



December 2022 – January 2023

Special Edition: Quality Matters



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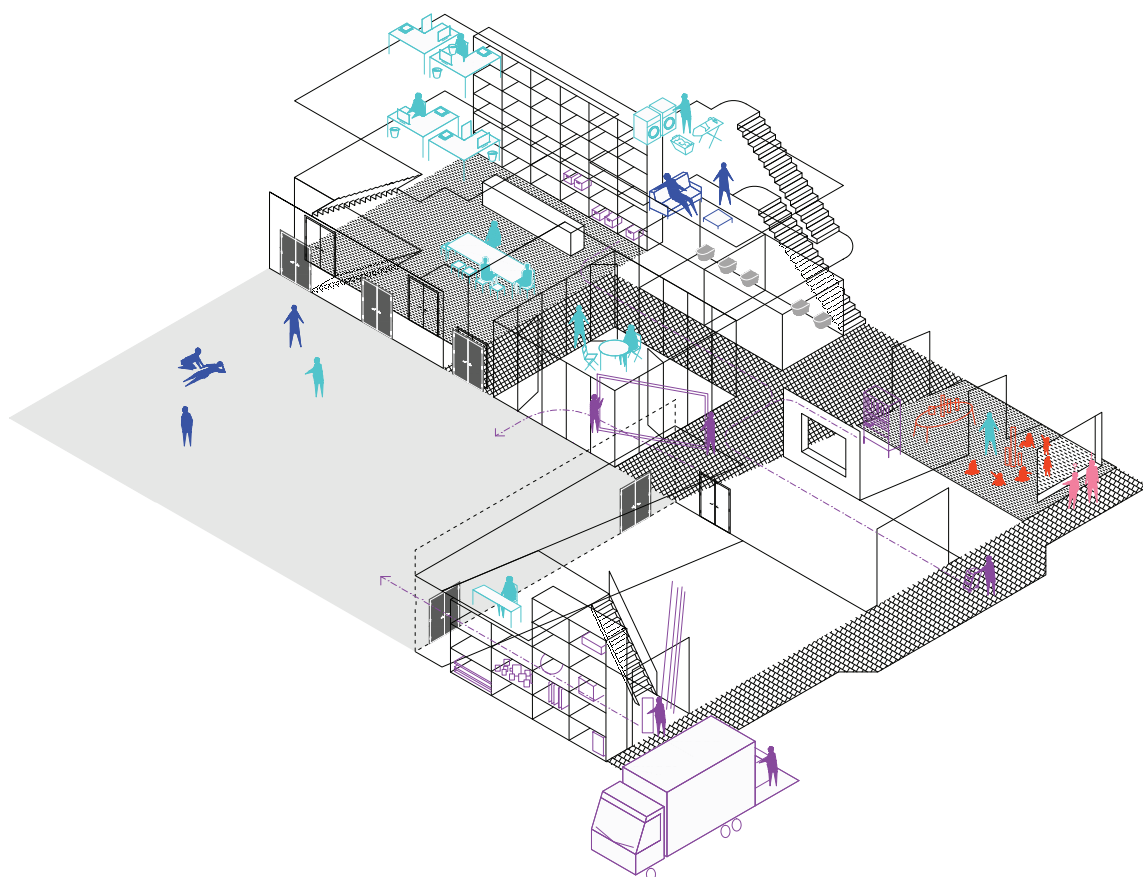
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*Emmanuel van der Beek*





**Arnaud De Sutter**

is an architectural engineer (Ghent University, 2020). During his studies he did several internships, including at Bovenbouw Architectuur. He joined Areal Architecten at the end of 2022. Besides his work as an architect, he publishes regularly in *A+* and *De Witte Raaf*.

**Gilles Debrun**

is an architect. Since 2010 he has been teaching at the Faculty of Architecture of UCLouvain. In 2019 he co-founded with Dimitri Fache the research workshop on architecture Usages. Together with Pauline de La Boulaye, he edited the book and curated the exhibition *Inventaires #3 Architectures Wallonie-Bruxelles 2016-2020*.

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is an architect. She teaches at the Faculty of Architecture La Cambre Horta of ULB. She was a project manager for ten years at Bureau V+ and currently works with the collective Grue.

**Jean-Michel Leclercq**

studied anthropology and communication in Liège. A musician, he is also a freelance journalist, writing mostly for the design magazine *Gael Maison/Feeling Wonen* but also for *Médor*, *Dérivations* and *Le Vif*. In November 2022 he released *J'habite ici aussi* (CFC Editions), an illustrated book made with Marie Mahler about encounters with wild animals in the city.

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**Eloïse Perrillon**

is an architect. She graduated from ENSA Saint-Étienne and La Cambre Horta in 2018 with a master's thesis on the persistence of the individual house myth. She works at Karbon' architecture et urbanisme.

**Sven Sterken**

obtained both a master's in architectural engineering and a PhD from Ghent University. He is currently an associate professor at the Faculty of Architecture of KU Leuven. His research focuses primarily on how architecture serves the territorial strategies of commercial, religious and political organizations.

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teaches at the University of Antwerp. In 2014 he obtained a PhD in history (University of Antwerp) and architectural engineering (Vrije Universiteit Brussel). His research focuses on the historical evolution of urban green spaces. He is a former head of exhibitions at the Flanders Architecture Institute.

**Pieter T'Jonck**

is an architect. He writes on architecture, the visual arts and the performing arts for several Belgian and foreign newspapers and magazines. He works for the radio station Klara and was editor-in-chief of *A+* in 2017.

**Maarten Van Acker**

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**UPP**  
UNE PIRE DE STICHEREN OM DE PERSOONEN POREN

 **Vlaamse**  
overheid



↳ The former military barracks on Generaal Jacqueslaan in the Brussels municipality of Elsene/Ixelles is being converted into student housing and research facilities for the neighbouring universities of VUB and ULB but also into (social) housing and neighbourhood facilities. In the run-up to the redevelopment, a brief was drawn up for the temporary occupation of the public domain. The eye-catcher was the velodrome on the former training area.





# Learning step by step

Pieter T'Jonck

With their neo-Renaissance façades, the Frits Tous-saint barracks on Generaal Jacqueslaan (the R21) in the Brussels municipality of Elsene/Ixelles appear less impressive than the Quartier Baron de Witte de Haelen barracks on the other side of the railway, in Etterbeek. The barracks are also smaller, 'only' 4 ha compared to 6.5. And yet these barracks are set to become the reference point in the area. Indeed, together with the VUB, ULB and various public housing corporations, the Brussels-Capital Region has repurposed the site as Usquare. brussels, a place for research and education with a food hall, a neighbourhood cinema, (student) housing and much more. The temporary use that SeeU organized on site until recently provided a foretaste of what is to come. The team of the Brussels Government Architect (BMA) supported the fascinating planning process, which relied on a range of work methods. It began with design research and a new planning instrument, the PAD/RPA, but also relied on competitions for designers, additional research and temporary use. As this report shows, this all yielded a rare abundance of quality.

↙

The heritage lends itself to a mixed programme. The design by evr – BC – Callebaut, who all advocate a circular approach, may provide for the demolition of a building to allow wider access to the enclosed site, but the demolition material will be reused on site as much as possible.





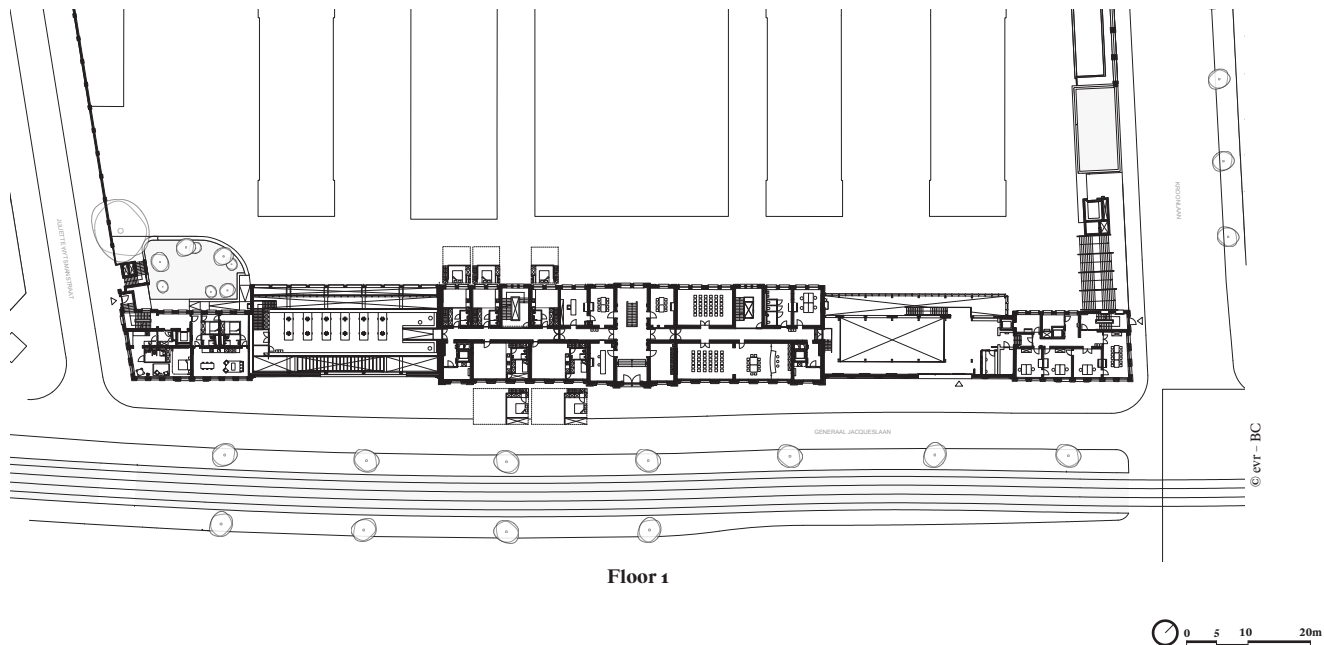
Sébastien Rodesch, project manager at SAU/MSI (the Brussels-Capital Region's Urban Development Corporation), begins his story about the site with a painful anecdote: during WWII, the barracks were mistakenly bombed by the Allies. This explains the strange mix of buildings on the site. The main building on General Jacqueslaan, the arena in the central training area and some other pavilions clearly date from 1906, the year the barracks were put into use as a training centre for the Gendarmerie. However, on either side of the arena and also to the left of the training area, blocks from the 1950s and 1970s replaced the destroyed buildings. The five-storey block from the 1970s on the north side stands out like a sore thumb. The impressive wall around the barracks has also been replaced here by heavy railings. This is where the national emergency call centre 101 was located. Right next door, in the north-east corner of the site, the *Clos des mariés* was preserved intact. This enclave within the barracks is where married recruits used to live. The walls kept their wives separate from rest of the barracks. After all, the barracks were forbidden to women in 1906.

When the Federal Police, which took over the buildings from the Gendarmerie in 2001, announced in 2015 that it was moving out, both the VUB and ULB immediately saw the site's potential to house student accommodation as well as research spaces, fab labs and more. After all, both universities

have their headquarters nearby, on the former training area of the Etterbeek barracks. The rectors Paul De Knop (VUB) and Yvon Englert (ULB) saw this as an excellent opportunity to strengthen their strategic and spatial position together. When the late Caroline Pauwels became rector in 2016, she endorsed the project with no less enthusiasm. 'That was a good thing', notes Rodesch, 'because that way both communities were immediately represented in the operation'.

However, the region was not standing idly by, either. It commissioned a study from MSA and Origin Architecture & Engineering in 2016. These examined, on the basis of (historical) plan material and some visits (the barracks being, after all, still in use), the possibilities of the site and the buildings. They concluded that the heritage lent itself to a mixed programme, with university buildings as well as housing and neighbourhood facilities. That convinced the Region to buy the complex from the Government Buildings Agency for the relatively modest sum of €30 million. Not quite a bargain: €750 per m<sup>2</sup> of land is in line with current land prices in the 'better' parts of the Region. But the buildings were a serious bonus. Still, targeted investment was the message. MSI took the lead. 'A wonderful process', Rodesch assures us. 'All parties were perfectly attuned to each other and still are.'

That is remarkable, because MSI did not carry out the development all at once, but step by step, with each time dif- →



Architect  
BC architects & studios  
evr-architecten  
Callebaut Architecten  
Website  
architects.bc-as.org  
evr-architecten.be  
callebaut-architecten.be/

Project name  
Usquare  
Location  
Elsene/Ixelles  
(Brussels)  
Programme  
Conversion of the former  
Gendarmerie barracks into  
an open, mixed and multi-  
functional district

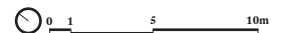
Procedure  
Competition with  
Brussels Government  
Architect (BMA)  
Client  
VUB – ULB  
SAU/MSI  
Structural and services engineering  
VK architects+engineers

Building physics  
VK architects+engineers  
Lead contractor  
BPC group  
Completion  
December 2023  
Total floor area  
9,035 m<sup>2</sup>  
Budget  
€ 106,700,000  
(excl. VAT and fees)





Floor 0



→  
Kempe Thill –  
Kaderstudio,  
conversion of the  
*Clos des mariés* into 31  
social housing units

←  
The first phase of the  
project by evr – BC  
– Callebaut includes  
the renovation and  
redevelopment of 7  
historic buildings  
for universities  
and community  
facilities including  
a research centre,  
an international  
reception centre  
and a sustainable  
food market for the  
neighbourhood.

## Architect

Atelier Kempe Thill  
Kaderstudio

## Website

atelierkempehill.com  
kaderstudio.eu

## Project name

*Clos des mariés*

## Location

Elsene/Ixelles  
(Brussels)

## Programme

Renovation of former  
barracks with heritage  
value into thirty-one  
social housing units  
and collective areas,  
exemplary in terms of  
circularity

## Procedure

Competition with  
Brussels Government  
Architect (BMA)

## Client

SLRB/BGHM

## Restoration architect

Olivier Graeven

## Landscape architect

Latitude

## Structural engineering

Ney & Partners

## Building physics

Studiel0

Total floor area  
4,642 m<sup>2</sup>

## Budget

€ 8,368,000  
(excl. VAT and fees)



ferent parties and a different approach for each programme component. The basis was a Guiding Development Plan (PAD/RPA). This is a recent policy instrument available to the Region. It is similar to the RUP (Spatial Implementation Plan) in Flanders: it defines in a single design a strategic vision and strict provisions for constructions, land development and so on. Such an instrument was necessary here in any case because of the repurposing of the site, but also useful to provide a framework that ensured preservation of the coherence of the site. The urban planning agency BUUR elaborated this plan. It was ready in early 2021.

Meanwhile, both universities developed plans for the front building on their own initiative by means of an architecture competition. According to Rodesch, they could do so because their project was not up for discussion anyway. 'Moreover, they had secured ERDF funds. These have to be spent within a short period of time.'

However, MSI did draw inspiration from the circular approach of evr and BC Architects, the winners of the competition. Although the competition provides for the demolition of a building on Kroonlaan to make possible a wider access to the enclosed site, the demolition material will still be reused on site as much as possible. And yet the PAD/RPA did not require circularity. Rodesch: 'We found that a valid approach. We also wanted to impose it for the

construction of student accommodation. In this regard we opted for a Design, Build, Finance & Maintain (DBFM) approach, because neither we nor the universities have sufficient resources. But we did impose the condition that bidders had to recover at least 60 per cent of the material in three buildings. The fourth building, however, could be torn down. This was not random: we examined the stability of the buildings and commissioned an inventory of materials from Rotor. They presented it in the form of a BIM model. This was very useful, as it gave us a detailed view of what was available. Moreover, some bids recover more than required.'

For the housing along the north and west sides of the site, on the other hand, MSI is working with two social housing corporations and with Citydev. The renovation of the *Clos des mariés* will start soon: Kempe Thill and Kaderstudio won the competition for this first project. Rodesch: 'We are tackling this bit by bit, because we find that we are also learning something each time. For example, the PAD/RPA provided for community facilities in the north-east corner but left open whether that should be new construction or renovation, the only condition being that the wall surrounding the complex was preserved. A centre for people with autism spectrum disorder appeared to be a suitable use for the purpose, but research also taught us that the existing buildings are very suitable for that purpose.'

→

↘  
For the housing along the north and west sides of the terrain, the client worked with a social housing agency. The *Clos des mariés* will be the first to be converted by Kempe

Thill and Kaderstudio into social housing units, all according to the principles of circular construction. They will also be fitted with collective green spaces.





↓  
Anyoji Beltrando won the competition for the new layout of the public space on the site. This Paris-based office also focuses on

circularity and the greening of the space. The buildings around the training area will be given a backdrop.



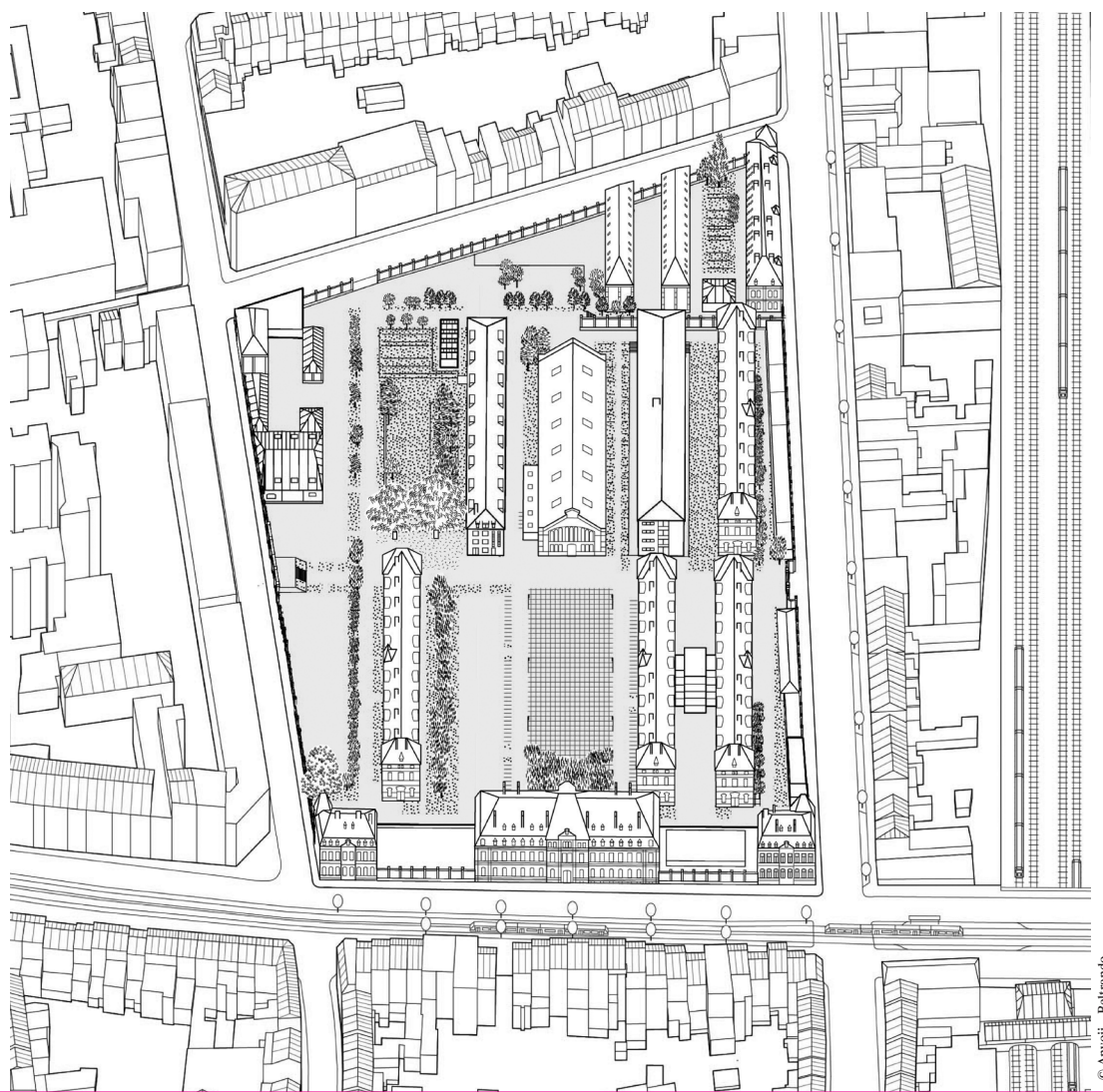


The layout of the public domain, however, is in MSI's own hands. Rodesch: 'Back in 2018, we were already worried about the neighbourhood's reaction to all that was about to happen here. No one had ever set foot here. We wanted to know what questions people had. Temporary use could provide insight into that, but we didn't want to admit everyone at random. We therefore commissioned an organization that would manage the temporary use and also communicate about it. This all had to be done very quickly, as we had no more than a year and a half, from the approval of the PAD/RPA in 2021 to the start of works in mid 2022. To our relief, we received very valid proposals. This is how SeeU came into being. The eye-catcher was the velodrome at the training area.'

From SeeU came the insight that the buildings along the training area (fab labs, student accommodation and the food hall) were essential to bring the square to life. Rodesch: 'We insisted that the student accommodation and fab labs

have all kinds of public facilities on the ground floor so that the activities on the square and in the buildings flow into each other. This was also in line with the views of the group around French landscape designer Anyoji Beltrando who won the competition for the public space. The group fully embraces the concept of circularity. They reclaim as much as possible the existing cobbles, but green the space by processing it differently. Through SeeU, the group also noticed that the buildings around the training area should provide a backdrop for life on the square. Their design is an expression of that.'

This shows that the way MSI approached the development of Usquare.brussels worked out very well: not designing and tendering everything at once, but drawing lessons from each step and linking further research to it. This gave that method a meaning in itself, which transcends the actual project. ▲●



Architect	Anyoji Beltrando (Paris)	Programme	Public space design (17,000 m <sup>2</sup> ) and urban orientation for the construction lots (50,000 m <sup>2</sup> )	Client	SAU/MSI	Completion	2025
Website	anyojibeltrando.com			Landscape architect	OLM	Total floor area	17,004 m <sup>2</sup>
Project name	Usquare			Services engineering	ON éclairage (Paris) MK Engineering (Brussels) Studie Bureau Joret (Sint-Niklaas)	Budget	€ 4,700,000 (excl. VAT and fees)
Location	Elsene/Ixelles (Brussels)	Procedure	Competition with Brussels Government Architect (BMA)				