

PUPILLENSITE TE AALST
AUTONOOM GEMEENTEBEDRIJF STADSONTWIKKELING AALST
OO2904



INTRODUCTIE / CONCEPT NOTA

The Pupillen-site is a collection of different objects distributed through the centre of Aalst. This group of objects occupies a relevant portion of the city centre (almost the entire north-eastern sector) and therefore is crucial for the definition of the future of the entire city. An idea for the Pupillen-site is an idea for Aalst altogether. It implies an interpretation of the role of the city in the Brussels metropolitan region, an understanding of the everyday rhythm of the town, an investigation of its unexpected moments of eruption.

Transforming the Pupillen site does not just imply the development of a design, but requires the definition of a method to look at this ensemble (an attitude towards description) and a strategy to organize the ensuing process. This means that the crucial operation is to observe: to check the balance in between the Pupillen site and the city around it, to recognize their mutual adjustments, to detect changes in the urban processes as soon as they appear.

For this reason, more than a simple design, we propose a commitment to observation, a style of description and a strategy of action. We believe it is crucial to recognize all available assets, to define all possible protagonists of the transformation, to activate all energies and to imagine a possible discourse that could bring all these

different subjects together. The urban challenge is also a geographical, economical and rhetorical one.

Knowing the central and highly symbolic position of the site, the carnival is of course used as a key figure here. Although the carnival is not directly our subject we use its extraordinarily joyful dimension in order to develop a much broader scope regarding what we call a 'joie de vivre'. This notion of joy of life is translated into various programs related to food and fest. Food as a collective and joyful experience is thus used as a recurring element thought the project and throughout the different courtyards of the pupillen-site.

We believe that our design and strategy fully respond to the ambitions and questions formulated initially in the brief, amongst which the need for an imaginative and innovative design, a subtle private/public articulation, the creation of urban dynamics by re-use of existing monuments and finally the creation of green spaces and connections through the urban fabric. We explain more in detail the actions taken in that sense through the 6 following chapters : (1) The city and the region , (2) Carnival , (3) Joie de vivre, (4) A vision for the Pupillen-site/ a vision for Aalst, (5) Public - Private and (6) Green city/gray city.

1. THE CITY AND THE REGION

Aalst is not easy to decipher. Neither the Pupillen-site is. The city is too small to be really independent from the rest of the Brussels metropolitan region and at the same time it does not seem to establish any obvious link (either in terms of urban form or in terms of way of life) with the metropolitan centre. Also the apparent quiet of the city seems a form of disguise of an identity that is not entirely revealed.

We do not think that our project should intervene as an act of reduction, forcing a univocal identity over the city; we believe that the complexity of the city is an asset and we think that the urban strategy should aim at expanding the multitude of possibilities enclosed into the city. Aalst should not become simpler; Aalst should become richer.

Aalst is the administrative centre of a district of 130,000 inhabitants, located exactly between Brussels and Gent, in the middle of the densest territory of Flanders. These geographical conditions do not disappear once we focus our attention on the city centre and on the Pupillen-site. The proposal for the transformation of the Pupillen-site must be able to understand and challenge the city at its many different scales, reading the territory into the architectural types and proposing a possible new way of life by simply modifying flows and uses inside the city.

The Pupillen-site should be redeveloped taking into consideration three main levels:

- a) the city centre, with the Pupillen-site in between the station, the Grote Markt and the Tereos-Syral factory. Inside this realm the atmosphere is urban, and everything lays in walking distance. Here public space is crucial for the quality of life and for the creation of job opportunities;
- b) the Aalst hinterland, with the small towns (Erembodegem, Lede, Langestraat, Denderleeuw, Babbelaar) and the two major hospitals, and the agricultural landscape;
- c) the metropolitan region including East Flanders, Gent and Brussels. At this scale, influences are mutual, with more and more people moving from Brussels to live in Aalst, and people from Aalst using the metropolitan assets available in Brussels. The populations of the different centres of this area are way less separated than we tend to think and they are connected through family links and normally migrate from one point to the other of the metropolitan region through their professional life.

We believe that Aalst city centre should not become a pure service provider for the hinterland (which is often the case for mid-scale Flemish cities). As a consequence we think that the city centre (and the Pupillen-site) should not just develop into a mix of shops, parking lots, and historical atmosphere (or, in other words, into a shopping mall disguised as a historical city centre). This is why we think that the Pupillen-site should be programmed carefully, in order for people to live there. Consequently housing is of crucial importance and public amenities should be introduced into the city in order for people to live there.

Lastly, the project should integrate all these scales and dimensions not just in terms of physical requirements and economical performances but also in terms of spatial experience and collective memory.



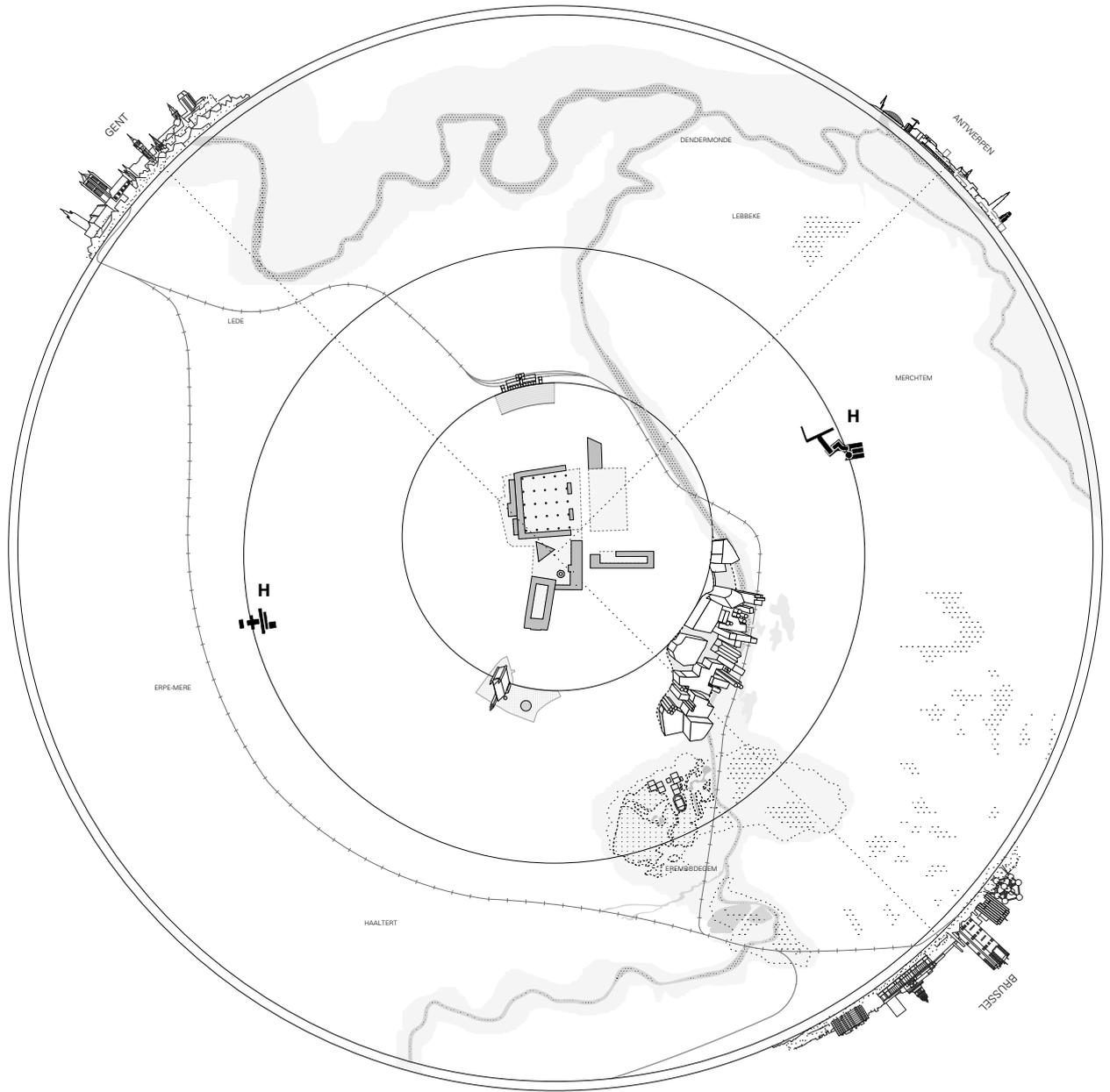
1. Tereos fabriek



2. Pupillen binnenplaats



3. Aalst trouwzaal



2. CARNIVAL

Aalst carnival is one of the main carnivals in Europe. Carnival puts a relatively small city like Aalst in the same range as Basel, Binche, Cadiz, Cologne, Ivrea, Mainz, Nice, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Viareggio and Venice. Although carnival – in its current form – has been organized only since 1923, the first references to Shrove Tuesday celebrations in Aalst date back to the fifteenth century, making Aalst carnival almost six hundred years old.

Carnival does not just mean the days from Sunday to Tuesday, but it involves also all the preparation, with thousands of volunteers grouped in several organizations working in the various halls spread through the city for the production of the floats and of the other components of the festival. Carnival in fact officially kicks off on Epiphany, when candidates for the title of Prince Carnival are introduced to the crowds.

Aalst carnival proved to be an event capable to resist in time maintaining a strong connotation, while at the same time being able to re-invent itself in several occasions (for instance, the now characteristic “throwing of onions” before the Monday parade, is a relatively “new” feature, which happened for the first time in 1957). Although now registered by UNESCO as a “Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity” the Carnival will remain a living happening, shaping the city as well as being shaped by the city.

Carnival knows no audience. Everybody in the carnival is a protagonist of the event.

During the Carnival, none of Aalst inhabitants knows any other life than the carnival. It is impossible to escape, carnival has no spatial boundaries. During the carnival, private space deflates, while public space inflates to fill every accessible open-air space of the city. The borders move and destroy usual hierarchies. The city becomes a total public space. As in a radically serious application of the famous drawing conventions of the map of Rome by Nolli, in Aalst, during carnival, all accessible space becomes public space, all inner courtyards become squares.

Carnival becomes a tool to investigate the city: carnival indeed occupies the space of the city in a paradoxical way, and yet, by imposing this stress on the city, carnival reveals its purest structure, its hidden potential.

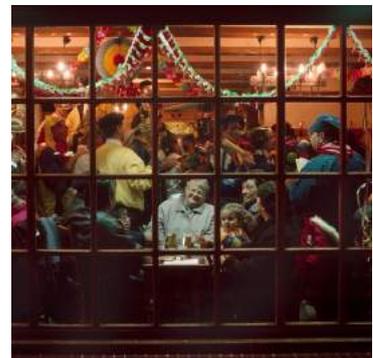
While our project for the Pupillen-site has no immediate connection to carnival, it uses carnival in order to understand spaces and scales, and it tries to build upon carnival’s extreme public nature. Carnival in fact shows that Aalst is inhabited by a plurality of times. The exceptional time of the Carnival does not entirely disappear during the rest of the year. The carnival remains as a possibility of an entirely different world, a potential dimension of the city that never disappear into the everyday city. This complex urban calendar (both regular and exceptional, both sober and festive, both pragmatic and ritualistic) can be even more evident into the city. Aalst can use the energy of the carnival to produce urbanity all over the year. The traces of the carnival can be recorded by architectural elements and remain in the city as silent signs of the festive time. The plural and dialogic nature of the carnival (Bakhtin) can resurface inside of the city as a series of fragments, of silent signs of a possible world.



1. Harry Gruyaert, *Dunkerque Carnival*, 2000



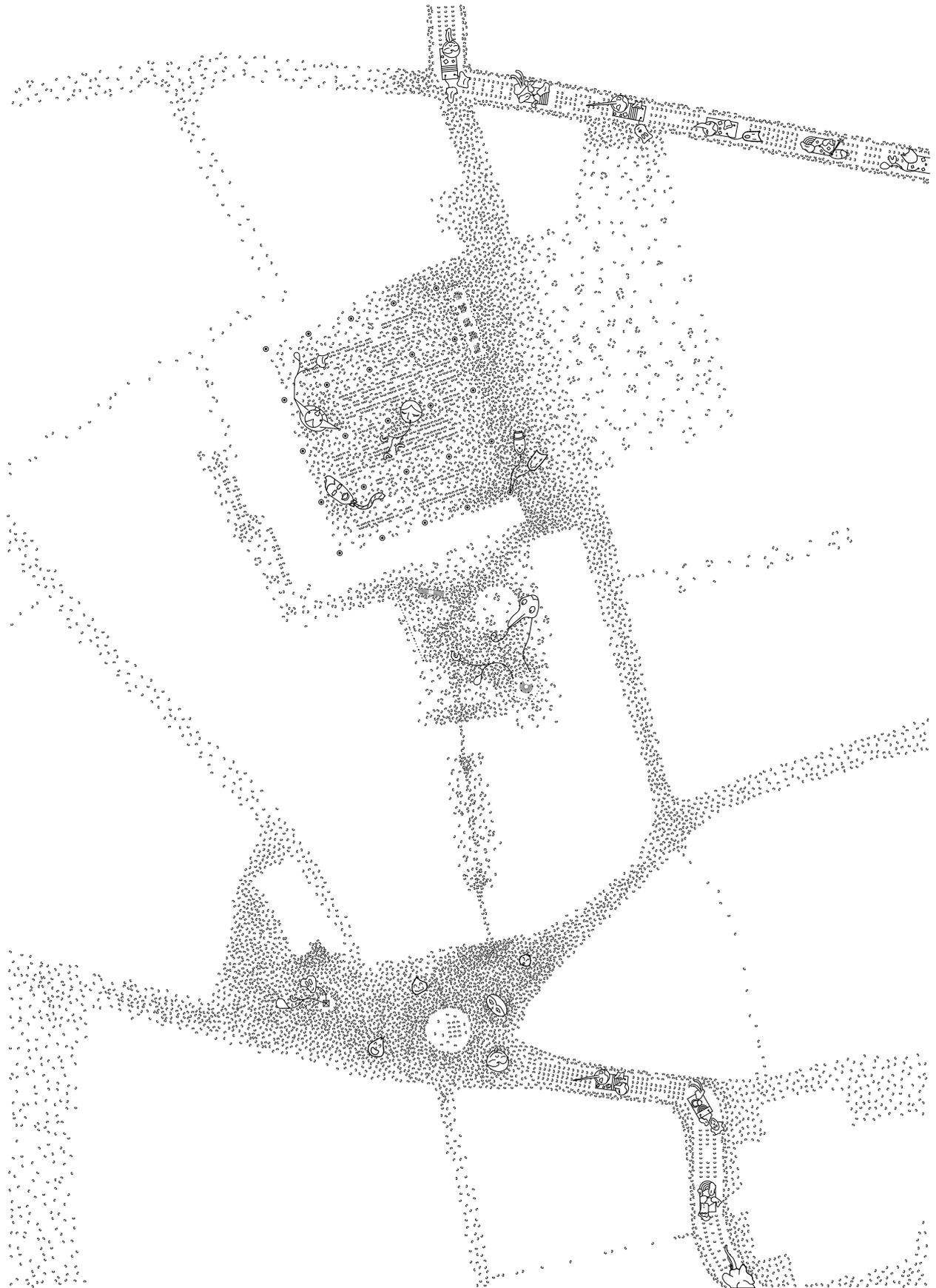
2. Harry Gruyaert, *Aalst Carnival*, 1975

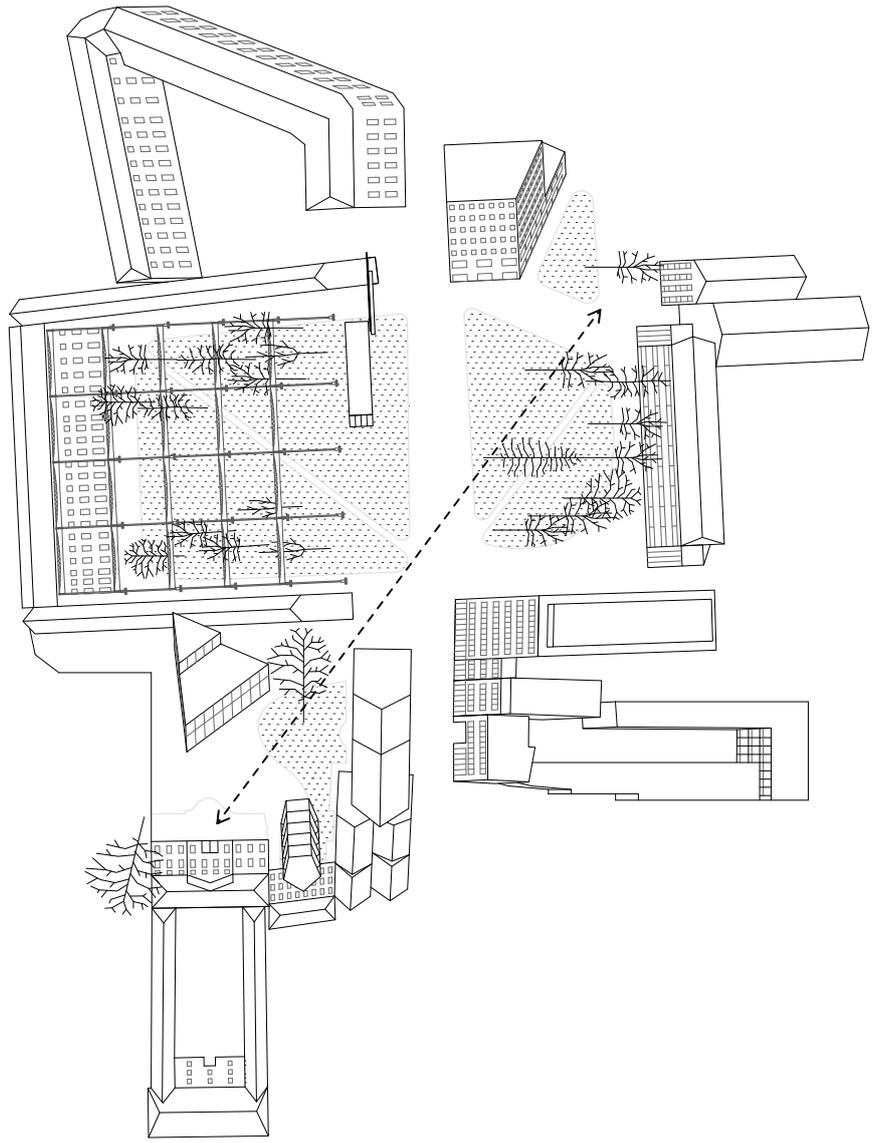


3. Harry Gruyaert, *Bailleul Carnival*, 2000



4. Mardi Gras, Munich





PROGRAM & FLEXIBILTY

The Pupillen-site has always played a central part in Aalst's city life. In order to transform the Pupillen-site and give it a new start, it is crucial to introduce a new program into it and to imagine how it could immerge into the urban realm.

A transformation that simply turns the previous public buildings into houses will never succeed without imagining what kind of public life will take place there. It is only by inserting a new form of urban life that the system will come back to life and give a new image to the city. As such, the public side of the program (although quantitatively minor) is crucial for the economic success of the operation.

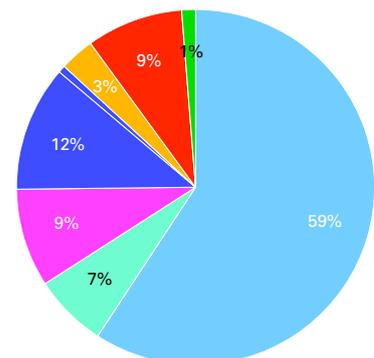
The main theme developed throughout the project is related to food but on a new scale, not the like the traditional pubs that already exist in the city centre. By associating various food programs and other small programs such as offices, workshops, small business, in different environments and proportions, a hole new realm is created around « eating culture ». The architecture of the buildings on site and qualitative open spaces are a huge asset for this sort of program, offering some large spectacular rooms and calm outdoor spaces.

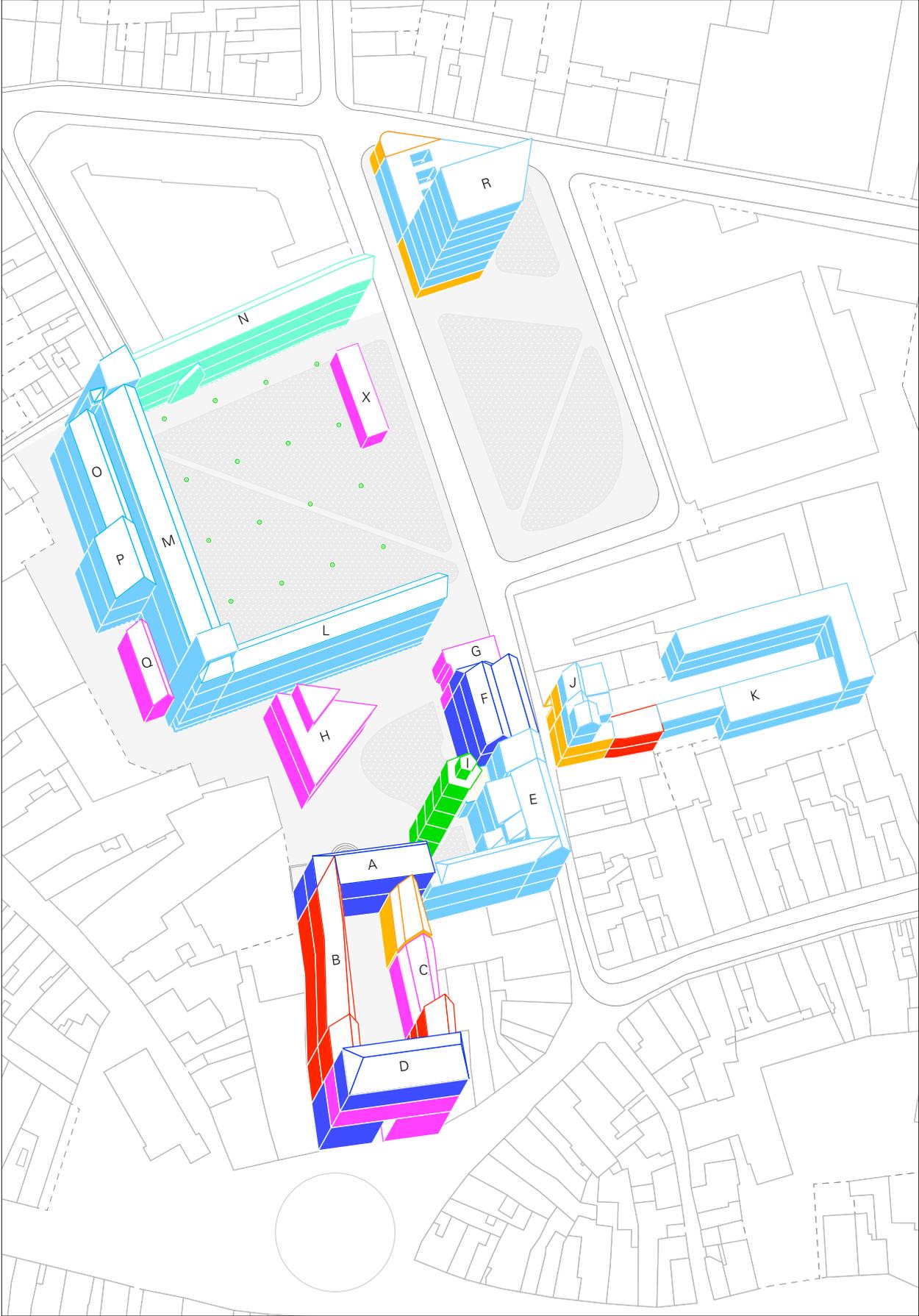
We propose to introduce three types of program:

- a) a thematized series of functions related to food & drink (shops, workshops, restaurants, brasserie, gastronomic pub, horeca, market, kitchen facilities...);
- b) small scale private business, such as shops, offices: these facilities will complement the previous ones, providing the necessary counterpart to the main attractors. These facilities will also contribute to the liveliness of the area and guarantee the safety of the environment;
- c) housing – composing the bulk of the transformation (ca. 66% of the overall built surface) – will give financial stability to the project and adapt to other functions, somehow remaining in the background and profiting from the energy that other program will introduce into public space. There are 3 types of housing in the project : in existing buildings high standard dwellings and housing for elderly people (linked to silver economy) and in new buildings smaller size dwellings attracting a younger, more active part of the population.

Overall by offering a qualitative convivial living environment the project will draw a varied population to the heart of the city.

RESIDENTIEEL GEBOUWEN	10 950	59 %
ASSISTENTIEWONINGEN	1 218	7 %
RECA & MARKT	1 664	9 %
HOTEL	2 134	12 %
CEREMONIEZAAL	108	1 %
RETAIL	578	3 %
KANTOREN	1 629	9 %
OPEN STRUCTUREN	225	1 %
TOTAAL	18 507	100 %

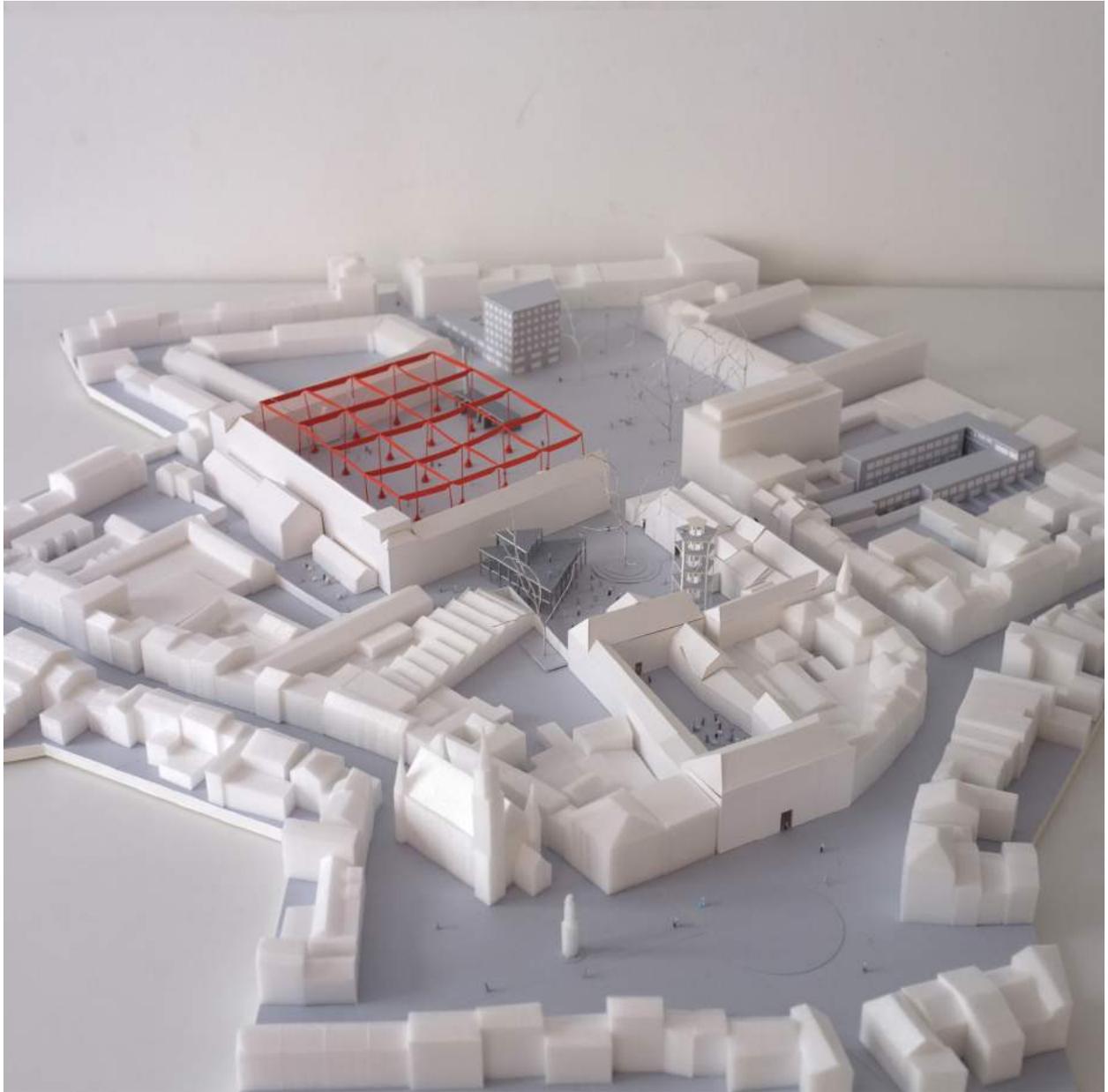




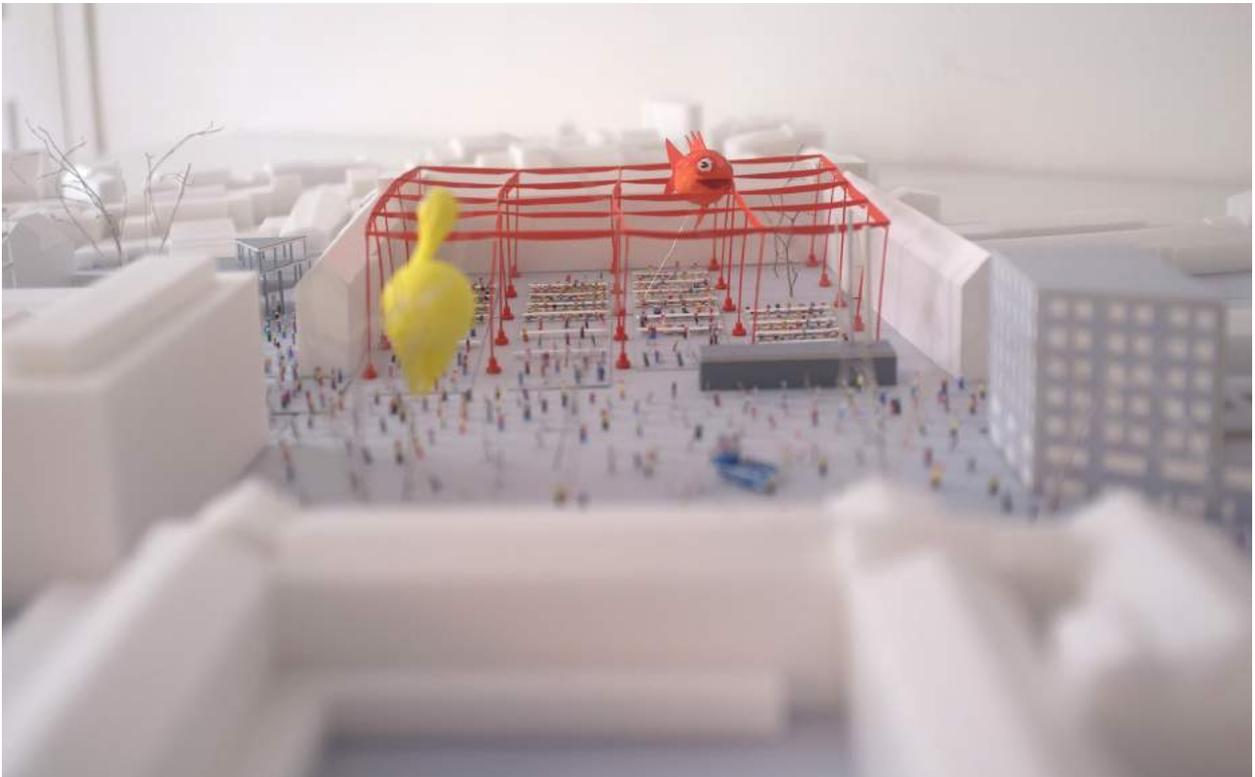
MODEL PICTURES



Carnaval tijd



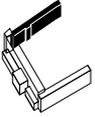
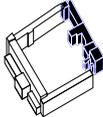
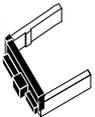
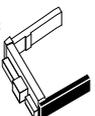
Dagelijks leven

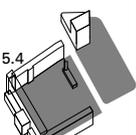


Carnaval tijd

PROGRAM QUANTITIES

	Oppervlak	Gebouw beperkt	Eigendom	Programma (m2)	Parkeren	Afbraak	Oppervlak
1: Stadhuis 1.1 	796 m ²	279 m ²	Publiek/Privaat	Hotel: 651 m ² Trouwzaal: 145 m ²	-	-	-
1.2 	896 m ²	397 m ²	Privaat	Shops, kantoren, Cafes : 896 m ²	-	-	-
1.3 	1409 m ²	414 m ²	Publiek & privaat	Hotel: 940 m ² Restaurant: 469 m ²	-	-	-
1.4 	948 m ²	345 m ²	Privaat	Shops, kantoren, Cafes : 948 m ²	-	-	-
2: Hotel Van Langenhove & ZWarte Zusters 	720 m ²	320 m ²	Publiek/Privaat	Markt/Cafe: 720 m ²	-	-	-
2.2 	314 m ²	63 m ²	Publiek/Privaat	Culturele structuur: 314 m ²	-	-	-
2.3 	3793 m ²	1204 m ²	Privaat	Behuizing: 2321 m ² Hotel: 1264 m ² Restaurant: 208 m ²	-	-	-
3: Huis de Bolle 3.1 	672 m ²	211 m ²	Privaat	Shops, kantoren, behuizing : 672 m ²	-	-	-
3.2 	2385 m ²	1510 m ²	Privaat	Behuizing: 2385 m ²	1097 m ² (45 plaats)	Oppervlak: 2936 m ²	-

	Oppervlak	Gebouw beperkt	Eigendom	Programma (m2)	Parkeren	Afbraak	Oppervlak
4: Pupillen & Graanmarkt 4.1.1 	2032 m ²	515 m ²	Privaat	Shops, kantoren: 508 m ² Behuizing: 1524 m ²	1560 m ² (66 plaats)	 Oppervlak: 3127 m ²	-
4.1.2 	3723 m ²	1319 m ²	Privaat	Behuizing: 2956 m ² Werkplaats: 640 m ² Pub: 126 m ²			
4.1.3 	2104 m ²	486 m ²	Privaat	Behuizing: 2104 m ²			
4.2 	150 m ²	150 m ²	Publiek	Keuken: 151 m ²	-	-	-
4.3 	3700 m ²	924 m ²	Privaat	Behuizing: 3200 m ² Shops, kantoren: 500 m ²	-	-	-
TOTAL	23 492 m²						

5: Open Spaces 5.1 	842 m ²	842 m ²	Publiek	Voedselmarkt: 842 m ²	-	-	Ondoordringbaar 100%
5.2 	4500 m ²	4500 m ²	Publiek	Open ruimte: 4500 m ²	-	-	Ondoordringbaar 70% Doordringbaar 30%
5.3 	641 m ²	641 m ²	Semi Privaat	Courtyard: 641 m ²	-	-	Ondoordringbaar 60% Doordringbaar 40%
5.4 	6187 m ² (pupillen only)	6187 m ²	Publiek	Park: 6187 m ²	-	-	Ondoordringbaar 30% Doordringbaar 70%
TOTAAL	12 423 m²						