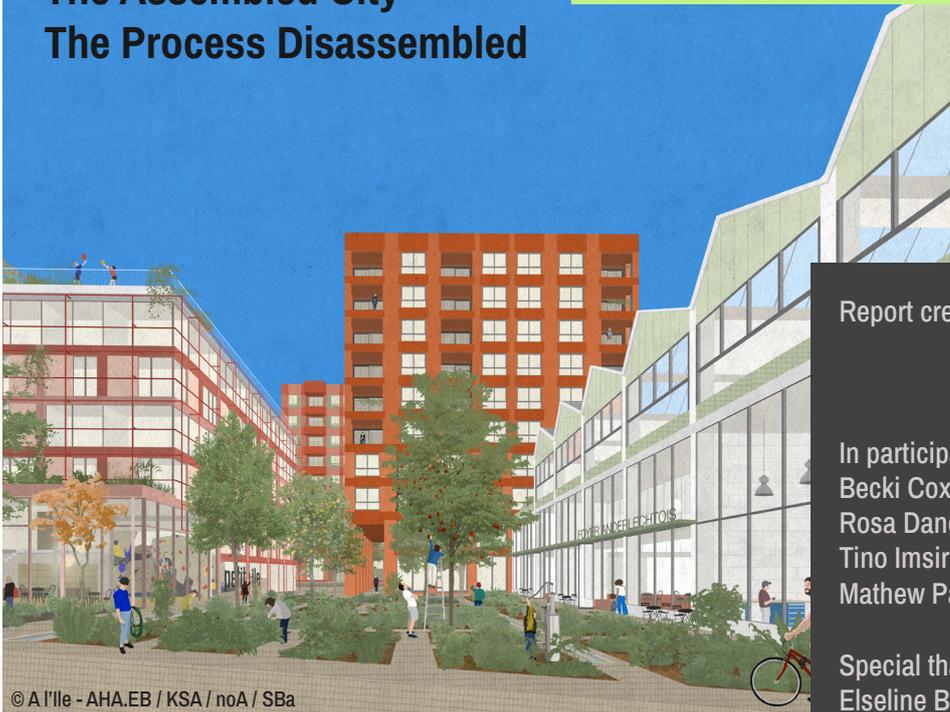


# Urban Maestro

Masterclass:  
New governance  
strategies for  
Urban Design

## Petite Île City Gate II

The Assembled City –  
The Process Disassembled



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# Introduction

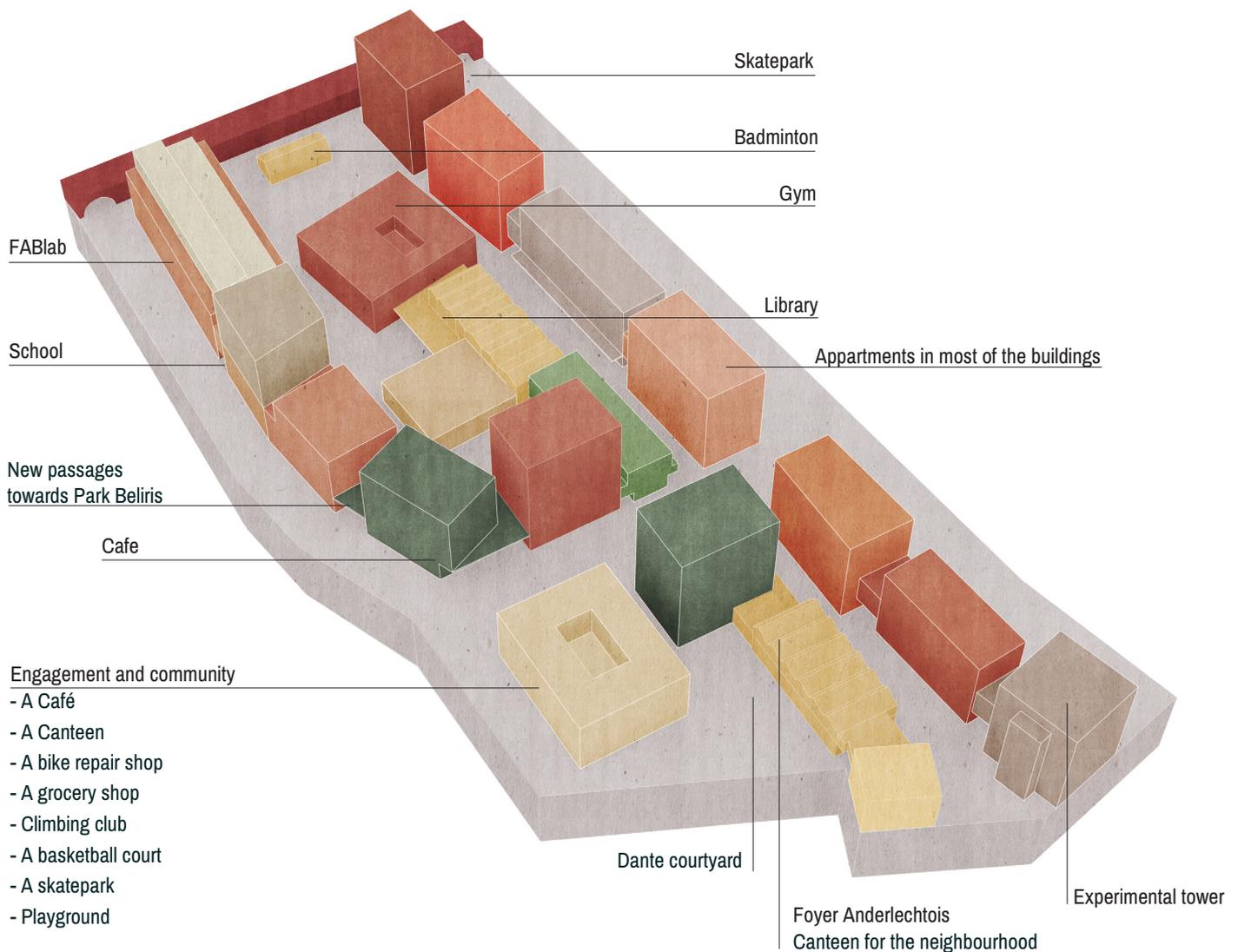
Petite Île/ City Gate II is a new mix-used neighbourhood, “a city within a city”, located in the municipality of Anderlecht, Brussels, Belgium. The former industrial site between railway tracks and a canal is being turned into a new sustainable neighbourhood where working, learning and living coexist. The rich programme of the project contains 400 social and subsidised housing units, a library, commercial space for shops, cafés and restaurants, a variety of sports facilities for both indoor and outdoor activities, including bouldering and skateboarding, and a school for 1,200 students, 'École de Tous'. The porous masterplan is designed to bring the various functions together and enhance encounters between the workers, teachers, students, residents and visitors. The project aims to reuse the existing building stock on the site, both to preserve the industrial heritage and to allow temporary usage by different actors during development and construction.

The plot is owned by two public actors, Citydev.brussels (The Brussels Regional Development Agency) and the SLRB (The

Brussels Capital Region Housing Corporation) who wanted to develop the site into a lively and productive hybrid complex in a coherent but ambitious manner, at the same time following the specifications of the ZEMU (the Urban Enterprise Zone), the Plan Canal and the Special Land Use Plan (PPAS).

The project is the result of an international design competition, which was won by a multidisciplinary team composed of both national and international designers. Different governance tools were established and used in order to enhance the collaboration between the various stakeholders, designers, developers and the public sector, to engage the existing and future users and inhabitants, as well as to promote sustainability and heritage preservation.

During the Urban Maestro Masterclass, our group of students was asked to analyse these tools in order to better understand the patterns of collaboration between different stakeholders on the site.

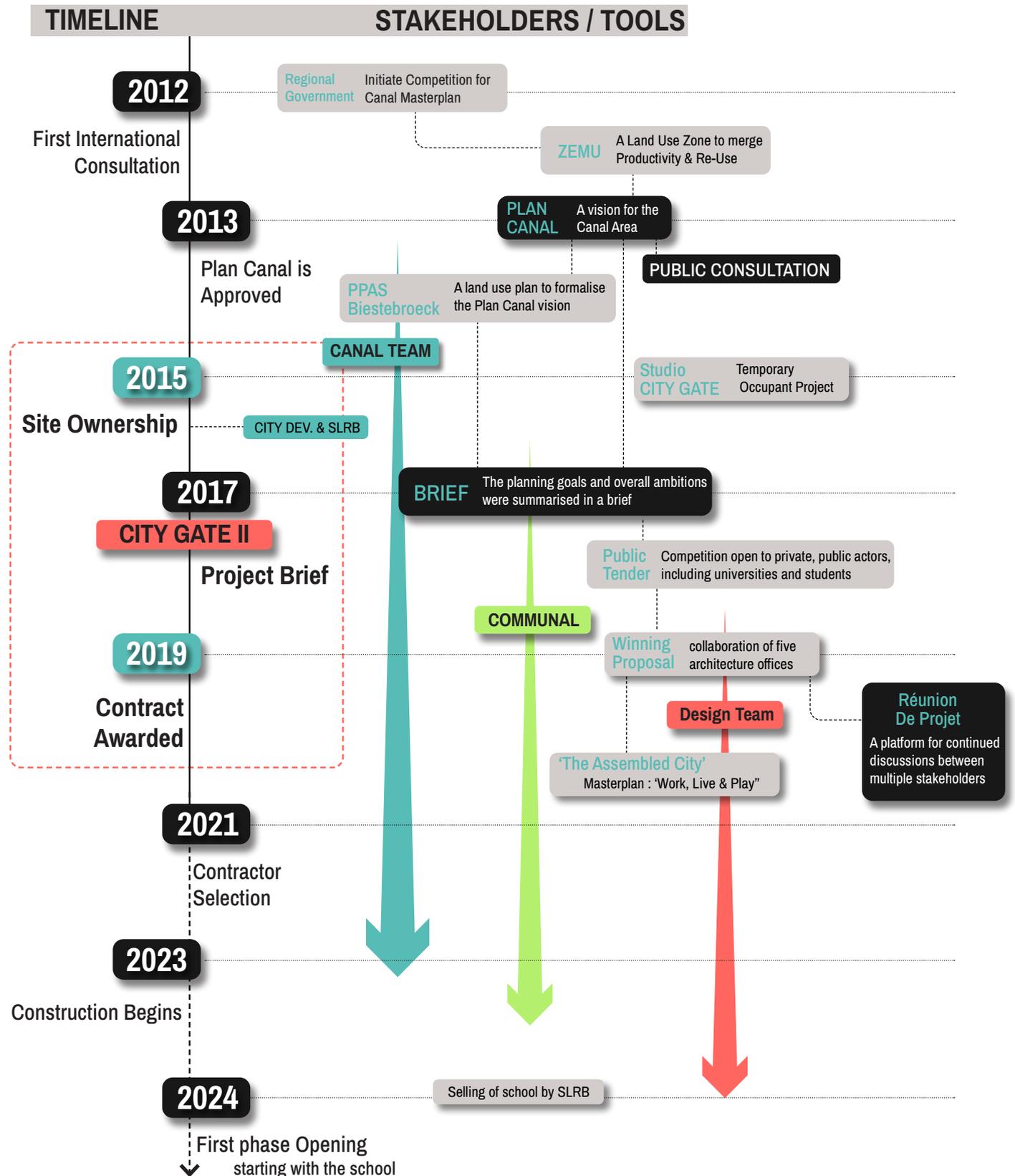


# Stakeholders

The Canal Team, a group of regional actors already formed as part of the official co-operation, got its name from the Plan Canal, Brussels' vision for developing the quays of the canal throughout the city. The team members involved are:

- The Urban Development Corporation (SAU) of the Brussels-Capital Region, responsible for carrying out

- major urban development projects in Brussels and constructing public facilities of regional significance.
- Bouwmeester Maître Architecte (BMA), the Chief Architect of the Brussels-Capital Region, who acts as a supervisor of the overall Canal Plan vision and plays an advisory role to ensure a high level of architectural and urban quality.



## Analysis Framework

- Urban.brussels, formerly known as Brussels' Planning and Heritage, in charge of assessing all applications for regional permits in the Canal Plan zone. The team is involved from the submission of applications to issuing the urban planning permission.
- Perspective.brussels, the Brussels Planning Bureau in charge of the general planning, expansion and monitoring of the regulatory framework of spatial planning in Brussels.

After the regulatory actors, there are the acquirers of the site; the landowners and developers:

- SLRB (Société du Logement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale) is the supervisor of the social housing companies and is in charge of building new social housing. SLRB bought the western plots on the site of Petite Île in 2017 to build social housing, a part of the school, new spaces for Foyer Anderlechtois (a social housing organisation) and workshop space.
- Citydev, a regional developer with two main tasks: Economic expansion through (1) making land or buildings available to companies and promoting the economic development of the region and urban renewal; and (2) building medium-sized owner-occupied homes. On the site of Petite Île, Citydev owns the eastern plot and the Studio City Gate building.

Nonprofit organisations were also involved in the final programme for the site:

- Le Foyer Anderlechtois, a social housing company in Anderlecht. While the SLRB is one of the plot's owners and is building the new social housing, the apartments will be sold to and managed by Foyer Anderlechtois.
- Ecole de Tous, chosen by the municipality of Anderlecht to lead the pedagogic project of the school. When completed, the municipality will become the owner of the school.

In addition, many designers, architects and consultants were involved. A team of five architectural firms, three offices from Brussels (Aurélié Hachez Architecte, Elseline Bazin and noArchitecten), one from Rotterdam (Korteknie Stuhlmacher Architecten) and one from London (Sergison Bates architects), won the design competition organised with the Brussels BMA.

During the development process, the site owners allowed temporary use of vacant spaces. Different cultural organisations now organise activities in the former industrial building of Studio City Gate. Skatepark Byrrrh has been there for two years now and Volta also moved from Ixelles to Anderlecht six months ago. The temporary use is managed by Entrakt.

Other local organisations that were involved in the process are Le Comité du Bout du Monde, ULAC (Union de Locataires Anderlecht-Cureghem), Médecin du Monde, Cultureghem, Le Foyer Anderlechtois, PCS Goujons, Medikuregem, TRAVIE, Plastoria.

To analyse the different governance tools used in the project, we developed our own analysis framework (presented on the next page) that categorises the tools by their characteristics.

Firstly, the tools are divided into those which focus on **quality culture** and prioritise the process in order to establish a long-lasting relationship between the stakeholders, and those tools which focus on **quality delivery** and prioritise the outcome and quality at different key moments. Quality culture tools are often more time-consuming and hence more difficult to support financially, whereas quality delivery tools require less budget. Secondly, the tools are categorised by their formality range: formal tools, which are obligatory and symbolise the hard power of local authorities; and informal tools, which represent soft powers and other stakeholders who informally influence the process or the outcome. These governance tools each possess a different hierarchy: the more institutionalised a tool is, the more power it has.

The analysis framework itself is created by two axes that form four quadrants and therefore four categories. The first quadrant of the scheme is the quality delivery/ formal axis where the most formal and institutionalised tools, e.g zoning plans and future visions, fit. In the case of Petite Île, ZEMU, the design competition and Plan Canal can be found here. Because Plan Canal is the future vision for Brussels, it is closer to quality culture. At the same time, there is less space for informal and soft powers.

Moving down, we find the formal tools that aim towards better urban design by having a diverse design team with different expertise backgrounds to maximise the design quality. The different partnerships, like the Plan Canal co-operation, underline the process and are also located in this quadrant. Involving different stakeholders makes the decision-making process more complex, but also more solid and futureproof for the local society.

Softer power tools are in the lower left quadrant. Greater focus on the process requires more flexibility in the project, but it can ultimately add social value. Transparent and socially inclusive tools improve the design process. The Research by Design tool is placed here as it allows for more dialogue between different stakeholders.

The informal quality delivery tools are placed in the last quadrant. The informality level of these tools shows that social values are often neglected from a quality delivery perspective. It is important to note that the timeline for the use of these tools was not taken into account in this categorisation. Informal tools are often only introduced at the end of a project in order to get some minor feedback and finalise the project. Including soft power tools earlier in the process could result in a more balanced inclusion of different ideas at an earlier stage. Here the stumbling block is the informality: how can an informal tool be part of an obligatory requirement?



## Important processes, collaborations and outcomes

One of the main goals of the project was to develop the site of Petite Île into a mixed-use neighborhood that brings the past, present and the future together. In order to meet the goal and preserve the heritage, the project went through various critical milestones with different stakeholders, community engagement and co-design processes.

The site is in the former industrial zone along the canal. In 2012, as part of the development plan for the canal, the city decided to rezone the canal area from an industrial zone to ZEMU Zone. In 2013, the Plan Canal was approved as the new Vision Masterplan, and the regional actors' representatives formed the Canal Team. In 2015 the Canal Team announced that the site had been acquired by both SLRB & Citydev. Placed within our analytical framework, the Canal Plan vision is closer to quality culture, as it is part of Brussel's future vision. In terms of quality culture, it is interesting to note that, in the beginning, the existing community was not engaged in the process. Cultural heritage received a lot of attention, but the focus was more on the built environment and the preservation of the existing building stock than on social issues. This caused confusion among the locals.

In 2017, the community representatives were invited to participate in workshops and meetings in order to set planning goals and overall ambitions for the project together. The Canal Team and community representatives were involved to ensure the achievement of the Plan Canal initial vision. This was an important stage in the process, allowing the public and local community to cooperate, interact and help to form a solid project brief with clear objectives. As a result, private firms and public actors, including universities and students, were invited to participate in an open design competition.

In 2019, the competition was won by a team of five design firms. The winning team collaborated with a sustainability expert in order to ensure that the project had a sustainable and environmentally friendly approach. The project was titled The Assembled City – Work, Play & Live, reflecting the rich mixed-use programme mentioned earlier. The school 'École de Tous' was a major player in creating such a diverse community and played a large role as a stakeholder in framing the project, leading to the design team creating a new type of innovative school with the aim of ensuring a mixed population in the neighborhood.

Ultimately, the development process of Petite Île is a result of multiple interactions, starting from the Plan Canal vision and ZEMU zoning plan right up until the interactive design process to form the Assembled City. This interactive process involved public, private and communal sectors, creating a co-design framework.

Reflecting on the process, it succeeded in involving multiple stakeholders in a complex project, achieving the goal of

preserving the heritage and simultaneously creating a livable neighborhood for everyone. Although such interactions and collaborations act as soft tools in forming and shaping the project brief, the locals and their representatives were not included from the beginning. Instead, they were invited during or at the end of the process, after the bigger alignments had already been made. This created a sense of quiet exclusion which was not consistent with achieving the desired engagement in the project.

It is possible that the ZEMU plan is not really working or achieving the mix that it claims to do (living & working), since only very light industrial activities are permitted on the plot, which has the effect of excluding many skilled workers and certain whole industries. On another hand, Réunion De Projet City Gate, which is a platform for continuous discussion between multiple stakeholders, was a useful tool to ensure the participation of all the stakeholders, even inviting local representatives, making the process more transparent and knowable to the neighborhood.

## Recommendations

The interaction between actors was extremely complex, which was reflected in the tools employed to endorse the process. We have the impression that coordination and exchange between formal and informal powers could have been better integrated and harmonised so that all the actors would have been involved, making the process smoother.

To achieve such a harmony, an independent stakeholder should act as the main organiser for the participatory process to better engage locals, previous users, temporary users and future users. Such an informal actor could also provide an evaluation of the process, and ensure the equality and transparency of the participatory process and decision making. In addition, great impact needs a clear goal and continuous evaluation of social value, even after construction.

A further question is: what is the main tool that is needed throughout the process? We believe the most important tool in such a complex project that is necessary to achieve the goal of a "city within a city" is PARTICIPATION. It is a tool that creates mixity and exchange between formal and informal power, helps to have clearer and more direct communication, and creates a clear goal through continuous evaluation.

## Additional interviews

After studying the developing process and analysing the governance components that have shaped Petite Île, we decided to look beyond the official framework. Although we got the chance to hear about the process from different parties, they all represented the client's side. Our team wanted to know more about the community's experiences. We contacted different people who were involved with this site in the past, present and future. They were all involved at different stages, which gives us an interesting view on how the project initiators engaged external parties over time. Below are some critiques and experiences we have heard from our interviewees.

### Past

#### ZEMU - A GOOD IDEA?

For the first interview, we talked with Steyn Van Assche, who represents BRAL, a citizen action movement in Brussels. BRAL has over 40 years' experience in striving for urban livability. Steyn gave us some insight about what happened before Petite Île/ City Gate II was launched. "There was much discussion about the canal zone Biestebroeck and the rezoning with ZEMU, specifically about the abolition of productive industrial zones in exchange for housing zones. The areas that were targeted were considered necessary to keep the productivity and labour with the unavoidable noise, nuisance and traffic close to the canal."

#### BUYING LAND BEFORE REZONING

Even before the Plan Canal was launched and no concrete plans were prepared by Chemetoff, the speculating promoters bought land there. After the rezoning, the land became more valuable and the developers made great profits. At this point, the authorities should have been stricter and moved to acquire the industrial land first, in order to avoid it becoming private property.

#### LOW SKILLED WORK OPPORTUNITY

Petite Île/ City Gate II is a public project and set to be an example. The canal zone is important in terms of employment and manufacturing activity. Citydev reserves 10% of the space for manufacturing and productivity, but these are often offices, shops and bars, with no actual manufacturing. Some of the spaces are not even occupied, since enough money is already earned from the apartments on the other floors. Why not mix horizontally instead of vertically and allow more labour-related productivity?

### Present

#### BUSINESS PLAN, NOT SOCIAL WORK

Youssef received help from Citydev to build an indoor skatepark. It was a temporary agreement, so he knew from the start it was a temporary project and therefore he will not

be disappointed when he has to leave. For him, this is a good solution because the market price is a double of the current rent in Studio City Gate. "For Entrakt (the 'curator' of the temporary users), it's a business plan, not social work. Now we have a good relationship with Citydev. They are happy with us and what we build, also because we organize skate camps for children. Every Wednesday afternoon we teach children to skate at a local school in Anderlecht."

#### SKATEBOARDING IS GOOD FOR THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Youssef Abaoud was not invited to participate, and the design team did not reach out to involve him. "I did see the plans and I know that there will be an outdoor skatepark. They did not ask for my contribution concerning the new skatepark. But I don't mind, and I will find another place in Brussels with Citydev. I'm just happy they planned skateboarding here in the future. Skateboarding is a great sport and very popular so it's good that it will have a place. Skateboarding is good for neighborhoods and should be included in plans more."

### Future

#### NOBODY PLAYS BADMINTON

Citydev and SLRB programmed a school in the heart of the site. The municipality of Anderlecht hired École de Tous to represent the local authority in the development process. Benoit Koot and Victoria Forget explained their role in the process. Since 2018, École de Tous participated in the selection of the architects and analysed the plans of the five projects. Following the selection they were also involved in the design process and worked closely with the designers. In all phases of the project, they felt like an equal partner and had a lot of flexibility to discuss and reflect on all topics. "We didn't see a lot of citizens, but we did see the organisations that work with them, so they were represented, and it was a good compromise. A good example was that the designers drew a badminton terrain and the neighborhood association said nobody plays badminton in Anderlecht."

#### A SHARING PHILOSOPHY

École de Tous has a pilot project on the site with a mixed school population. "We will have students from the new neighborhood, but we also aim to attract people from Anderlecht. Mixity is the core of our project. If we don't have mixity in the surroundings, then our project will not succeed. We also experiment with shared infrastructure for the neighborhood. All the sport terrains and halls, the library, the FABlab, all these infrastructures will be accessible for the neighbourhood after school hours. In our project we planned to work closely with local partners so that some parts of the school remain open after school hours to make it accessible, letting the people use our space. It's a sharing philosophy."

## Conclusion

“The combination of developers, functions, stakeholders and the large team of designers makes City Gate II / Klein Eiland a very complex project” explained Benjamin Cadranel of Citydev (Bruzz, 2020). For us, too, it was a challenging project to analyse. We started with the constellation of actors. The reality of interaction between them was more complex than expected. We aimed for a clear representation of the involvement of actors through the use of a timeline. We identified the milestone moments from the vision of Plan Canal to the future users of the site. After this exercise, we noticed that some of the stakeholders were missing. For example, the current neighbourhood inhabitants and temporary users were not strongly represented in the process. It seemed that the project initiators approached Petite Île/ City Gate II as an empty arena but in reality, there were different actors involved. That’s also why we reached out to a few representative actors to hear their opinions.

The concept of transforming an industrial zone to an urban zone is quite generic. A lot of cities struggle with rapid population growth and look for unconventional zones for housing. Most urban planners applaud density, especially in such sprawled regions as Flanders and Wallonia in Belgium, but creating such dense and brand-new neighborhoods in industrial zones can create quite big expectations. We could argue about how innovative and how future proof this project actually is. We agree that the design team did excellent work within the

parameters of the design brief. On the other hand, the design brief is almost the only communication that has reached the designers. It is interesting to see if all the needs from different stakeholders are consolidated in this document, and how flexible the interpretation could be.

We examined the different tools that were used and determined an imbalance between soft and hard powers. This also explains the critique this project has received from the surroundings, because it is heavily-weighted towards formal actors. A lack of inclusivity during the development process often translates to distrust after finalisation of the project. Allowing more space for local actors would have resulted in a more robust design and more public support and recognition after realisation. In our recommendations, we highlighted the importance of participation and came up with an idea of another independent stakeholder, who would be in charge of the participation process and also evaluate the process. This tool is presented in the diagram below.

Although the name of the project “Petite Île” translates into English as ‘Small Island’, this project should not have become an urban island in the surroundings. Instead, it should have been more embedded within the existing tissue, embracing the industrial past through a more mixed program in terms of work and living, but also through an active involvement of citizens from the neighbourhood and current users of the site.

