

# VALUE ADDED

VALUE ADDED what young design professionals can do for you

What do a nineteenth century fort, a city centre, an agricultural area, a neighbourhood park and a river valley have in common? All these landscapes were part of the VALUE+ project and the subject of five international workshops involving students of Garden and Landscape Design of VHL University of Applied Sciences.

In this publication you will find detailed reports of the international design charrettes that were part of the VALUE+ project. These reports help to gain insight into the different ways these charrettes can be organised, depending on the assignment, the context, the participants and the stage of the process.

The book concludes with a more thorough analysis of the different charrettes. What were the results? How were top-down and bottom-up approaches actually combined? What was the added value of student involvement in the planning process?



Liège  
Amersfoort  
Sheffield  
Menen  
Stuttgart  
**what young  
design professionals  
can do for you**

Ad Koolen | Wim Timmermans | Jimmie Slijkhuis | Dorith van Gestel | Alexandra Branderhorst | Brechtje Horsten







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University  
Of  
Sheffield.



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 **Ville de Liège**



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# Introduction

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What do a nineteenth century fort, a city centre, an agricultural area, a neighbourhood park and a river valley have in common? All these landscapes were part of the VALUE+ project and the subject of five international workshops involving students of Garden and Landscape Design of VHL University of Applied Sciences.

## **Value + project**

The five project areas were suggested by the partner cities of the VALUE+ project. This project is partly funded by the Interreg IVB NWE programme of the

European Union and has 12 partners across North West Europe. EU policies demand greater public engagement to increase inclusion, strengthen territorial cohesion and deliver sensitive developments that meet local needs. But challenges like sustainable growth and biodiversity also require a top-down strategic approach on a larger scale. The aim of the VALUE+ project was to improve green infrastructure and urban spaces by integrating bottom-up and top-down approaches. In the investment sites, excellent landscape design was combined with effective community engagement (VALUE+). Cities in North West Europe are facing similar issues and transnational cooperation ensures that best practises are shared and countries can learn from each other's innovative approaches. The international design charrette was one of these innovations and turned out to be a successful tool for integrating a strategic approach with more community involvement. A charrette is an intensive multi-day design or planning workshop with clients, stakeholders, designers and other professionals. The design charrette allows a diverse group of people to quickly generate design solutions that integrate a diversity of interests.

## **Challenges**

There were five project areas with completely different challenges. In Liège, Belgium, the investment area was an early nineteenth century fort on a strategic height in the Meuse valley, where plans for a new residential area needed to be combined with the conservation of military structures and the development of a public park. In Menen, Belgium, the challenge was to make a new bridge the starting point for a riverside development and a regeneration project for the city centre that also solved the transport and parking issues. In Amersfoort, the Netherlands, the project area was a rural landscape to the east of the city, where agriculture and habitat development needed to be combined with water management and more opportunities for recreation. In Sheffield, UK, students devised strategies to make a neighbourhood park a more integrated part of the community and the surrounding area. In Stuttgart, Germany, the challenge was to develop an industrial heritage route in a densely urbanised river valley to strengthen the identity of the region and make the connection between the river and the industrial heritage sites visible as well as attractive to tourists and local residents alike.

## **Contribution to investment sites**

The impact of the design charrettes on the final investment plans of the VALUE+ partner cities differed. In Amersfoort, the charrette led to a toolbox that helped property owners to improve the landscape themselves. In Liège, it helped to get stakeholders and local government officials to talk with each other after a long period of silence. In Menen, the charrette opened people's eyes to existing qualities that are not yet used to their full potential. In Sheffield, it led to more attention for the park entrances and better connections with the surrounding areas. It also helped to generate additional strategies to involve local residents in the new park. In Stuttgart, the charrette helped to gain a wider perspective on the challenges at hand and visualise new ideas for the local EU-champions and their plans for one of the industrial heritage sites.



● Sheffield

● Amersfoort

● Menen

● Liège

● Stuttgart





1



2



3



4



5



6



### Charrettes and higher education

Participating in an international design charrette also has many benefits for the education of young professionals. Students get to work on international assignments within an unfamiliar physical and political context. They work on site, with real clients, local residents and other stakeholders. They develop their planning, communication and negotiation skills. They can test their classroom knowledge in a practical situation and learn that they can bring something of value to the discussion. The narrow time frame of the pressure cooker sessions teaches them the necessity of rephrasing the assignment and forces them to deliver fast. They often surprise themselves with their own achievements and gain a lot more confidence. All in all, it is an unforgettable experience. Most participants are eager to sign up for the next international workshop or register as an exchange student to do part of their studies abroad. These international design charrettes are so successful that VHL University of Applied Sciences is now discussing the possibility of making this an integrated part of the curriculum.

1 Sheffield  
2 Liege  
3 Menen  
4 Stuttgart  
5 Amersfoort  
6 Liege

### Tool with potential

Why was the international design charrette a successful tool? What was in it for the clients? To begin with, foreign students are not driven by a political agenda or financial gain and therefore they always bring an open mind to the discussion. Their questions are genuine and local residents easily open up to them. Because the charrettes are organized within a narrow time frame, they quickly need to gain an understanding of the main challenges. When analysing the area and its problems, students are direct in their way of identifying and communicating the challenges at hand. An outsider's view helps both the partner and the other stakeholders to address inconvenient truths and focus the discussion on the things that really matter. In addition, students have an optimistic view of the world. They think in opportunities rather than problems. Some of their insights turned out to be real eye-openers for the partners and local stakeholders. Finally, students can quickly come up with a variety of solutions. The wide spectrum of possibilities, combined with the students' enthusiasm, helps to move the discussion forward. The international design charrette is a helpful tool for involving more people in the design process, generating discussion, gaining more focus on the main challenges and opportunities, widening people's point of view, and finding a common ground between various stakeholders. The charrettes helped participants to take a wider perspective, think outside the box and dare to dream. The charrettes worked best if there were multi-disciplinary project teams consisting of students from different universities and disciplines, as well as local authorities and community stakeholders. The ideal time frame is five days. This gives students the time to get to know the area and develop their analysis into a real strategy and properly visualised solutions.

In this publication you will find detailed reports of the international design charrettes that were part of the VALUE+ project. These reports help to gain insight into the different ways these charrettes can be organised, depending on the assignment, the context, the participants and the stage of the process. The book concludes with a more thorough analysis of the different charrettes. What were the results? How were top-down and bottom-up approaches actually combined? What was the added value of student involvement in the planning process?

We are convinced of the mutual benefits of the international design charrettes for municipalities, for stakeholders and for the education of our future European professionals. That is why the research group 'Green Cities' of VHL University of Applied Sciences has organised no less than 38 design charrettes since 2008 (Timmermans et al, 2015). We are looking forward to continue working together in the future.

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Special thanks to all the participating students:

Liège Loeki Dorenstouter | Martijn Filé | Viktor Groen | Joshua Holleman Sjaak Punt | Merel Verbruggen | Laura Campeny | Gilles Delfosse| Virginie Libert Amersfoort Kevin van den Berghe | Mariska Blankespoor | Jelle Engelchor | Agnita van der Laan | Stephanie Mullaart| Max Voskuilen Sheffield Ruud Custers | Loeki Dorenstouter Julia Kinzevskaja | Laslo Schoots | Merel Verbruggen | Abigail Wall





Behdad Alizadeh | Gulsah Bilge | Melih Bozhurt | Zifei Cheng | Xiaoyum Wan | Michael Clare | Jason Colbeek | Alys Fflur Hughes | Laura Mellon | Laura Precious | Esme Walker Menen Lonneke Borst | Wytze Hoektra | Kris Kersten | Jasper Klaassen | Michiel Strik | Maartje Webbers | Simone van de Wiel | Jordi de Vlam Stuttgart Adriaan Bicker | Jasper van den Ende | Jos de Graaf | Myrthe van Heek | Sophie Huis in 't Veld | Rianne Luring | Wessel van Vliet | Simone van de Wiel







# Plans for La Chartreuse, a park that has run wild

## Into the wild

By Alexandra Branderhorst

Six second-year Garden and Landscape Architecture students from the Van Hall Larenstein university of applied sciences studied the case of La Chartreuse, a park that has been allowed to run wild, during an intensive three-day workshop in the city of Liège. People from the council, local residents and other stakeholders told the students what their wishes were and described the problems. The students then came up with designs to make the park, which lies on elevated ground, more accessible. They also gave people a reason for visiting the rugged park.

### A voyage of discovery in La Chartreuse

A tall rusty gate comes into view in a corner of a back street. The gate is ajar. We slip through, one by one: six students and two lecturers from the Netherlands, someone from the University of Liège, someone from the council and yours truly. We are entering a rugged area that has gone back to nature, a wilderness with bushes, trees and head-high grass. Various dark-brick buildings emerge into view - old, deserted army barracks.

Like boys looking for adventure, we enter one of the buildings. Everything inside has been demolished, from the windows and doors down to the toilet bowls. The walls and corridors are covered with graffiti. Plants or even sapling trees are growing in the concrete of the empty frames that once held windows. The building stands open to daylight and the wind.

Facing it is a row of colossal buildings with bushes growing from their windows. It is as if we are on the set of the film *I am Legend*, in which Will Smith lives in a deserted New York after most of the human race has been eliminated by a mysterious virus. Nature reasserts itself and takes over human civilisation.

### Bad reputation

When we leave the building we see the remains of a camp fire nearby in among the tall grass, along with rubbish and an old shoe. Further along stand the oldest buildings, including the Ferme des Hollandais. Behind old high walls is a huge hall with columns. It occasionally serves as the venue for house parties. A square hole in the ground nearby gives access to a system of underground passages. No-one knows where the tunnels go - there is no map.

The tall grass, bushes and empty buildings give La Chartreuse an eerie feeling. Anyone could be hiding out there. Indeed, some drug addicts and homeless people do lie low here. Several murders have been committed in the area over the past decade and it has a bad reputation among the residents of Liège as far as safety is concerned. Only people with dogs go for walks there. Or the occasional group of lads in search of adventure. There is a long concrete strip in the middle of the park, surrounded by trees. This used to be the place for parking military vehicles and tanks.

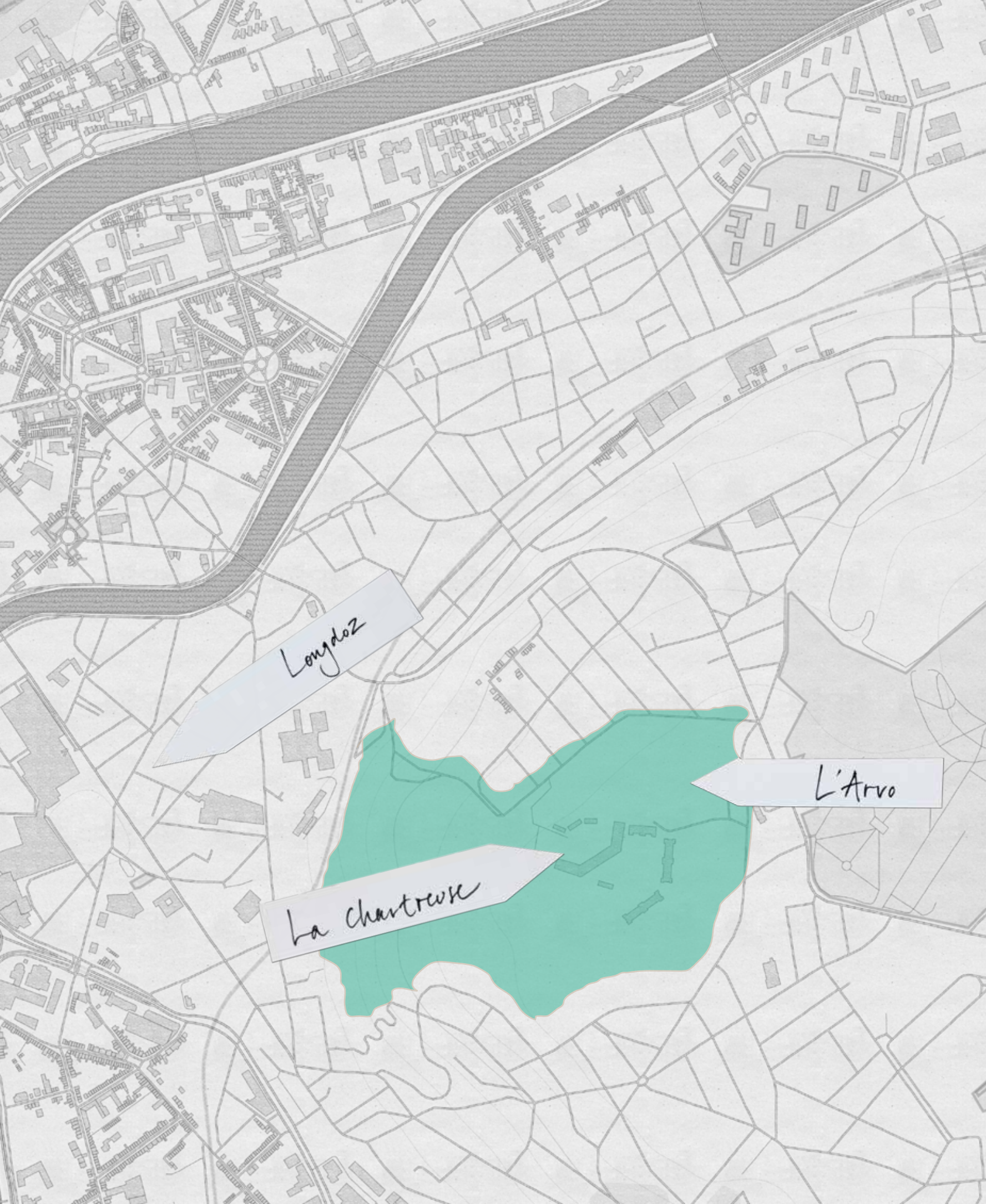
To the north lies L'Arvo, the listed remains of a medieval abbey. The western end of the area is at a greater height and we arrive at a good viewpoint where we can look down on a railway line below. The railway track forms a barrier between the elevated land and the residential district on the other side. Returning to the east and the dilapidated U-shaped Fort des Hollandais, we come to the aging Les Oblats park. The original capricious design is reminiscent of English landscape styles.





Liège City Centre





Longdoz

La Chartreuse

L'Arvo



## The state provides

“La Chartreuse is an area covering 34 hectares at heights of between 64 and 122 metres. So there’s a height difference within the park of 60 metres already. That, together with the untamed vegetation, makes it difficult to urbanize the place,” says Lucie Lefebvre from Liège municipality’s Parks department. It is the morning of 12 June and she is giving a talk to the group of second-year Garden and Landscape Architecture students from the Van Hall Larenstein university of applied sciences and the two lecturers. They are sat around a large wooden table in a community centre close to La Chartreuse.

Lefebvre says that there was a monastery here belonging to the Carthusian Order (ordre de Chartreux in French) from 1357 to the time of the French Revolution. The ruins, known as L’Arvo, are a listed monument. A fort was built there between 1817 and 1823 to protect the city, strategically placed at an elevated position above the Meuse valley. The fort was built by the Dutch during the period in which Belgium was part of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. The main building is called the Fort des Hollandais (meaning ‘Dutch fort’) and there is also a Ferme des Hollandais (‘Dutch farm’).

Belgium declared its independence in 1830 and the fort fell into Belgian hands. From 1891 it served as army barracks. During the First and Second World Wars, the German occupying forces used it as a prison. In 1944 to 1945, the American liberating forces used it as a military hospital. The Belgian army gave up the fort in 1988. Since then, it has been taken over by vandals, graffiti artists and nature.

After this look back at the history, Lucie Lefebvre explains that the old fort and 14 hectares of land have been sold to developers. They will start demolishing part of the dilapidated military buildings by the end of this year. Another part, which has been designated as a listed building, will be converted for residential use. A total of around 400 to 500 luxury homes will be built.

The remaining 20 hectares, including the Les Oblats park, is owned by the municipality. It does not have much of a budget for the area. It maintains the trees and some of the open spaces and it has recently marked out and partially created three walking routes.

### Creating involvement

La Chartreuse is one of the pilot areas in the EU VALUE Added project, says Christine Ruelle from the Urban Planning department at the University of Liège.

The EU project is all about strategic planning and public participation. The project participants include the University of Liège and the Van Hall Larenstein university of applied sciences.

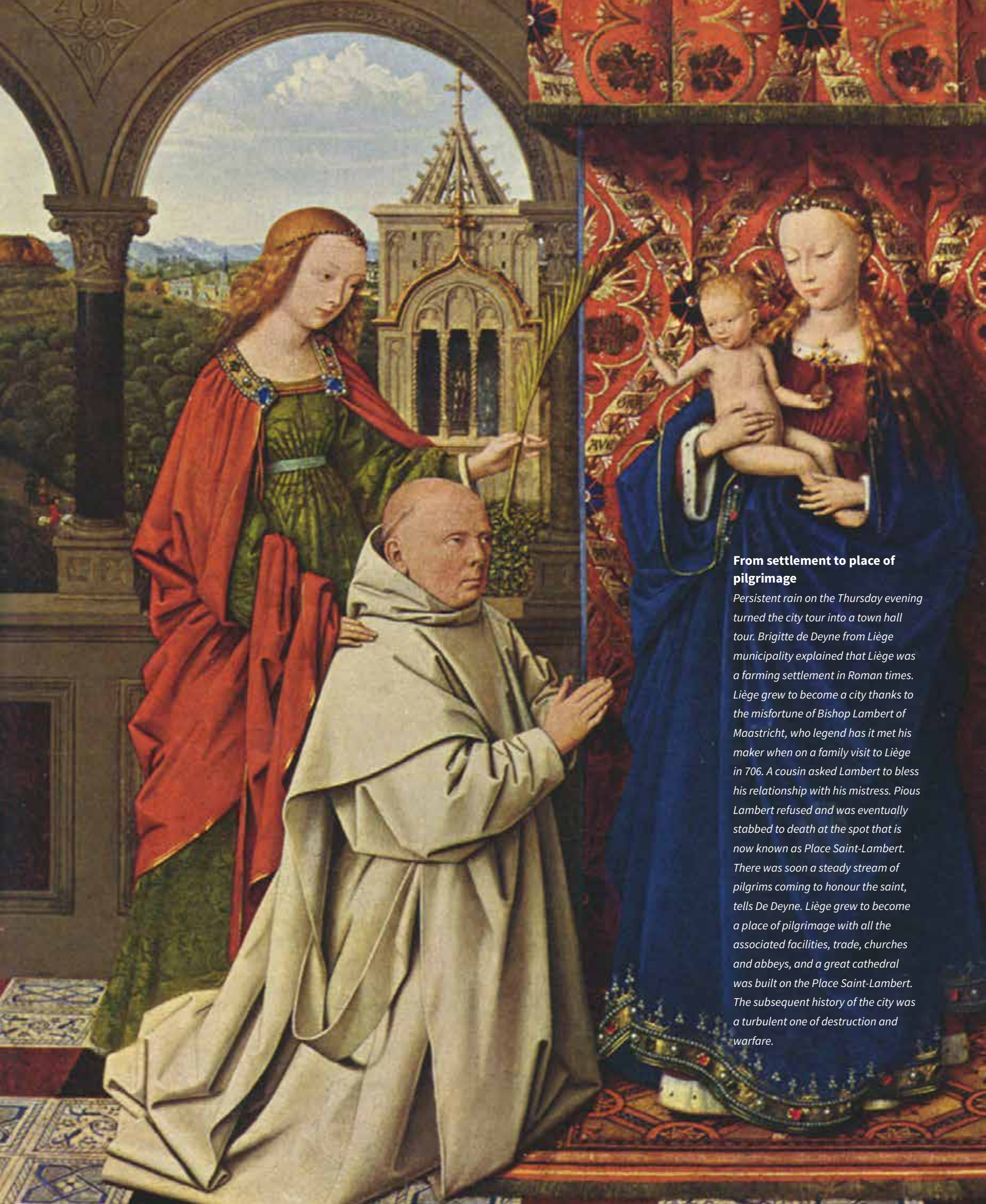
“Europe is having to deal with changes in demographic composition, the consequences of climate change and the need for growth and development to be sustainable,” explains Ruelle. “We can’t tackle these challenges either purely with ideas from below or with plans imposed from above. The aim of VALUE Added is therefore to increase the input from citizens in planning procedures.”

Belgium is not as far advanced as Germany, for example, or the United Kingdom when it comes to strategic planning processes, according to Ruelle. “Here, the old attitude still applies of l’état providence - the state should provide for all and sundry. Only this isn’t working properly as there is no money. People are not yet asking themselves what they personally could contribute.”

The city of Liège entered La Chartreuse for the VALUE Added project. The municipality wants to invest 300,000 euros in the site, with half the money coming from EU project funds. An extremely important element is the need to increase the involvement of local residents and other stakeholders. Ruelle explains that the experience the municipality acquires with La Chartreuse and the approach it develops could also be used in other parts of the city in the future.

The municipality and the University of Liège have held an online survey and sent out questionnaires to the residential districts bordering the park. This showed that people wanted to keep the area’s untamed character. However, many people have their doubts about the safety of La Chartreuse. Many local residents want access to the park from the residential districts to be improved, with more entrances. In addition to the surveys, four workshops have been held. Ruelle observed, “A few weeks ago, we organized a walk in the area with a group of immigrants. Only one man knew the park existed.”





### **From settlement to place of pilgrimage**

*Persistent rain on the Thursday evening turned the city tour into a town hall tour. Brigitte de Deyne from Liège municipality explained that Liège was a farming settlement in Roman times. Liège grew to become a city thanks to the misfortune of Bishop Lambert of Maastricht, who legend has it met his maker when on a family visit to Liège in 706. A cousin asked Lambert to bless his relationship with his mistress. Pious Lambert refused and was eventually stabbed to death at the spot that is now known as Place Saint-Lambert. There was soon a steady stream of pilgrims coming to honour the saint, tells De Deyne. Liège grew to become a place of pilgrimage with all the associated facilities, trade, churches and abbeys, and a great cathedral was built on the Place Saint-Lambert. The subsequent history of the city was a turbulent one of destruction and warfare.*















## The stakeholders' wishes

"We want to keep La Chartreuse's natural scenery," says one of the local residents later on in the day during the meeting with the students in the community centre. Another person adds: "Liège has a number of city parks. It's precisely the untamed character that makes this place unique."

The six Dutch students have been joined by three Belgian students and ten stakeholders: people from Liège municipal government, a developer, several local residents and other stakeholders. When Christine Ruelle invited the stakeholders to this meeting, she joked that "The Dutch are back", referring to the brief period of Dutch rule during which the Fort des Hollandais was built.

The students ask questions. Should the park be for everyone? Yes, say the stakeholders, including someone who organizes orienteering in the park (running through a wild area with the help of maps and a compass). Because the area was built as a military basis, it was laid out with its back to the city even though it now lies in the middle of the city. Even so, it is possible to enter La Chartreuse from most of the districts bordering the area. The exception is Longdoz, the district to the west. The railway tracks and difference in height make access difficult. "Longdoz is a densely built-up district with no green spaces," explains Olivier de Wispelaere, an architect who is attending the meeting out of personal interest. Pierre Michaux is from the non-profit organization La Chartreuse, which has been urging retention of the buildings and area for 26 years now. "Many people are involved in La Chartreuse but we don't have anyone from Longdoz," notes Michaux. One resident from Longdoz, Serge Floëge, who is personally interested mainly in La Chartreuse's flora and fauna, says a lot of people would use La Chartreuse if only they knew it existed. Anne Rondia from the Parks department at Liège municipality confirms this. "Some of the people in Longdoz would like to have access to La Chartreuse but at the moment they have to climb forty metres first."

**'... a lot of people would use La Chartreuse if only they knew it existed.'**

### "Students are dreamers"

Some people also use the park as a through route. "People need a reason to linger in the park for longer," says Dutch student Merel Verbruggen, thinking aloud. "People do indeed need a destination. There's no sun, you can only walk through the place," replies Christine Ruelle. There are also problems with drug addicts and the place feels unsafe, say the people at the meeting. Various stakeholders suggest that perhaps there should be more lighting in the evenings, or trees should be felled to create open areas with more light. Michaux from the NGO is pessimistic. "A year ago, the municipality installed litter bins but they have all been destroyed by vandals." Ordinary visitors also often create a mess. "You can't imagine how often we've had to clear up the remains of barbecues," says Michaux as an example.

The Dutch students think the area will become safer with the arrival of 400 luxury homes. There will be more social control when people are living there. The stakeholders are not so convinced. "That mentality is difficult to change. The Protestant Dutch way of thinking is collectivist. We have a different attitude here, more Latin. People aren't concerned with the general interest," says De Wispelaere. "So why don't we turn the park into a garden for the people?" counters student Merel Verbruggen. But the stakeholders are not so easily persuaded. The developer replies: "Young students are dreamers. The practical reality we have to deal with in our work is very different. Then you see people taking a nimby attitude: Not In My Back Yard. That's difficult to change."

## Down to work with designs

At the end of that same afternoon, the students assess the area and form their initial ideas. "We want to create a basic structure with a couple of spots where you can do things, and apart from that keep the untamed nature and the little social trails," says Viktor Groen, explaining the initial plans.

The students have to come up with nine concepts that evening. The next morning they present these concepts along with their own sketches. One plan is based on three main entrances on the different sides of the park, with three paths leading from them to the park's centre. Joshua Holleman creates a stir with his idea of buying a house next to the old railway tracks and putting a lift in that will let you access the park from the Longdoz district. There is also the layered plan that has the park light and open at the edges while keeping the centre overgrown and wild as it is now.

Common features of all the plans are a new entrance from the railway side and the mix of a cultivated section and a wild section, notes lecturer Ad Koolen. "It's a good idea to create connections with the surrounding districts. At the moment, the greenery is often hidden behind buildings. I also thought the idea of using paths to make connections within the park itself was really good," says Christine Ruelle in response. One group of



students works further on the idea for the entrances and another group on the transition zone within the park. The students will pay another visit to La Chartreuse on Thursday morning, 13 June. “We need to know exactly what it looks like. We haven’t got Internet here so we can’t use Google Maps,” says Merel Verbruggen. She is working with Viktor Groen and Loeki Dorenstouter on the three main entrances. Joshua Holleman, Martijn Filé and Sjaak Punt are concentrating on the transition zone. “You want to let people decide for themselves whether they want to play volleyball there, have a picnic, a barbecue or laze about. We provide the seating, grass, an area with a hard surface, and shadow,” explains Martijn Filé.

#### **Little interaction**

The students are sitting and drawing, discussing matters and looking things up. The Belgian students have exams and are taking part on a voluntary basis. They are missing out on most of the process. Another problem is that the Belgians do not speak much English and the Dutch cannot speak French. “Virginie, one of the Belgian students, is contributing information about the position of La Chartreuse in the city. She knows a lot about the urban layout and structures in the surrounding area,” says Loeki Dorenstouter. Unfortunately, translating what’s being said - with the help of Christine Ruelle - costs a lot of time. “That means you don’t really get a feeling of interaction,” concludes the Dutch student.

“The Belgian student and Spanish student (studying in Liège) in our group are mainly examining the infrastructure around the park,” says Martijn Filé. “They also know the other parks in Liège and they saw the untamed character of La Chartreuse as complementing them.” But he feels the students should have been taking part from day one. “Then you get a bit of bonding. Now they drop in during the afternoon and we explain what we’re doing. But that might just be the Dutch mentality, that we take a more active stance.”

“It’s difficult to communicate with them and they have a completely different perspective. That really slows things down,” says Sjaak Punt.

### **The students’ experiences**

“What you do at college in six weeks, we are now doing in three days,” says Loeki Dorenstouter the next day. The students are putting the finishing touches to their work for the final presentation to the stakeholders later that day in the community centre. The place has turned into a real studio. The tables are covered with drawings, rolls of paper and marker pens, large prints of ground plans and laptops.

It is the first time that the Dutch second-years have designed something for and in a different country. They are enjoying the experience. “You would never get an abandoned park like this back home. The old ruins would be closed off and guarded in the Netherlands. And the park would be really cultivated whereas here it’s really natural. There are also big height differences, which we don’t have,” explains Dorenstouter.

“It’s very different to the standard assignments in the Dutch course material,” thinks Viktor Groen. “Back home they just flatten an area and you start designing from scratch. With La Chartreuse, they want to keep it that way and still make improvements. There is more money in the Netherlands for things.”

It was also a more primitive way of working for the students, with no Internet, scanners or printer. “A bit back to basics, but that was quite educational,” according to Groen. He found the workshop very educational anyway. “It gives you a broader view of things.”

**‘You would never get an abandoned park like this back home’**

#### **Strong points**

Martijn Filé notes that the meeting with the stakeholders did help to get a good impression of the park. “They had to be drawn out at first but you can see they like the fact that young people are interested and helping to come up with ideas. The park is amazing anyway, the perfect place to escape from the urban atmosphere.”

Filé does think it is a pity the stakeholders stick so firmly to their own interests.

He is also involved in a community park project in the Dutch town of Leusden. “More than three-quarters of the residents are digging their heels in. They aren’t prepared to move forward as a community and compromise to get a decent plan for everyone. It’s the same here. Even though everyone would gain if the place became safer,” emphasizes Filé.

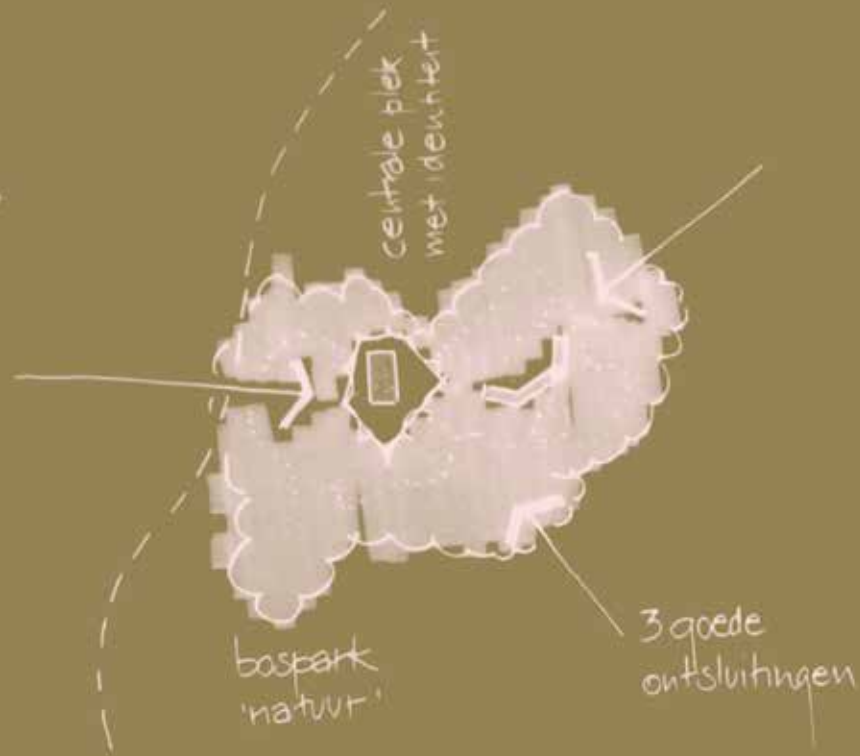
Merel Verbruggen had expected the stakeholders to get more involved. “Now it’s more a case of us designing for them rather than with them.” Verbruggen notes that everyone finds it hard going communicating in English. “The best thing about this assignment is making people enthusiastic and getting them involved in the park. You can achieve a great deal with a couple of minor measures.”

Fellow student Joshua Holleman thinks the input from the stakeholders was really good. “They talked about the problems but didn’t have any clear solutions. That gave us the freedom to come up with solutions.”





- story =
- a place to go to
  - nature ↔ civilized strip



CENTRAL PLACE



**‘We want to improve the existing routes with three main entrances that are real eye-catchers.’**

All of the students are enthusiastic about the way they all worked together. Sjaak Punt says, “There aren’t any conflicts, there’s no stress. Everyone starts working something out and uses their strong points.” One person may be good with computer programs such as Photoshop and SketchUp, which lets you draw things in 3D. Personally, Punt likes drawing things by hand. He likes working intensively like this. “You move quickly from stock-taking to ideas. When you’re doing assignments at college, you spend ages analysing things first. In this workshop, we’re going all out to generate something in three days.”

## The final result

The final preparations for the concluding presentation are made in an atmosphere of calm. All the tables have been cleared. The ground plans, drawings and sketches have been fixed to a white wall. The wooden chairs have been placed round the big table to accommodate the stakeholders. Eventually they arrive: Christine Ruelle from the University of Liège, Lucie Lefebvre, Anne Rondia and another colleague from the municipality’s Urban Planning department, Mr Michaux and another member of the La Chartreuse NGO, one of the local residents, the architect Olivier de Wispelaere and the three Belgian students.

Joshua Holleman presents the key points. “We want to improve the existing routes with three main entrances that are real eye-catchers. We also want two main routes through the park: one from north to south and one from west east. The other problem was that there was no destination to go to in the park, so we’ve designed a central spot.”

Loeki Dorenstouter tells the people present that an entrance is needed on the west side of the park. “Our idea is to build two towers with lifts and a bridge in between. This will take people over the railway line and you will be able to enjoy the views from the top.” The medieval-looking towers that Dorenstouter has drawn were inspired by a house with a little tower next to the railway track.

The stone wall and iron gate at the entrance to the south are not very inviting, continues Dorenstouter. “We want to do away with the grey elements and introduce more green.” At present, the entrance to the north-east is completely hidden behind a building. The park will be more visible and inviting if this building is demolished to create an open space.

Next, the design is revealed for the central square using the concrete strip in the middle of the park. The students want to create a steep edge with seating and to lay out a lawn next to the concrete where people can lie down. They can play football or volleyball, for example, on the concrete surface. And they can sit or lie in the sun along the edge of the concrete area and on the lawn. “An open lawn and more people doing things there will mean more social control, which will make the open space feel safe.”

## The reactions

The idea for the two towers provokes the most questions, surprise and resistance. “You could just make stairs, but a lift makes it accessible for people who have difficulty walking. They can still enjoy the views,” says Dorenstouter in reply to questions about the lift. Why not just one tower, asks someone else. Holleman explains: “The idea is that you need a bridge to cross the obstacles. And it would be a hot spot with amazing views.”

After the presentation, the stakeholders examine the drawings and designs and exchange their ideas with the Dutch students. The idea for a central area appeals to everyone. Local resident Didier Deville: “You could also have commercial activities at a central spot like that, such as a pavement cafe or a restaurant, or even bike hire.” Someone from the La Chartreuse NGO, who lives close by and often walks in the park, is particularly pleased that the concrete strips are being retained and used.

Lucie Lefebvre from the municipality of Liège is enthusiastic about the entire master plan. “It’s a good idea to improve the two main entrances. And we definitely need the connection between the park and Longdoz.” Her colleague Anne Rondia adds, “These ideas from outsiders are very interesting; the students have put their finger on the places where something needs to be done.”

## Useful

The organizers from the Van Hall Larenstein university of applied sciences and the University of Liège are also satisfied. Landscape Architecture lecturer Ad Koolen: “It was a good assignment with a very diverse set of stakeholders, each in their own little world.” He thought it was good that the students were able to unearth so much information in such a short time. “The second-years are young students who haven’t yet picked up that much but that wasn’t an obstacle,” notes Koolen. “The students have learned that the design doesn’t have to be sensational; you can get a useful result with modest measures.”

Koolen thinks the results of the master plan will be very useful to the municipality. “Most of the proposals can

**‘An open lawn and more people doing things there will mean more social control, which will make the open space feel safe.’**



**‘... The students grasped the spirit of the project and saw what the people wanted. And all that in two and a half days!’**

be implemented with limited funds. They also enable the stakeholders to be involved in working out the plan details.”

Jimmy Slijkhuis from Van Hall Larenstein, who is mainly responsible for the organizational side of the workshop, thought the Dutch students did a very good job. “The end result is a powerful concept. Not much use is made of the area, which lies with its back to the city. The common theme in all the designs is to be inviting,” says Slijkhuis.

The initial reaction from Liège University’s Christine Ruelle is equally laudatory: “The plans are very interesting and are prompting a debate. The students grasped the spirit of the project and saw what the people wanted. And all that in two and a half days!”

#### **The future**

“The student workshop fitted in well with the entire participation process. It gave a couple of powerful orientation points that everyone has now adopted, such as the concrete strips as a central spot, a few main entrances that should become hot spots for the adjoining residential districts and a few open main routes through the park,” says Ruelle afterwards in an e-mail.

The municipality will be renovating the main entrances and making them more visible. It is still considering the option of access over the railway track for the Longdoz district. “The sketch with the two medieval towers prompted a discussion in the municipality and during the public information meeting, and that is very positive,” she says.

The multifunctional space next to the concrete strips, called la Dale, will be implemented. The municipality is also working on several other sites, and activities are being developed such as educational nature programmes in La Chartreuse for schools. On 27 June, the municipality presented these plans to the stakeholders and other interested parties. Ruelle: “All the proposals got a warm reception, even from the usual critics.”

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# Do-it-yourself landscape

By Alexandra Branderhorst

## Connecting stakeholders in the outdoor area

Six Garden and Landscape Architecture students of VHL University of Applied Sciences, in Velp, The Netherlands, worked together in a participation project for the municipality of Amersfoort. The outdoor area east of Amersfoort hosts a lot of recreation from this city and from the town of Leusden. But not all local residents are enthusiastic about recreation, and most are wary of the plans of the municipality. With the needs and wishes of local residents in mind, the students developed a useful do-it-yourself tool for the stakeholders and residents to improve the landscape.

### The outdoor area and its problems

The eastern outskirts of the city of Amersfoort consist of a green and agricultural area. In the heart of this area is the castle and former country estate Stoutenburg. The area has a recreational function for both Amersfoort and Leusden, a town situated directly south of the area. The inhabitants of Amersfoort and Leusden like to go here for hikes or bicycling. Therefore the pressure of recreation is increasing in this area. At the same time intensive agriculture has left its marks on the landscape.

This outdoor area is situated in the middle of the 'Gelderse Vallei', a region with many problems like intensive livestock farming and too many cows per hectare,

canalized streams without natural banks and messy village borders. On the positive side, there are quiet country roads and farms nestle in the green. For years, the regional, provincial and national authorities are trying to tackle the problems by restructuring the Gelderse Vallei.

The area has not only a recreational function for the city population, but is also important for water storage, in case of flooding. The municipalities of Amersfoort and Leusden take a huge interest in it, as well as the regional Water Board Vallei and Eem, the Province of Utrecht and 'Het Utrechts Landschap', the provincial landscape foundation for nature conservation that owns several smaller recreational and nature areas within this area.

"All these partners have a different vision on this outside area, but these visions are not attuned to each other. There is also the population who lives there, and the farmers. A lot of the area is privately-owned", explains Charles Rijsbosch, program manager 'Green City' and strategist at the Spatial Development department of the municipality of Amersfoort.

Due to the widening of the highways A28 and A1, 20-40 hectares of new nature have to be developed to compensate for the loss of nature. Also the loss of ground that can absorb water has to be compensated for. That means that the capacity for water storage has to be enlarged elsewhere in the area. The funds for nature and water compensation will be made available by the national authorities. The nature and water compensation also has to be included in the vision for the area.









Amersfoort old town

Bloendaal

De Schammer

Stortenbos Village

Leusden





“There seem to be too many ambitions and wishes for this small outside area, that is cherished by all the different stakeholders. One wants rest, the other wants more nature, the third wants to improve the water quality, the fourth more recreation and so on”, Rijsbosch adds.

To complicate things further, the trust of the residents has been damaged in the past, when the municipality and Het Utrechts Landschap imposed elaborate smaller plans on the area as blueprints and the residents had disputed these plans. Since then the residents have a defensive attitude towards new plans.

#### The assignment

The municipality of Amersfoort is one of the partners in the interregional European project VALUE Added, in short VALUE+. The eastern outskirts of Amersfoort are not the pilot area that Amersfoort introduced for VALUE +. However, this outdoor area provides an interesting participation case because of the different interests of the stakeholders. A comprehensive vision for the future of the area has to be developed in agreement with

government agencies at provincial and municipal level, the regional water board, landowners, farmers and nature conservation organizations. And

that is where the students of VHL University in Velp come in.

“We gave the students the assignment to put the different ambitions together, and see where there are possibilities to synchronize these ambitions. Students usually have the guts to think further. They can speak freely and openly with everyone and also have the ability to dream. Because of this they can sometimes offer more ground-breaking solutions than others”, says Rijsbosch. To create a public support base, the students will have to find a way to involve the residents in the development and implementation of the plan.

#### A passage through from west to east

Directly on the east side of Amersfoort there is Bloeiendaal and De Schammer, a recreation and nature area that is managed by Het Utrechts Landschap, the provincial landscape foundation for nature conservation. This area is also a water overflow area. In 2011 and 2007, the pastures and fields have been reconstructed. Flowery meadows, swaying reed beds, sparkling streams and swampy marshlands: that used to be the face of the Gelderse Vallei a hundred years ago. Now in De Schammer and Bloeiendaal this ancient landscape is being recreated again. The nature is still developing, and people can go hiking, cycling and jogging in this area.

A little further to the west the village Stoutenburg can be found, harboring a castle and a former country estate with the same name. The former estate also belongs to Het Utrechts Landschap. The forest in it

**‘One wants rest, the other wants more nature, the third wants to improve the water quality, the fourth more recreation and so on...’**



has a rich bird population and is mostly deciduous, with an undergrowth of plants that are typical for old estates. Stoutenburg is becoming a new center in this part of the Valley, enhancing the natural quality and restoring the cultural heritage.

In 2000, Het Utrechts Landschap expanded this area by buying the Juliusput, a lake that is situated a few kilometers north-east of Stoutenburg. The lake has been dug to get sand for the construction of the highway A1. The Juliusput is cut off from the rest of the environment. There is only one path leading there and it is closed for public. As a result, nature around it blossoms and animals like deer are roaming there. The lake itself contains a lot of fish and water birds. It is situated on the border between the two provinces Utrecht and Gelderland.

In Gelderland, at the outer east end of this area there is a little hamlet by the name of Kallenbroek. This place, directly west of the town of Barneveld, is intersected by streams. There are many dug water courses, marshes and brooks here. Kallenbroek is also named 'Paradise' because of the combination of forests and heaths with pastures and farmland. There are nice hiking trails for recreationists in this part.

### **The wishes of stakeholders and residents**

On 11 November 2013, five third year students Landscape Architecture of VHL University of Applied Sciences, and a guest student Architecture, receive the assignment from their lecturers. A few days later they first meet Charles Rijsbosch of the municipality of Amersfoort. He explains the assignment and gives them information about the area. In the following days, the students have subsequent meetings with a policy officer of Het Utrechts Landschap and the

policy advisor outdoor area of the municipality of Leusden and get lots of useful information. They also have meetings with a policy officer on spatial development of the province of Utrecht and with a representative of Water Board Valley and Eem.

The students are particularly excited to speak with some of the residents. They visit the area by bike, and divided into groups of three students, interview seven residents. "To prepare ourselves we made lists with questions about the area, nature and recreation. One of the questions was: What would you change if you were the mayor?", says Mariska Blankespoor, student Landscape Architecture. Some of the conversations are less pleasant, like the one with an old conservative farmer. "Nature was nonsense in his eyes and he did not want to know anything about anything", recalls Blankespoor. A few other residents are more open-minded, like the local entrepreneur of 'Pluktuin Stoutenburg' with a

tea house and a garden where visitors can pick flowers, and a few farmers that offer care or recreational activities on the side. The last conversation is with Mrs Rodrigo, a local resident notorious for her love of nature. Blankespoor: "She lives on the former estate and keeps watch of everything. She stressed the point that more recreation will lead to less nature and will cause the animals to disappear."

Almost all of the residents that the students speak with, are complaining about the busy and speeding cut-through traffic on the roads the Stoutenburgerlaan, Hesseweg and Emelaarseweg. Also a majority of the residents feels annoyed by the rubbish left on farmlands and roads by supposedly recreationists. Most inhabitants say they appreciate the quietness of the area. Therefore recreation, cut through traffic, and a recent bicycle tunnel and a local train station that both make the area more accessible from the outside, are seen as threats. Rising criminality like theft, vandalism and burglaries, lead to a call for enforcement and control from the inhabitants.

Through an intermediate presentation on 10 December the students gain even more insight. They present their first findings and vision to representatives of the municipality of Amersfoort, Het Utrechts Landschap and the Water Board, in the former carriage house of Castle Stoutenburg. The stakeholders ask many questions to help the students develop a clearer vision.

### **Participation eve**

Three days later, the students organize a workshop with local residents in Care farm Blommendal in Stoutenburg. The farmer and his wife, Kees and Bea Blom, are there, and also Mrs Rodrigo and Lennart Ravenhorst, the latter being a Garden- and Landscape Architecture student as well, whose parents have the 'Pluktuin Stoutenburg' with the tea house and flower pick garden.

After a short presentation of their first findings and vision, the students sit down with the residents to discuss the landscape, recreation and nature. Soon the conversation is about the waste that day people leave in the area. "Many people demolish things and throw garbage away, for example in the meadow of our opposite neighbour, whose cows nibble it. We keep the nature tidy, that is hospitality. But if city dwellers come to visit, they have to keep it tidy too", farmer Bea Blom says. "The farmers have to clean up the mess. It would only be reasonable if we get a financial compensation. Farmers are more likely to clean up their own land and roads anyway, and it is much cheaper than when the municipality has to hire professionals", her husband Kees Blom adds. "Most of the recreationists are decent people. I believe that only a few of them ruin it for the rest", relativizes Lennart Ravenhorst, where upon Mrs Rodrigo claims that it is getting worse and worse with vandalism, rubbish and theft. The conversation moves on to combining

**'Nature was nonsense in his eyes and he did not want to know anything about anything'**



### **The Proud Castle**

Castle Stoutenburg is a manor house that has been built in 1888. The original castle was built in 1259 by Willem van Amersfoort to protect the border between the county of Gelre and the diocese of Utrecht. It was located a 1000 meters more to the east than the current castle, on the other side of the Barneveldse Beek (the Broke of Barneveld). The name 'Stoutenborch' meant Proud Castle in those days. The Bishop of Utrecht quartered soldiers in the castle and in exchange granted city rights to Amersfoort. In the following centuries, the castle was destroyed, rebuilt as a manor house, destroyed again and relocated en rebuilt. In 1948 the manor house was bought by a Franciscan monastic order and turned into an environment-friendly conference centre in 1990.

Since 1999 the surrounding country estate belongs to 'Het Utrechts Landschap', the provincial landscape foundation for nature conservation. The foundation strives to conserve and enlarge the area for future generations. It uses the former carriage house of the castle, the 'Koetshuis', as an information center where visitors of the area and day trippers can find hiking and bicycle routes and local products, or drink a cup of coffee.





a nature rest area for animals, like Juliusput, with recreation. The students propose to create unpaved hiking trails in the area and for example cycle routes along the outside of the rest area. Ravenhorst advises to make the hiking trails longer, because cyclists always take the shortest routes. But Mrs Rodrigo opposes strongly against the plan, even though the students are convinced that these small trails will only attract nature lovers. Mrs Rodrigo wants to shut off the nature area for humans. "This small area around Stoutenburg is as busy as the Kalverstraat (shopping street in Amsterdam) on sunny Sundays. There already is a recreation peak, it should not become worse", she stresses. "People find it a beautiful place", Ravenhorst points out, where upon Rodrigo retaliates: "It has to stay that way."

Then the students argue that now the city dwellers are going to one area. "Intensive agriculture is not attractive for recreationists. But we have to strengthen infrastructure and make the beautiful places in the agricultural area visible", explains Jelle Engelchor, the student that leads the discussion. The idea of the students of dispersing the stream of visitors over the area finds agreement with everybody present, including Mrs Rodrigo.

The students bring up wood banks, the traditional way of fencing meadows with bushes and trees, that has been replaced with barbed wire. "In the stream valleys there used to be wood banks, small groves of fifty by fifty meter and alder girths in the stream valleys here", states Engelchor. "Wood banks are beautiful, nice for farmers and provide shadow for the cows", reacts Bea Blom.

When the topic changes to water, farmer Blom explains that the meadows were sometimes used for water overflows in the past, but that a silt layer would remain afterwards. "It is bad for the cows. The silt makes them ill because there are phosphates and metals in it."

### Restoring landscape elements

After a while Engelchor asks the residents: "Do you think this is a good conversation? We are representing the municipality." Bea Blom answers: "It would be good to have talks like these with civil servants. It is important for the municipality to start a dialogue with people in the area. We know what is going on here, while a civil servant is just sitting behind his desk."

After a coffee break the students give a power point presentation about nature compensation in the area, and the ways to achieve this in the different nature types of the area. For example with grassland, groves, tree avenues, alder girths and wood banks. 40 hectares of wood equal 80 kilometers of wood banks. The students lay a huge map of the area on the table and ask the inhabitants to point out where they would like to have more nature and in what form. After

some discussion the farmer wants to expand the forest around Castle Stoutenburg with wood banks along the meadows. Engelchor remarks that the wood banks are like curtains, they will make the area seem less busy.

In the area around the castle Lennart Ravenhorst places a hiking trail with a small bridge, and more eastwards of the castle alder girths. Mrs Rodrigo proposes to prolong the trails through the meadows. "Some farmers want to keep everything as it is", says Ravenhorst. "We should not return to the past, but we should restore as many things as possible", reacts Bea Blom. And that is the perfect closing sentence for the evening, concludes Engelchor.

**‘Intensive agriculture is not attractive for recreationists.’**

### Final presentation

The final presentation where the students share and show their results is on 14 January, in the town hall of Amersfoort. Besides the students themselves and their lecturers, representatives of the municipality of Amersfoort and Leusden, of the province of Utrecht and of Utrechts Landschap are there, along with a handful of residents.

First Mariska Blankespoor takes the public with her on a trip through the outdoor area east of Amersfoort, naming the qualities and characteristics that define the area. Then she pinpoints the problems as they are perceived by the residents and the municipality of Amersfoort. The main problems in the eyes of the students themselves are:

- The busy traffic on the Stoutenburglaan and Hessenweg;
- The brooks that may overflow in the future due to climate change;
- The 'cluttering' of the landscape;
- The isolated position of the estate Stoutenburg that also isolates its nature, and the inaccessibility of the Juliusput.

The students propose to use agriculture as a means to improve the quality of the area. The nature is isolated and scattered across the area. The students want to connect the recreational site Schammer and Bloedaal and the estate Stoutenburg with the estate Kallenbroek, by way of the brook 'Barneveldse beek'. Next to agriculture and nature, water and recreation are part of the plan too. The necessary nature and water compensation for broadening the adjoining highways, can be opportunities to finance measures that will bring more unity to the landscape and will enhance the qualities of its nature.

### Do Book

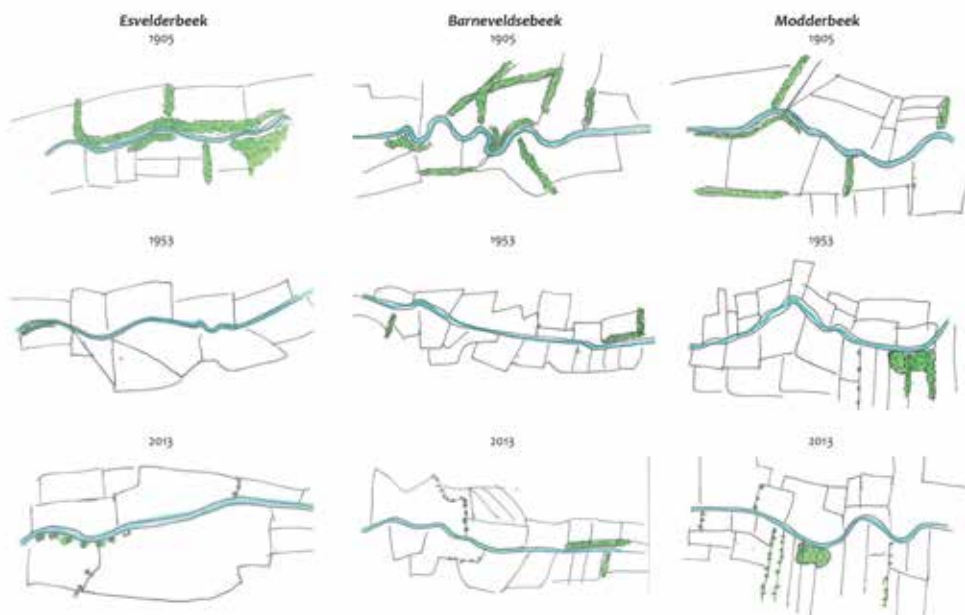
The students have made an overarching plan for the area, that will help residents improve local strong points. The plan is a book called the Do Book (Doeboek in Dutch). The idea evolved with the Recepty



## Geschiedenis van de beken

Bij deze schetsen is te zien hoe de drie belangrijkste beken veranderd zijn in de loop van de tijd.

Wat vooral opvalt is dat de meeste veranderingen tussen 1905 en 1953 hebben plaatsgevonden. Zo is er in die periode veel groen verdwenen en is met name de Barneveldse beek rechtgetrokken. Dit had vooral agrarische voordelen, maar heeft een negatief effect op de ecologie en de waterhuishouding op de lagere delen rondom de beek. Verder is de strookverkaveling langs een beek ook typerend. Bij de Esvelderbeek en de Barneveldse beek zijn deze voor een groot deel behouden gebleven, maar aan de zuidkant van de Modderbeek is deze verdwenen.



## 134 Scenariokaart

Als iedereen in het gebied alles volgens de uitwerkingen in dit boek zou maken dan krijgt het buitengebied een heel ander beeld. Dan zijn de landschapstypes weer zichtbaar en dus geen verrommeling meer, kan water opgevangen worden, kan de recreatie genieten van de omgeving en is het gebied een toevoeging aan Amersfoort.

De beekdalen zijn open met een paar elzensingels evenwijdig aan de beek, de beek heeft meer ruimte. Op de dekzandruggen is het een mozaïek van houtwallen, hier is het knus en gesloten met open landen tussendoor. De huizen staan in het groen. De verbinding landgoed Stoutenburg en Kallenbroek is nu duidelijk te zien aan het groen. De open intensieve landbouwgebieden aan de onderkant van de Hesseweg is nu ook goed te zien.



### Legenda

- Bebouwing
- Boerderij of woning
- Klein Stoutenburg met bezoekerscentrum
- Snelwegen A1 en A28
- Wegen
- Emelaarseweg: van 80km/h naar 60km/h
- Stoutenburgerlaan: toegankelijk voor bewoners
- Recreatieroute
- Beek
- Oever: flauwer en meer ecologie
- Juliusput
- Houtwal: dekzandrug
- Elzensingels beekdal
- Bomenlaan
- Bloemenrijkgrasland: dekzandrug
- Landgoed Stoutenburg: terugbrengen contouren d.m.v. bomen

Book of the municipality of Apeldoorn as an example and inspirational source. This book is like a manual for improving your own environment.

The Do Book first explains how the landscape was formed, geologically and by human hand. Student Jelle Engelchor introduces the Do Book. The first chapter shows how the natural landscape consists of stream valleys and sand ridges, the latter laying in the landscape like a hand with spread fingers.

In the Do Book the students motivate local farmers to make groves, tree avenues and wood banks on the sand ridges, so the agricultural area gets a more intimate feel. In the stream valleys they would like to see a comeback of the traditional alder girths. Also the students propose to flatten the banks of the streams, with reed vegetation. That will create more biodiversity and look more attractive. Flattening the banks of the streams also makes them better suited for water retention.

The Do Book is essentially a tool to help the residents strengthen the identity of the landscape. In another chapter the students provide tips to the municipality for nature and water compensation, by pointing out what could be done in which areas.

At the end of their presentation, Jelle Engelchor connects different parts of the area and proposes many smaller and larger improvements. The students recommend to develop more recreational routes in De Schammer and Bloeidaal and around Stoutenburg castle. For the Juliusput they propose to make longer hiking trails with also a shorter bicycling path and a 'window', through which recreationists and by-passers can see the lake and the surrounding nature, without actually going there. That way 'a nature experience' can be created. Furthermore they propose to make the Stoutenburglaan traffic free by introducing a system that only allows residents to use the road.

## Reception by stakeholders and residents

The first reception is very positive, the stakeholders all find the Do Book very appealing.

Charles Rijsbosch of the municipality of Amersfoort, and the principal of this assignment, calls the Do Book a surprise. "It is not a blueprint or a command that is being dictated but rather an invitation for the stakeholders to strengthen the story and the purpose of the landscape. This is a very good achievement", he comments. Rijsbosch says he was wary beforehand about the participation part of the assignment. "The people are quite suspicious about plans for their area, but obviously students create more goodwill than government officials."

One of the residents, farmer Van Oosterom, likes it that the book gives everybody a chance to contribute in their own way. But there has to be a compensati-

on for certain things, he finds. "We have a mortgage on the land and we would rather let a milk producing cow graze the land, than plant a wood bank. So there should be a compensation from the municipality for the construction and maintenance of wood banks." His wife says that they feel that the students took them seriously and that the students brought about the most important issues. But she concludes: "Of course we still have to see if it will lead to anything in practice."

## '... everybody who wants, can start creating groves and wood banks on a small scale.'

Fellow student and resident Lennart van Ravenhorst makes the same reservation, but finds the Do Book a beautiful approach. "It is better to give guidance. Rules and regulations only arouse resistance. And everybody who wants, can start creating groves and wood banks on a small scale. But a compensation has to be paid, because it will take up agricultural ground. Otherwise the farmers will not carry out any of these ideas."

Detlef Stolker, policy advisor outdoor area of the municipality of Leusden is impressed by the speed in which the students acquired insights about the area and developed a vision. "The Do Book provides concrete guidance, and we can use it as inspiration for the future", states Stolker.

The policy officer on spatial development of the province of Utrecht, Gerda Zijm, calls the Do Book a modern solution. "These days spatial design cannot be planned in advance anymore. The local, regional and national government do not have the money anymore to subsidize projects, purchase land and build things. So it is better to offer people possibilities to make their environment more attractive, and to inspire and challenge them to do things themselves. Involving people and creating conditions for participation is of this time."

### The experience of the students

Looking back, all students say that they have learned a lot about participation. "We learned how to have interviews and conversations with stakeholders and residents and we saw that there are many different opinions. You have to be convinced of your own ideas before you can transfer them. It is a very useful experience. Participation is used more often, especially now with the crisis. There is less money, so the government has to involve people", explains Mariska Blankespoor. Fellow student Stephanie Mullaart adds that she also learned that some residents just don't want anything at all. "Some people are very closed. Besides that, there were so many different interests that we could not make an off-the-peg plan. Because



## **‘...after the final presentation the different parties were embracing each other again’**

of that, we had to look at the area in a different way. We chose to look at small ingredients to make the area more beautiful. We saw that the different landscapes have different elements, like the alder girths along the stream in the stream valleys. The sand ridges consist of rectangular mosaics, that can be framed by wood banks”, says Mullaart.

The students are happy that the Do Book can have a meaning for the area. Mariska Blankespoor explains: “It will help to realize things and to create public support, and hopefully take away the great reserve of the residents. There was quite some distrust. It felt as if we were the key to bring everybody together.”

The municipality used a top down approach in the past that led to friction. “That is why we found it reasonable to take the side of the residents, to ensure and enlarge their support”, says Jelle Engelchor. Participation was totally different and new for us, he stresses. “After the first weeks I said: I have not drawn any sketches or made any designs, but I still find it interesting. That is was a real assignment motivated us even more. I have learned a lot about dealing with people and about the relations between the municipality, residents and other stakeholders”, he concludes.

### **The lecturers’ verdict**

All three lecturers of VHL University of Applied Sciences that were involved in the assignment, are satisfied with the outcome. “The conversation between the municipality and the residents had come to a deadlock”, analyzes Ad Woudstra. “Especially when the residents feel that they are not heard, it can be good to come with a group of students and carefully dig the ground”, he continues. Woudstra speaks from decades of experience in participation processes. “The students succeeded in getting things going again and in creating enthusiasm and energy. They created an opening towards the residents. Now the municipality has to take up on the process.”

His colleague Adrian Noortman underlines that the students learned to think in a different way. “To give the residents the management of their own area means that you recognize that it is their land. The interesting part is that the Do Book invites people to take part in the process. The book has a lot of elements that will improve the quality of the landscape. But if residents don’t have the desire to participate, they don’t have to.” Also he applauds the financial aspect of the plan, the idea of using nature compensation for broadening the high ways to compensate land owners who want to plant wood banks, groves, tree lanes and alder girths. “Residents will ask themselves: What is in it for me?”, states Noortman.

Lecturer landscape architecture Ad Koolen agrees. However, the report of the students is not very visionary, he finds. It is unclear how the area will look like in the coming century. Will it for example evolve into a city park where some farming still will be

done, Koolen wonders. “But there is not one professional landscape design bureau in the Netherlands that could have accomplished this within only eight weeks. The students acquainted themselves with the landscape, spoke with stakeholders and residents and came up with a plan. And after the final presentation the different parties were embracing each other again”, he says.

Within the VALUE+ student workshops, that all concern participation, this assignment stands out, concludes Koolen. The Do Book is an end product that the municipality and other stakeholders can use and distribute, he explains. “This assignment was mainly about the participation process, and the way in which the end product can play a role in that process. The starting point is really bottom up.”

### **The future**

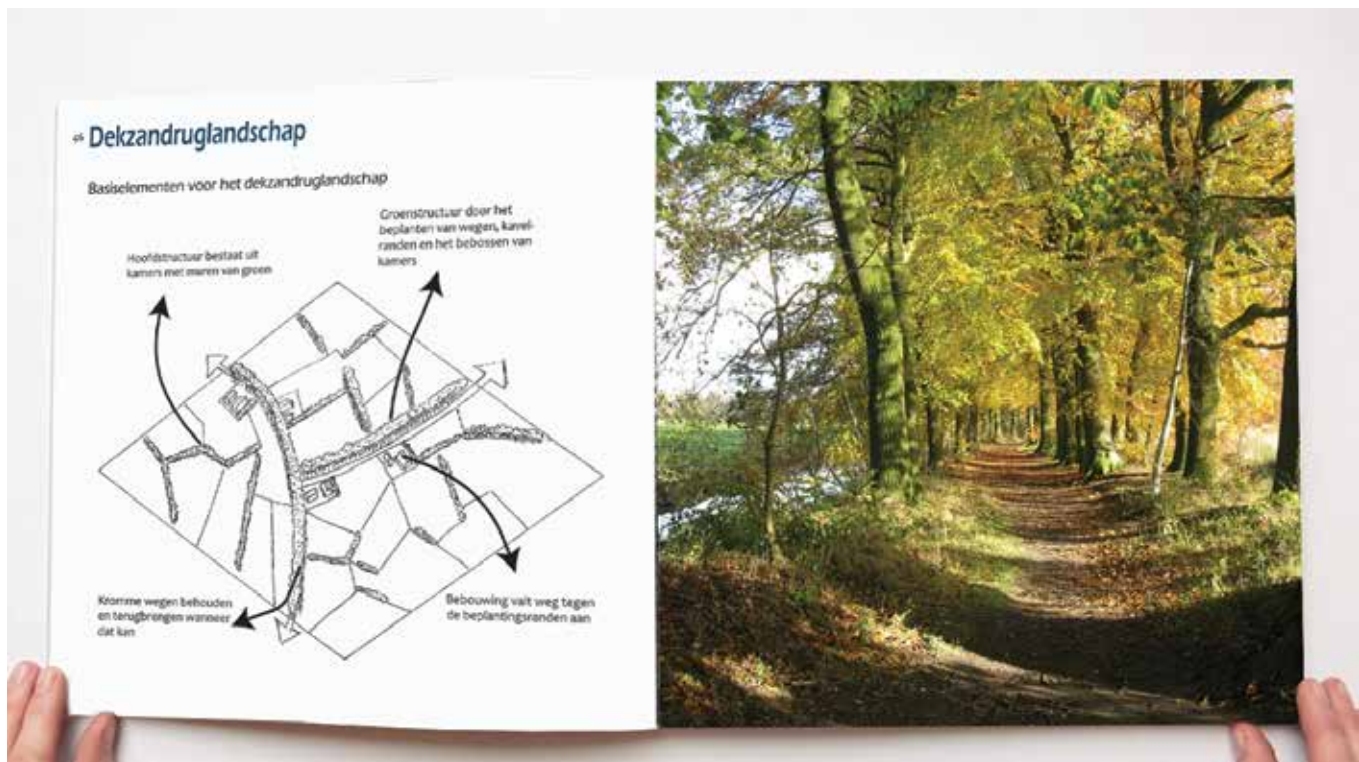
The Do Book can certainly play a role in the future of the outdoor area of Amersfoort.

Irma Bakkers, policy officer of Het Utrechts Landschap, likes the overlap between recreation, water and nature. “The Do Book helps to draw attention to things that are good and possible in the area. And it focuses on ways to involve the residents in improving their own area.” As an organisation Het Utrechts Landschap has been working on this area for a long time, she says. “It is good to have a fresh view from students, to prevent tunnel vision and look at the area in another way.”

However, in practice it has proven difficult to create public support, Bakkers commemorates. “Some residents are willing to cooperate, but we will have to find creative solutions to financially compensate them. It is good to keep the conversation going. We will have to find a way to facilitate the cooperation between the stakeholders and residents. The municipality can steer things in the right direction.”

Charles Rijsbosch of the municipality of Amersfoort agrees. Sometimes during charrettes and design workshops in which students, residents and stakeholders cooperate, an atmosphere of togetherness arises. Eventually that will motivate the participants and create the necessary energy to execute the ideas, Rijsbosch explains. “Now, this is not the case. We have to find a way to organize sufficient drive and commitment to change things. That will be the next step. The Do Book will definitely help us to develop a collective language and a collective outlook on the landscape.”

The municipality of Amersfoort helped to produce more copies of the Do Book, to be distributed among the stakeholders and residents that were involved in this student assignment. Rijsbosch thinks that the Do Book will provide insights and that it will help to start the dialogue. “It forces people to think about the measures they want to take and it helps them to do it in such a way that the measures will enforce each other.”









# Upgrading Edward Street Park **A shared place**

By Alexandra Brandenhorst

During an intensive three-day workshop, six Garden and Landscape Architecture students of VHL University of Applied Sciences in Velp, The Netherlands, worked together with Master and PhD students of the Universities of Sheffield and Manchester. Their focus was on Edward Street Park, an underused park nearby the University of Sheffield. With the needs and wishes of local residents in mind, the students developed useful, creative and original plans to turn the park into a lively place.

## Monday 14th October

### A first impression of heights and rain

Six Dutch students are descending the stairs that lead along a huge social housing complex to Edward Street Park. These are third year students of VHL University of Applied Sciences, accompanied by three teachers. Under their feet the stairs end in a broad path that has a soft yellow brown color. On the left side there is a grassplot sloping uphill, surrounded by the path that leads to a small plateau. Standing there, a grand view of the city unfolds, with tall apartment buildings and the hills that surround Sheffield in the distance. The Dutch group is stunned by the big differences in height, which cannot be found in their own flat country. Directly on the right side there are tall modern buildings, and there is a Tesco supermarket.

Across from the sloping grass plot, there is a squishy basketball court with the green color of artificial grass. The court is divided from the path by three rows of low stone walls in half a circle, functioning as benches like in an ancient amphitheater. There are green plots with plants, surrounded by low walls that are built from the same yellow brown stone as the benches around the basketball court. There are a few plants, lavender, low reed, and some young trees.

At the end of the basketball court an iron fence arises. Behind it there is a steep meadow, with construction work for student housing behind it. On the left side, the meadow leads to a street with modern student housing, and some uninviting looking plots of land further on. There are not many people around. It has been raining for hours since the Dutch group arrived in Sheffield that day.

## Tuesday 15th October

### Getting to know Edward Street Park

The room in a building of the University of Sheffield not far from Edward Street Park fills up. Still a bit uneasy the students greet each other. There are six Bachelor students of Garden and Landscape Architecture of VHL University in the Netherlands, and six Master students of Town Planning of the University of Manchester. Also five PhD students of the Department of Landscape at the University of Sheffield are present.

Betty Anyika of the South Yorkshire Forest Partnership welcomes everybody and introduces the project. Edward Street Park is one of the pilot areas in the project VALUE Added, in short VALUE+. VHL University, the University of Sheffield and the South Yorkshire Forest Partnership / Sheffield City Council (SYFP/SCC) are all participants in this interregional project about strategic planning and public participation. The SYFP/SCC introduced Edward Street Park as their investment site for VALUE+. The municipality of Sheffield invests € 880,000.= in the site, with half the money coming from EU Interreg subsidy.





### Architecture, art and sightseeing

Due to its history, the city of Sheffield harbors different styles of architecture. Solid brownstone factories, clearly dating back to the industrial revolution, more elegant old buildings and churches and surprising 21st century architecture mix wonderfully well together. There are many famous examples of modern architecture in the city, like the 'Cheesegrater' multi-storey car park.

Upon arrival by train, a huge water feature named 'Cutting Edge' directly outside the railway station overwhelms the unsuspecting visitor, giving an image of fluent steel. Another must see is the Winter Garden, one of the largest urban glasshouses in Europe that houses more than 2,000 plants from all around the world in a mild and pleasant temperature.



University of Sheffield



Old pictures of the area around Edward Street



The Winter Garden





Edward Street Park

Sheffield City Centre



### **New urban park**

Development Officer Matt Hayman of the City Regeneration Division tells the audience more about Edward Street Park. The spot is located in St Vincent's quarter, traditionally an area with high density housing and larger factories. Part of it is a steep sloping area up the hill. Nowadays there is both social and student housing, and there is also industrial land close to Edward Street Park. Because it was an underused open space and there were not enough people working and living in the vicinity, there were problems with prostitution and drug use. To prevent the kerb crawlers from driving around, in 2009 the road through the park was closed and a concrete basketball court was constructed. However, the place needed more work.

Edward Street Park connects the city centre, the university and the tram stop. There are a lot of people passing by and it is an important junction in the area. That is why a few years ago the city council decided to create a new urban park, aiming to improve social cohesion, stimulate economic activities and engage the community in the long-term management of the site. When it was appointed a VALUE+ pilot area, more funding became available.

After a lot of planning and redesigning, the site was reconstructed in 2012 and 2013 to its present state. Unfortunately most of the planting failed, says Hayman, because the plants were delivered too early and it was too cold. Also, the area still suffers from antisocial behaviour.

On 28 September 2013 there was a grand opening for Edward Street Park. Some of the colourful triangle-shaped little flags are still hanging there, swaying in the wind and rain.

The students can see this for themselves, when they visit the site together after the presentations. At the site Landscape Architect Mike Brearly of the city's Urban Design and Conservation Team tells the students about the redesign process and answers their questions. There is a little bit of funding left to make further improvements. The city council organized discussions with local residents and a questionnaire was held during the grand opening.

### **Local concerns**

After the site visit and a tasty lunch, the outcomes of the questionnaire are presented by Gulsah Bilge, a PhD student in Landscape visualization in Sheffield. She was involved in developing the questionnaire and a 3D

**‘People wanted more street lamps, more trash bins, more flowers and trees and an information board!’**

visualization of the spot. Landscape architect Tim Calnan of CS Design Software delivered a user-friendly visualization tool that enables stakeholders to experience the site by walking, flying or running around. During the opening the attendants who participated were shown a one minute 3D visualization of the park. They were also asked what they liked about the park, and what problems they wanted to see resolved. The 80 questionnaires show that the main concerns focus on litter, noise, safety and security. People wanted more street lamps, more trash bins, more flowers and trees and an information board. Especially for the upper plateau they wanted more facilities, like a playground or aerobic facilities. The ground of the basketball court is too soft for basketball, people complained. And the stairs leading up to Solly Street get too slippery in winter and are too dark at night.

### **Placemaking theory**

Next, landscape architect and lecturer Ad Koolen of VHL University asks the students to identify the strong points of the site. “Heights”, says a Dutch student immediately. It is open and has a nice view, other students add. “The place had a bad image and was not so safe. But now with the playground and the Tesco supermarket there are always people around. I can walk there alone”, says Xiayum Wan, a PhD student from China, who happens to live near the park. Most of the residents around the site are Master students who only live there for one year. They hardly mingle with the people living in the social housing, the Edward Street flats. The temporary and permanent residents don't have any connection, the Sheffield students explain.

The big group of 17 students is divided into five groups that each contain students of all three universities. Within the smaller groups the students identify the problem and possible solutions. One group wants to improve safety and create common ground to link the different resident groups together. Other groups focus on accessibility and connectivity and strive to create inviting entrances and a visual connection between the park and the surroundings. They want to increase safety and add green and colour to the site.

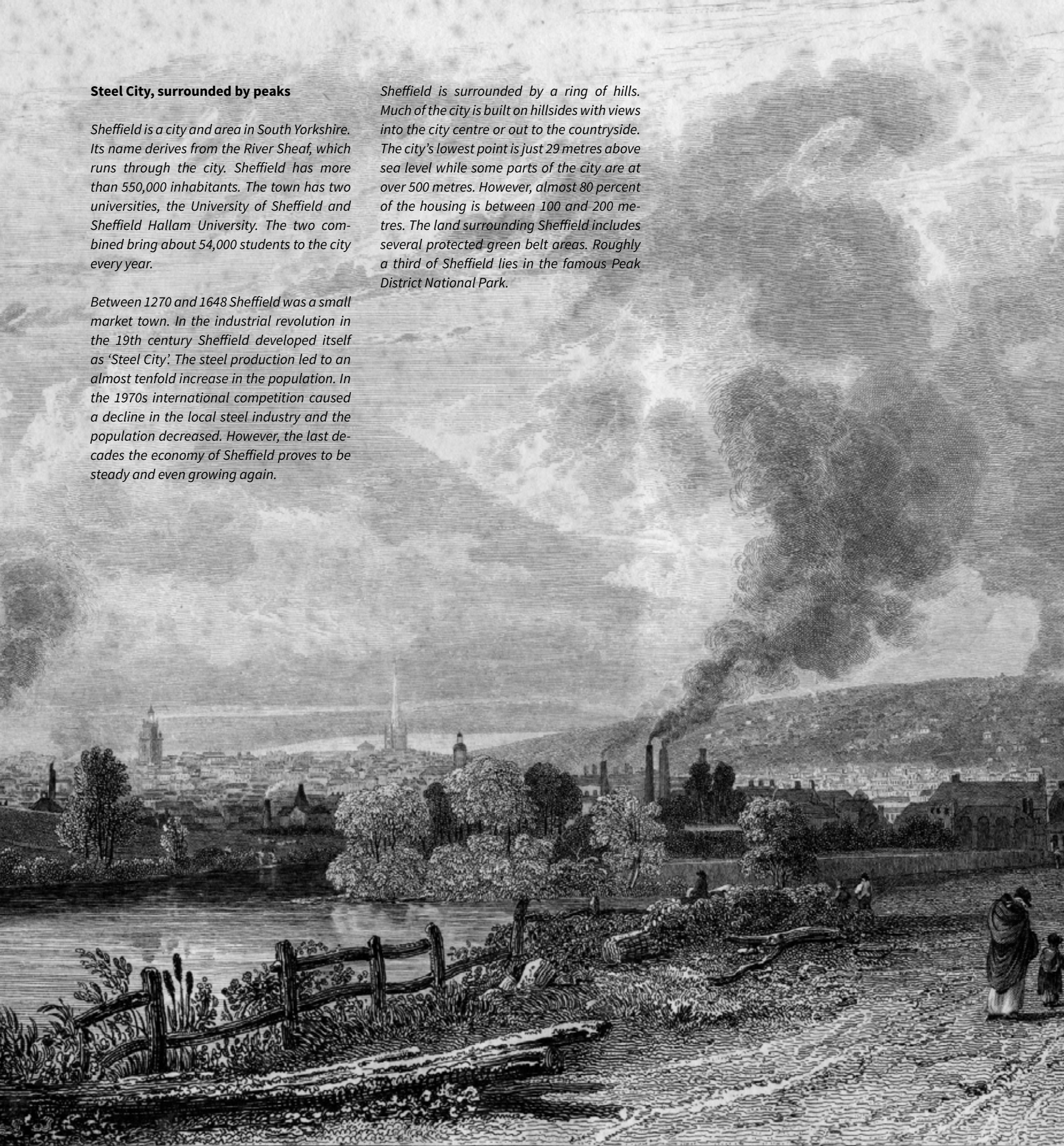
After a first presentation, Koolen concludes that the general ideas of the students focus on connectivity, permeability, safety and activities. Then the students receive more theoretical input from Dorith van Gestel, designer and guest lecturer at VHL University. She tells them about placemaking, the process in which professionals, residents and shopkeepers work together to change a public space into a lively place, with the users and uses of the place as starting point. Van Gestel gives a clear overview of the history and premises of placemaking the-

### **Steel City, surrounded by peaks**

Sheffield is a city and area in South Yorkshire. Its name derives from the River Sheaf, which runs through the city. Sheffield has more than 550,000 inhabitants. The town has two universities, the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University. The two combined bring about 54,000 students to the city every year.

Between 1270 and 1648 Sheffield was a small market town. In the industrial revolution in the 19th century Sheffield developed itself as 'Steel City'. The steel production led to an almost tenfold increase in the population. In the 1970s international competition caused a decline in the local steel industry and the population decreased. However, the last decades the economy of Sheffield proves to be steady and even growing again.

Sheffield is surrounded by a ring of hills. Much of the city is built on hillsides with views into the city centre or out to the countryside. The city's lowest point is just 29 metres above sea level while some parts of the city are at over 500 metres. However, almost 80 percent of the housing is between 100 and 200 metres. The land surrounding Sheffield includes several protected green belt areas. Roughly a third of Sheffield lies in the famous Peak District National Park.



Sheffield





ory. We learn the main ingredients of a great place are sociability, multiple uses and activities, access, linkage, comfort and image, we learn. Afterwards, Ad Koolen asks the students to look again at the assignment with this knowledge in mind, and point out the most important theme the next day.

### Wednesday 16th October

#### Visualization techniques, lots of ideas and a map

The day starts with the presentation 'Landscape Visualization History' by professor Eckart Lange, the head of the Department of Landscape at the University of Sheffield. "Normally we perceive the world in a visual way. It is the dominant sense," he says. Hence a range of techniques has been developed to show landscape and architecture designs, from drawing, painting and small scale models to photomontage and virtual environments. One of the newest 3D techniques is augmented reality, that was first developed in the army. It allows the viewer to see the virtual environment on screen or through special looking glasses, from their real and literal point of view - it adapts to the viewers position.

Lange himself was involved in the URSULA (Urban River Corridors and Sustainable Living Agendas) project, that included multidisciplinary visualization research and development. The outcome was an iPad, linked with a remote computer, that provides on-site real-time visualization. Also Lange and his colleagues conducted research about the use of the different visualization techniques. "2D overviews and a 3D walkthrough seems the strongest combination", he found. The students are then given the opportunity to experiment a bit with a 3D walkthrough of Edward Street Park on the computer.

#### An inviting park

Then it is time for the students to present their first results. The first group wants to create "a shared place" and improve the park use throughout the year, by offering a range of activities and establishing a community centre. The other groups focus on practical improvements to make the place, the entrances and the surroundings more inviting by adding elements like more seats or benches, a transparent roof above the benches, an information board, pot plants, seasonal flower beds, cascading water features and fountains, wall art, wall plants and vertical flower beds.

One group wants to improve the visual connection with the environment and the tram stop, by creating a sight line and redesigning the Solly Street Steps. Wider stairs made of natural stone and a wall on sitting height next to the stairs, create a broader view as well as sitting possibilities. Other multifunctional solutions pass in review too. For example the basketball court has to be resurfaced, so it can be flooded and turned into an ice skating ring in winter, and used for basketball, hockey and other sports the rest of the year. Another student remembers the iron umbrella poles she saw in Ireland that can be covered when it rains, and be rotated into a cinema wall.

**'What are the the strong points of the site? "Heights", says a Dutch student immediately.'**

#### Creativity takes over

In the afternoon, a big white paper on a table in the middle of the room invites the students to turn it into a map of Edward Park Street, with drawings of their ideas. At first everybody seems a bit shy, but soon creativity takes over. In spontaneously formed groups the students exchange ideas and start drawing.

On top of the other plans a rainwater harvest system will be installed next to the stairs. The stairs are illuminated during the night. In the uppergarden, the plateau, somebody imagines a barbecue pit. Along the basketball field the iron fence is changed into more natural materials and can be used as a cinema screen too, the steep meadow becomes the center of a neighborhood planting competition and a harvest festival. Opposite of Tesco the terrace of a coffeeshop arises, with umbrellas, seats and flowerbeds in the middle.

Lecturer Ad Koolen is satisfied. "This morning I heard 25 stories, but now we have added everything together and created one big model. We can give the community lots of tools to improve the park. Now we have to put these elements into SketchUp models and drawings for the final presentation tomorrow."

#### Room for discovery

This workshop is completely different than other international workshops, including the workshop for Value Added in Liège, Ad Koolen states. "The international collaboration is fantastic, there is no language problem and everybody is very motivated. The different degrees of the students, from Bachelor to PhD, can barely be noticed."

In other workshops in Southern European countries the Dutch students usually show initiative and take the



lead. In Sheffield this is not the case. “The working relations are on equal terms.”

The assignment itself also differs a lot from Liège, where the students spoke with stakeholders and made plans for a park run wild. “Edward Street Park is more of a luxury problem, there is a bit of money left for some practical solutions. The assignment in itself is not very challenging.”

Nevertheless something interesting happened, says Koolen. The students and the working class who live in the vicinity are being introduced as requesting parties, but they have nothing in common and use the park on different times. Koolen: “During the workshop the students reformulated the assignment. They want to change the park into a place where these groups meet and that will be used the whole year. So the students asked themselves: What can we add that gives the place more meaning for both groups?”

The way in which Koolen organized the workshop leaves room for discovery, he explains. “When you know in advance what results you want to see as a teacher, you can steer the students in this direction. But it can be good to leave it open. Because of the input of the students, you suddenly notice that it is better to take a left turn. So the outcome of the first step, determines the direction of the second step. In this kind of intensive workshop, the design charrette, the students can surprise themselves as well as their teachers.”

## **‘At first everybody seems a bit shy, but soon creativity takes over.’**

### **Thursday 17th October**

#### **Time to draw conclusions**

On the last morning, the workshop participants are busy, talking things through and putting their ideas in drawings and in 3D images in SketchUp, for the final presentation that afternoon. It is a good moment to ask them about their experiences.

The workshop is really interesting because it concerns her research area, states Gulsah Bilge from Turkey, PhD student on Landscape Visualization in Sheffield. In her research she compares the use of virtual reality and mobile devices on the spot. “It can be good to use a device at the place itself. In a laboratory or office and on photos or 3D models you can see something, but in reality it can smell or be noisy.”

All the different perspectives from the participating students, from different backgrounds and universities are really helpful, says Bilge. “It is easy to work together and finally we came up with about 16 different scenarios.” She will visualize some ideas about Edward Street Park to present in the lab with virtual reality to some people and to show it on mobile device to others.

#### **Multidisciplinary collaboration**

The group of the University of Manchester consists of six Master students Town Planning. “We don’t get study points but it will look good on our résumé and participation is fun”, says one of them, Michael Clare. “This kind of workshop would work really well with residents in the groups. For example: yesterday we were drawing. Anyone can do that. It’s a shame that there is not enough community involvement now. But for Xiayum who lives here, we would never have known who goes to the park.”

Clare enjoys the multidisciplinary cooperation a lot. “We are more into planning, theory and policy, while others are landscape architects. They say: We can do this and this. We say: Where do we get the money from? And with so many nationalities here, the different approaches show how design of public space is funded in the different countries.” He is proud of the results. “We have come up with designs that do not cost a lot and that can be implemented.”

His study mate Esme Walker agrees and adds that she became much more familiar with people that do landscape design. “Some students are only interested in colors and design, while planners look more into practicalities like maps, and how people move through the public space.” She finds the Dutch learning style, with multiple lecturers involved, quite informal and nurturing and liked the set-up of the workshop. “We do a bit of work, then present, do more work, present again. It is good for your presentation skills.”

Also Xiayum Wan from China is attracted by this kind of flexible group work. “It made the outcome so rich when we worked with the whole group on the map and added our opinions. Also it has been years since I drew things.” Wan just finished her PhD at the University of Sheffield about community governance and public participation in relation to small scale landscape design in China. The small scale of the workshop assignment is a good thing, she thinks. “For a larger location we would have needed more time.”

Her only regret is not being able to speak with local residents. “We should have talked more with the users of this place. In Beijing we have public hearings with local people and business men. I learned a lot from talking with them. We should have that sense of responsibility as planners and designers, that we have to design things for people to use.”







Create a better view of the park from the top of the steps by widening and straightening the path



Create a new short cut by stairs

## Realistic

Practically all students and lecturers involved, are enthusiastic about the diversity of the participating students and the cooperation. VHL student Loeki Dorenstouter also attended the VALUE+ design workshop in Liège in June 2013, where the students made plans for the neglected park La Chartreuse. “In Liège there was a very low turnout of Belgian students and there was a language barrier, so the collaboration was very stiff. In Sheffield that went very well”, says Dorenstouter. “The workshop is very structured, people have very good and useful ideas. I am really learning to optimally use my creativity. Like how to make a multifunctional barbecue pit, or how to turn a super ugly iron fence into something nice and functional.”

Fellow VHL student Ruud Custers notes that his unfamiliarity with Sheffield, the British rules and the organization of public space help him grasp new ways of thinking. “Usually we think that something is not possible because it is not allowed by the authorities. But now I was thinking ‘why not?’ and trying to find good arguments for it.”

His classmate Abigail Wall also enjoys working in a city in another country. “Sheffield is a relatively small city, but very attractive. Here they pay more attention to the outdoor space than in the Netherlands.” Wall is learning how to organize a process in a fast way, she emphasizes. “At university we design things. Now it is just about making some adjustments with a little bit of money. That makes it very realistic. And it is great to hear different ideas about urban planning from the other students. They are thinking on very different scales; all together that’s a good combination.”

**‘Usually we think that something is not possible because it is not allowed by the authorities. But now I was thinking ‘why not?’**

## The final presentation

### Solutions for Edward Street Park

After lunch, as the final presentation nears, Betty Anyika, professor Eckart Lange and some others arrive. Manchester student Michael Clare takes the lead, explaining the assignment on the basis of a power point presentation. The students want to make the park “a shared place” where permanent residents, professionals and temporary residents like students get together throughout the year. Clare: “That is why we came up with EDDY’s scheme, short for Every Day of Da Year. A manager will run EDDY’s. Next to Tesco there is a vacant shop that could be his head office and a drop in space at once. Outside we put some seating and umbrellas opposite of Tesco to make the space more inviting as well”, explains Clare. The objective of EDDY’s is to organize activities and events that create interaction, like a pancake race, outdoor cinema, yoga classes, buying and selling of books and a Christmas market.

Next Esme Walker clarifies the plans for the Solly Street Steps, to improve visibility, accessibility, connectivity and safety. “We want to have lighting on ground level and a ramp for trolleys, wheel chairs and bicycles next to the stairs. At the entrance we want to have an information board advertizing the events in the park. Also we would like to make the steps more colourful, and of anti slippery material.”

The idea for a barbecue pit in the upper garden, is pitched by Ruud Custers. “The pit will be made of the same stone material as the walls. Fire and food are inviting”, he clarifies. His study mate Loeki Dorenstouter says that they want to cover the steep meadow bank next to the basketball court with native grass and flowers, so people can use it for picnics. Also new stairs should be created between the road and the event area. The iron fence should be replaced with a more natural looking wooden wall with big holes to look through, so people can see the skyline of Sheffield. Julia Kinzevskaia adds that Radford Street, beneath the meadow banks, looks ugly. The easy, fast and cheap option to refurbish it, would be to put lights and vertical green structures on the walls. The presentation is concluded by PhD student Melih Bozhurt. “It was a pleasure to work on a project that is in the real world after six years of academic research”, Bozhurt stresses, before summarizing the experiences and skills the students have gained through the workshop. Like working in an international and multidisciplinary environment and getting to know different design styles. For example the more ecologically oriented design style in the Netherlands, Bozhurt illustrates.

### Reception

The presentation is received very enthusiastically. VALUE+ Project Manager Betty Anyika of SYFP/SCC is impressed with the results. “You managed to do in three days what planners will take weeks to do. You have gained a lot of understanding of the area. That is fantastic. In terms of new ideas this is what we were looking for. We have not thought of redesigning the stairs for example, but it will uplift the whole area”, Anyika tells the students. However, a barbecue pit will probably not be possible because of the regulations concerning open fire in the UK. But there may be some extra funding to realize some of the other ideas, she adds.

Professor Eckart Lange is satisfied too. “This overview gives a good impression of the issues. The social issue



concerning the students and the local residents, I am not sure how to overcome that and if it is something for designers to solve. But the students gave quite a few suggestions. Now the interesting part is how the park will be developed further”, comments Lange. The workshop was very useful for his PhD students. “In an interdisciplinary workshop with an international group of students, different perspectives meet.”

#### **Arousing interest**

“You can achieve a lot in a compact three day workshop. It really works like a pressure cooker”, says designer and lecturer Dorith van Gestel. Like everybody else she is enthusiastic about the international, multidisciplinary collaboration and inspired by the outcome. But she did miss the participation of local residents in the design process. “Through the questionnaires we know what they think and want. It is good to gather this information, but the result of citizen participation can be more than a wish list. If you can involve people in the entire design process this will improve how the space is used eventually. Placemaking is not about designing spaces for people, but about making places together with people.”

In an ideal situation, the neighbourhood helps with the analysis, the vision and the action plan, and the government plays a facilitating role, stresses Van Gestel. “This will improve the interaction between the design, the

## **‘It really works like a pressure cooker’**

use and the management of a space.” Besides, many municipalities feel the necessity of finding new ways to manage public spaces, simply because there is not always enough

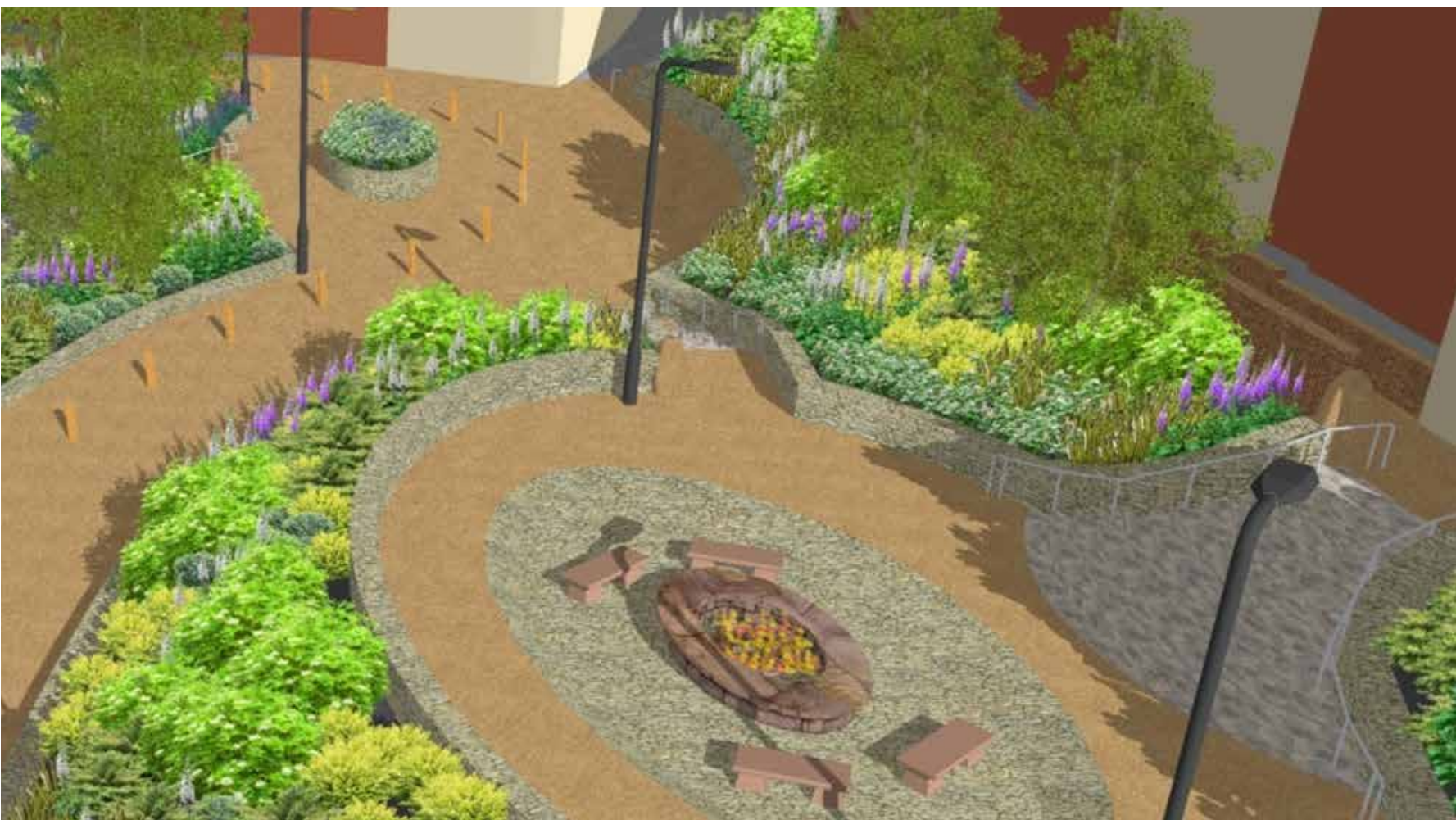
funding anymore. For example the Dutch city of Breda is mobilizing inhabitants for the maintenance of greenery in their neighbourhoods, says Van Gestel. “Mobilizing residents to take an interest in their surroundings is part of the placemaking principle. With the enthusiasm that a student workshop like this ignites, the residents can be motivated to make an effort and set things in motion.” In this respect, Van Gestel sees future potential for EDDY’s scheme as well. “Maybe university students can receive credits for organizing activities together with the permanent residents.”

#### **More Silicon Valley**

The assignment, concerning a park that had been delivered just a month before, was very instructive, finds Hans Smolenaers, architect, landscape architect and lecturer at VHL University. “It was good for the students to start from an existing situation, usually they don’t train for that. But it was surprising for all of us. Actually it is a kind of review of the spatial planning. It is not in a designer’s nature to evaluate his design afterwards, to see what worked out and what didn’t. Perhaps we should include it in the study program.”

In the workshop all teams developed ideas that hit the mark, Smolenaers continues. “It is very smart to study the routing and context in the urban fabric. Also EDDY’s scheme, to have a kind of program director for the place, responded to the challenges of the place very well.” In that scheme many events and things can be realized there, without making it permanent, the lecturer explains. “Maybe it is a good idea to create and offer more space in cities for non programmed activities and things.”

Similarly interesting were the differences between English and Dutch planning that came to light. “The emphasis on safety is quite extreme in the UK, in our eyes”, says Smolenaers. An example are the iron railings in the park, that were added to the original design for safety reasons. He found the presentation of Eckart Lange about landscape visualization, and the use of it as an interactive participation tool very potent as well. “In the Netherlands landscape architecture and design studios and studies are lagging in this respect. We should pay more attention to that aspect too, be a bit more Silicon Valley.”









# Dare to dream!

In May 2014, eight students and two lecturers of the department of Garden and Landscape Design participated in a workshop to develop a new Masterplan for the city of Menen in Belgium. In only five days, the seven students of VHL University (Velp, the Netherlands), together with a student of University College Ghent (Belgium), were asked to get to know the city and its surroundings, identify its most important challenges and opportunities, develop a long-term strategy for new green infrastructure, and propose new designs for key public spaces.

## The city

On the border between Belgium and France, along the river Leie, lies the small city of Menen. Including the villages of Lauwe and Rekkum, about 32,500 people live in this municipality. Menen used to be a fortified city, located at the very point where one of the old roads between Bruges and Lille crosses the river Leie. This river separates the centre of Menen from the neighbourhood De Barakken and its French twin city Halluin. Since the First World War the river Leie was altered several times to accommodate shipping.

Menen offers a number of interesting sights. The city has an attractive city hall from the 18th century, with a 33-meter high belfry next to it. The first fortifications of Menen were designed by Vauban and date back to the 17th century. Today only their foundations remain. On top of them, one can still see parts of

the Dutch fortifications from the beginning of the 19th century. Other buildings expressing the military history of the city include an old hospital and an armoury.

Menen is mostly a densely built city with many small row houses and small back gardens. With the exception of the main square, public spaces seem to be designed for cars, not people. The streets are covered in asphalt and cluttered with parked cars. Most street trees are pollarded, although there seems to be sufficient room for full-grown trees.

As Ad Koolen, lecturer of VHL University, puts it: “At the moment, the city lacks character, but it certainly has a lot of potential.”

## The challenges

The river Leie needs to be able to deal with larger ships that can carry more levels of containers between Antwerp and Paris. As a result, all bridges across the river will be renewed, and in some places the river is widened to accommodate the extra traffic. These new developments along the river Leie are a great opportunity for making new plans for Menen as a whole.

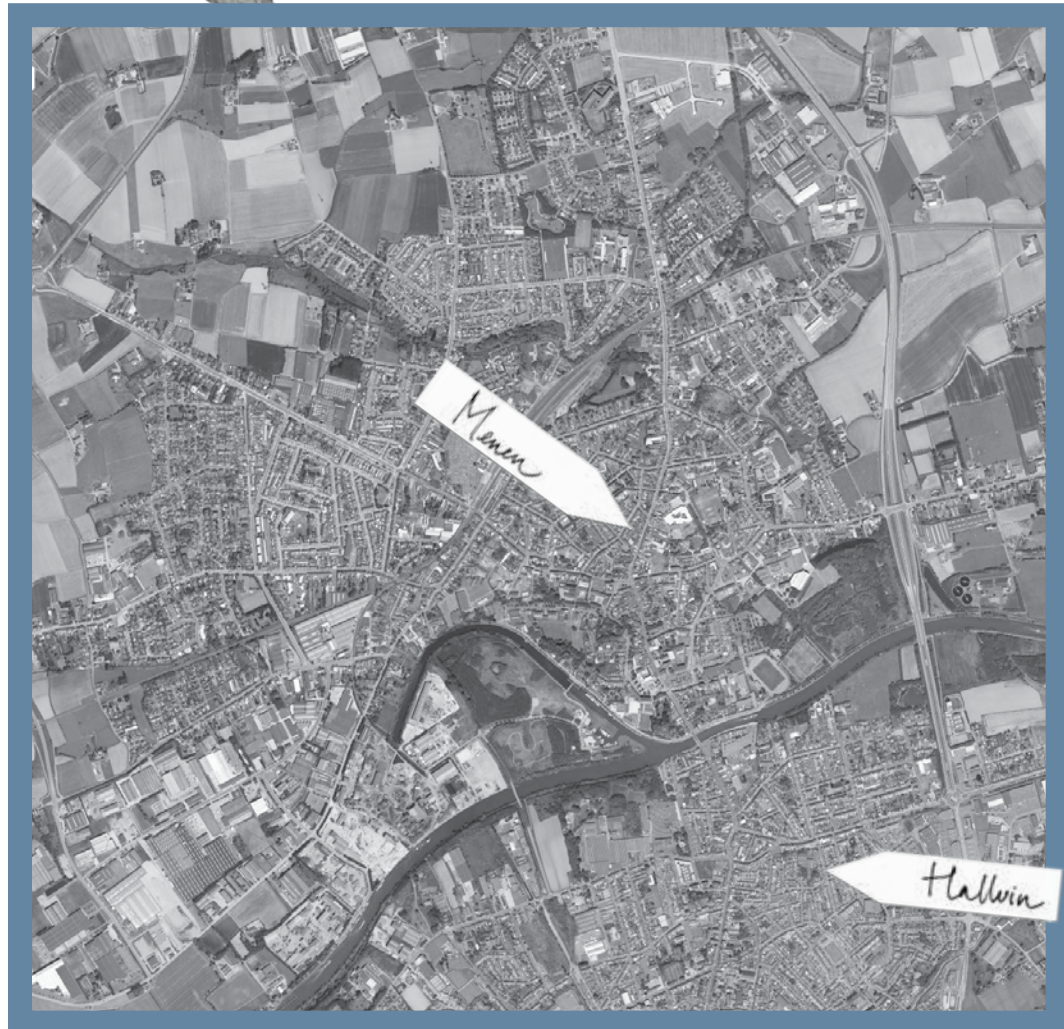
Until now, the river has mostly been used and valued for transportation. The river engineering project is an opportunity to make better use of the city's waterfront. Another challenge is the main shopping street that connects the new bridge with the main market square and city hall. De Barakken, the neighbourhood south of the river, is now a favourite shopping place for the French, where they can buy cheap flowers, cigarettes and chocolate. But these shoppers hardly cross the river to visit the Rijsselstraat and Me-

## A Masterplan for Menen

By Dorith van Gestel



**‘On the border between Belgium and France, along the river Leie, lies the small city of Menen.’**



*Menen used to be a fortified city, located at the very point where one of the old roads between Bruges and Lille crosses the river Leie. This river separates the centre of Menen from the neighbourhood De Barakken and its French twin city Halluin. Since the First World War the river Leie was altered several times to accommodate shipping.*







nen city centre. How can the Rijsselstraat be turned into an attractive shopping street?

Parked cars clutter almost every street and square in Menen. One of the questions therefore is how some of these places can be turned into people spaces. The final challenge is to make better use of the Geluwebeek, a stream running to the north and east of the city centre. In the old days, it was a stream valley outside the city's fortifications. When the city expanded in the 20th century, the waterway disappeared into underground tunnels and became part of the sewer system. Only outside the city, and in some locations within the closed perimeter blocks, the Geluwebeek is visible as an above ground stream. How can the city make the most of this largely covered waterway?

## Designing the city together

To address all these challenges, the city of Menen is supported by Intercommunale Leiedal. This is a governmental organisation supporting 13 municipalities in the southwest of Belgium. They offer support on issues related to spatial planning, ranging from water management and landscape development to housing areas and public spaces.

"In the old days," says Isabelle Putseys, urban designer at Intercommunale Leiedal, "the city would have hired a firm to develop a vision. These consultants would have discussed their plans with the city officials only, and it would have been presented to the citizens as a done deal." Today, Menen is trying out a different approach, called "designing the city together". The new plans are developed in close collaboration with citizens, companies and other stakeholders in the region. This approach is discussed within the Interreg IVB NWE Value Added project, which promotes innovative strategies to combine top-down planning with bottom-up approaches. "Leiedal, as Van Hall Larenstein University, is a partner in the European Value Added partnership, where cities and organisations from the North West Europe region meet about the

value of green investments. Leiedal has proposed to use the challenges in Menen as a pilot case for this Value Added workshop, to introduce new methods in designing green infrastructures," says Stefaan Verreure, expert on green environment at Intercommunale Leiedal. "We are participating to gain and share experience in planning strategies which involve local people, business, and organisations. We will use this experience in the further process of Value Added to formulate good practices to enhance the social and economic benefits of an integrated approach in green investments."

Nele Vandaele and Isabelle Putseys are the two urban designers of Intercommunale Leiedal who organised the programme "Designing the city together". They started with identifying and interviewing key stakeholders, which included organisations such as the local hospital and schools, but also local businesses and environmental organisations. They also launched a new website and facebook page, and organised a successful conversation café, where the citizens of Menen could discuss the main issues in an informal setting. The next step is the student workshop which will be the main focus of this article. The student workshop will be followed by a design charette with a Spanish landscape architect, Jordi Farrando, who also redesigned many of the public spaces in Kortrijk, a nearby city. All the input will be combined into a new master plan, which will be presented to the people of Menen in another conversation café. People will have the opportunity to comment and respond before a final version is drafted.

## The workshop

The five-day workshop in Menen started on Sunday evening, when the Dutch students and their lecturers were warmly welcomed with a dinner party at restaurant the Royale Axkit. An excellent start, as the Geluwebeek, part of the assignment, ran through the back garden of this restaurant.

Monday was all about getting to know the area. After a warm welcome by Trui Everaerd, urban designer for the city of Menen, the urban designers of Intercommunale Leiedal presented a thorough analysis of the history and development of the city, followed by a bicycle tour through the municipality. This was hosted by Dirk Vanholme, the alderman responsible for transport, and an avid cyclist himself. After the tour, the students were divided in groups and assigned different topics. One group was to focus on transport and parking issues, one group on the main shopping street and the new bridge, and a third group on the stream valley of the Geluwebeek. At the end of the day, the students presented their analysis to each other.

The next three days the students worked in the studio. As the city hall is located in the heart of the study area, the students could easily pop out to check the location or take extra pictures. Four bicycles were available to visit the sites that were further away. "It was a good idea to work at the location," says urban designer Vandaele. "We usually work from our office of the Intercommunale in Kortrijk. Now we are much more in touch with the city of Menen, both the location and the organisation." Around lunchtime, city officials drop by to check in on the progress and to answer questions.

**'In the old days the city would have hired a firm to develop a vision.'**









On Wednesday, a larger delegation of the city of Menen and the Intercommunale is present to watch the presentations at the end of the day. They ask about the consequences of different measures, for instance the effect on water management. They also want to know about the quick wins. Dutch professor Wim Timmermans of Van Hall Larenstein is also present. He asks the students about their priorities and stresses the importance of a long-term vision. "It is tempting to fix things in such a way that you can manage for another 10 years. But where do you want to be in 50 years? This may ask for a completely different approach."

Thursday was devoted to creating an integrated framework for the products of the three different groups. On Friday morning the students added the finishing touches to their drawings and gave their final presentation.

## The proposal

On Friday afternoon, the students presented their plans to a large delegation of some 25 city officials and representatives of the community. In the students' point of view, Menen is a riverside city and should be proud of it. The river engineering project, widening the riverbed and heightening all the bridges to accommodate bigger ships, is a big opportunity for Menen to emphasize its identity as a riverside city. The first challenge is to make it stand out among all the other cities along the river, and use the new developments to put the city back on the map.

The new bridge is an excellent opportunity to create a real icon for the city. An iconic bridge can seduce (French) visitors of the Barakken to the other side of the river to discover the historic centre of Menen. In order to make the most of this location, both the bridge and the waterfront need to have high quality pedestrian areas where people can sit, talk, and enjoy spending their time.

The bridge needs to be two meters higher than it is today. First, the students show the advantages of a moveable bridge. They conclude that a vertical-lift bridge would not require the demolition of any buildings and would leave room for urban spaces that are close to the water and well-connected with the urban fabric. Attractive 3D drawings of the new bridge, as well as examples of other waterfronts, show how this type of bridge can be both an icon and an urban space of its own.

The alternative is a fixed bridge with 50-meter long ramps. In the opinion of the Intercommunale this also creates new opportunities. The space that is needed

for the ramps can be used to create a green riverside park. This park could show off part of the old fortification walls and include new building developments. In both cases, Menen could do more to organise activities along the waterfront, and develop its quality as an urban space, not just a transportation route.

The river Leie is not the only important waterway for Menen. Along the Geluwebeek there are many beautiful green places of value. Some are suitable for recreation, some for storm water management, some have ecological value, others might be used for educational purposes. These functions can also be combined. Over the past 70 years, the city has expanded across the stream valley, and the stream has largely disappeared underground. In the near future, the water of the stream will no longer be polluted by the sewer system, and so the second challenge for Menen is to rediscover this valley running through the city and reconnect the isolated areas. This way a new "blue and green corridor" can be created throughout the city.

The Geluwebeek is considered to be a forgotten treasure of the city, like a string of green pearls, waiting to be rediscovered. Beautiful pictures show what a lovely place it can actually become. One of the issues is the water quality. This can be improved by preventing sewer overflow, and by cleaning the water in the reed beds of treatment ponds. The students propose to emphasize the wilderness aspect of the stream val-

## **'The Geluwebeek is considered to be a forgotten treasure of the city, like a string of green pearls, waiting to be rediscovered.'**

ley on the west side of the tracks by induced meandering. More towards the city centre, the valley could have more recreational value by adding a petting zoo or an adventure playground. On the east side of the city centre, the stream runs through two parks. By connecting these and incorporating a parking lot, one big park is created, where one can also see part of the old fortifications. The students also introduce a park café that can be supplied by an urban farming project in the park itself. The water of the Geluwebeek can even run through the main street, as is illustrated with examples of water as a playful element in city streets.

The third challenge are the cars dominating the public domain. This leaves little room for pedestrians, cyclists or full-grown trees. The challenge is to reclaim the most beautiful public spaces of the city for people and nature. One of these spaces is the Leielaan, an old river bed that today is planted with



trees, but again dominated by parked cars. Another structure worth reclaiming are the old fortifications, of which the traces can be found throughout the city, if one knows what to look for. The Rijsselstraat, the main shopping street, should also be turned into a people space, connecting green urban squares instead of parking lots.

One strategy to remove the cars is to alleviate traffic on the main shopping street, by using an existing ring traffic structure and an existing but underused bridge. For visitors, parking facilities are created on

locations easily accessible from the new ring road. Leftover space inside perimeter city blocks can also be transformed into parking spaces. This way, sidewalks can be widened and the shopping street, the main squares, the old riverbed and the fortifications can make room for pedestrians and trees. A new and pleasant route is created between the central station, the main square, and the new bridge across the river, where the car is not completely excluded, but can no longer dominate the streetscape.

On the north side of the city, the fortifications can still be recognised in a typical zigzag street pattern. But the narrow sidewalks and parked cars do not make it an attractive area. By relocating the parking inside the closed perimeter blocks, the streets can be turned into places with wide sidewalks and room for trees. An interesting tour can be enjoyed in this part of the city. Making the inside of the city blocks accessible not only creates room for parking, but also for communal gardens and playgrounds.

The old riverbed Leielaan is transformed from a long car park to a long park connecting the new swimming pool on the riverside with the main shopping street. New parking spaces are created in the side streets, making use of the different levels to create both underground parking space and interesting roof gardens on top. Finally, a new S-curved pedestrian bridge is added as an extra connection between two riverside parks on the east of the city.

### The response

The final presentation on Friday afternoon was well-attended and well-received. Alderman Dirk Vanholme was happy that the students had lived up to his expectations. He supported the car-free zones, although the local shop owners will still need to be convinced that inviting spaces for people are better for business than parking spaces right in front of your building. When some people objected to the 'car-free zone', the students asked the audience to try and let

go of old habits and convictions, and this was received with affirmative nods. Other people wondered why was there a study for a moveable bridge. The students explained that a fixed bridge is not the only answer. With less traffic on the main shopping street, fewer cars would be waiting for a moveable bridge, and this would allow the city to get much closer to the water. Vanhaverbeke, managing director of the Intercommunale Leiedal, praised the students for bringing focus to the discussion, and showing what is truly important, "These plans are not a blueprint for the future, but a challenge to the city of Menen to make clear choices." Alderman Laurent Coppens was pleased that the students had managed to disclose the potential of their city in only a few days. He appreciated the opportunities to make better use of water and green spaces, and complimented the students for thinking outside the box. "You are daring this city to dream!"

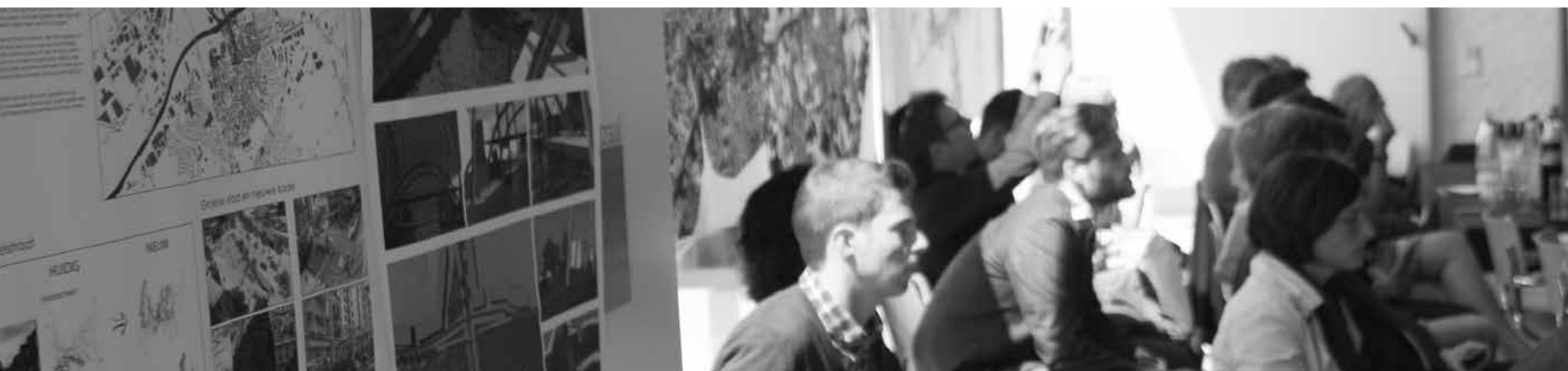
Urban designers Vandaele and Putseys were also pleasantly surprised by the results. "We usually work with Master's students. These Bachelor's students of Van Hall Larenstein produced a coherent story, richly illustrated and well done." It is too soon to determine which ideas will end up in the masterplan, but several ideas, like the string of green pearls, a linear park on the Leielaan, more green in the streets, pocket parkings, reinforcing the squares and a low-traffic shopping street, are definitely worth investigating. "With their ideas and images, the students have motivated more people to take an interest in designing the city together, both inside and outside the organisation."

### Looking back on the workshop

The workshop was organised in great detail. Students were staying over at host families. Vanhaverbeke admits that the host families were initially to save costs, but it turned out to have other benefits as well. "Most of the host families are people working for the city of Menen, such as Trui Everaerd, the urban designer, or Mieke Syssauw, the alderman for urban development. This way, the city officials are more involved in the student workshop. They check in with "their" students every day, and talk about it with their colleagues. Another benefit is that the students can really be a part of the local community." The students enjoyed it as well. "The people here are very kind and hospitable" says Lonneke Borst, second year student. "We talk about our day, and they give me books about the history of Menen to bring to the studio." Koolen considers it a direct confrontation with another culture, "And an additional benefit is that the students cannot party all night, so everybody is on time in the studio every morning."

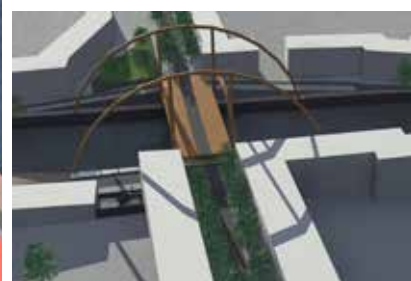
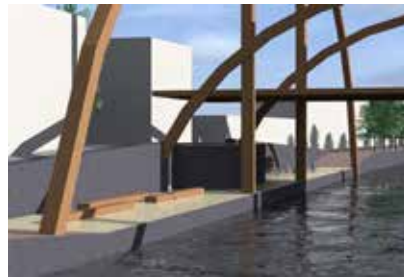
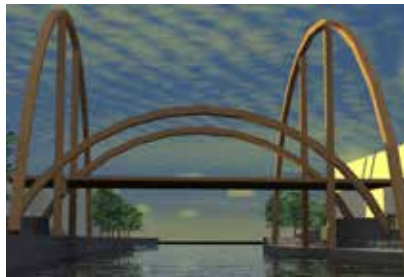
For the students, there are quite a few differences

**'The students asked the audience to try and let go of old habits and convictions, and this was received with affirmative nods.'**





# MENEN; Stad aan de rivier



between the five-day workshop and a regular design course of 9 weeks. "At school, we mostly work on design projects individually," says third-year student Jasper Klaassen, "this time we work on a project together." Lonneke adds "Some of us are second year students, others are third year and one of us is only six weeks away from graduation. In school, we would not get the opportunity to work together and learn from each other." Students appreciate that they have more influence on the focus and the definition of the problem. "This process is also more efficient," says fourth-year student Wytse Hoekstra, "Every day we share the results and we get immediate feedback. There is less distraction, and more focus." Jordi de Vlam is the only Belgian student in the group. He is taking a Bachelor's degree in landscape development and doing a work placement at the Intercommunale. "I am used to working on projects in groups, but we usually meet once or twice a week. We do not work together in a studio all day. Also, in a workshop like this, you move more quickly from analysis to design." Not everything is easier though. "During the workshop we were also confronted with all the practical problems that professionals can bring to the discussion," explains second-year student Simone van de Wiel. "It's a challenge to filter all this information and stick to your vision."

"At some points, you might say this workshop was too well organised" says lecturer Koolen. "Some background information is useful, but students can be easily overwhelmed by large amounts of data and practical issues. For a student workshop one central question is enough, and sometimes not even necessary. It is important they learn to define the central problem themselves." Student workshops are ideal to get fresh input from young people who have a different perspective. The Belgians also expect the Dutch, who are known for their straightforwardness, to state the issues clearly. "These expectations can also be a risk. The students should feel free to draw their own conclusions, it is not their job to confirm the opinions of the organisation."

On the second day, the lecturers felt it was necessary to intervene, when the urban designers confronted the students with many practical issues. "It is a big risk to focus on details and obstacles in an early stage, before a strong vision is developed. Students are easily intimidated by the amount of knowledge of the professionals," says Dick van Dorp, lecturer at VHL University. "However, the experience has great educational value. This shows that it is also possible to be too well-prepared. The urban designers had analysed the situation so thoroughly, that it was difficult for them to let go of the short-term problems, and focus on the long-term opportunities. Nevertheless, it is good for students to do a project where they have di-

rect contact with stakeholders. Every student should have an international experience with a multidisciplinary team and stakeholders at one point during their studies."

The differences between the Dutch and Belgians also offer many learning experiences. One difference is that Belgians want to discuss the problem more before they start drawing, while the Dutch discuss while they are drawing. "Early sketches can certainly improve discussion," concludes Vandaele. Another difference concerns the legal instruments in the two countries. "It is difficult to interfere with another person's private property here," she explains. "In Belgium, we need to work bottom-up and create win-win situations to change things around here." Belgian student Jordi adds: "Processes may be more complicated in Belgium. It's one thing to do it on paper, another thing to change things in real life." Simone concludes "The Belgians are practical in their approach, it has made me think more about how you will eventually get things done."

**'The Belgians are practical in their approach, it has made me think more about how you will eventually get things done.'**

Most students mention that this workshop has helped them to see the importance of approaching problems from a bigger perspective. "I have learned the importance of thinking big" says Kris. "To stick to my long-term vision and not to get stuck in the details." Simone adds: "It's important to listen to other people, but it should not always influence the course you take. As a landscape architect you are asked to offer a unique and different perspective." Vandaele concludes "The Dutch start with more abstract concepts. They make sure they have a clear and pure idea, which they then translate to fit the given location. This workshop has inspired me to be more bold and ambitious. Instead of making a plan for the next 10 years, we should be dreaming about the next 50 years."



# Design principles for the Fils Valley

## Industrial Heritage Route, Stuttgart region.

By Dorith van Gestel

# A wider view

During three days in early July 2014, eight students and one lecturer of the department of Garden and Landscape Design of VHL University developed design strategies for an industrial heritage route in the Fils valley near Stuttgart. They had one day to visit and get to know the area, one day at the office to develop their strategies, and one morning to visualise their ideas for the presentation in the early afternoon. This is a report of an intense three-day design charrette in Germany.

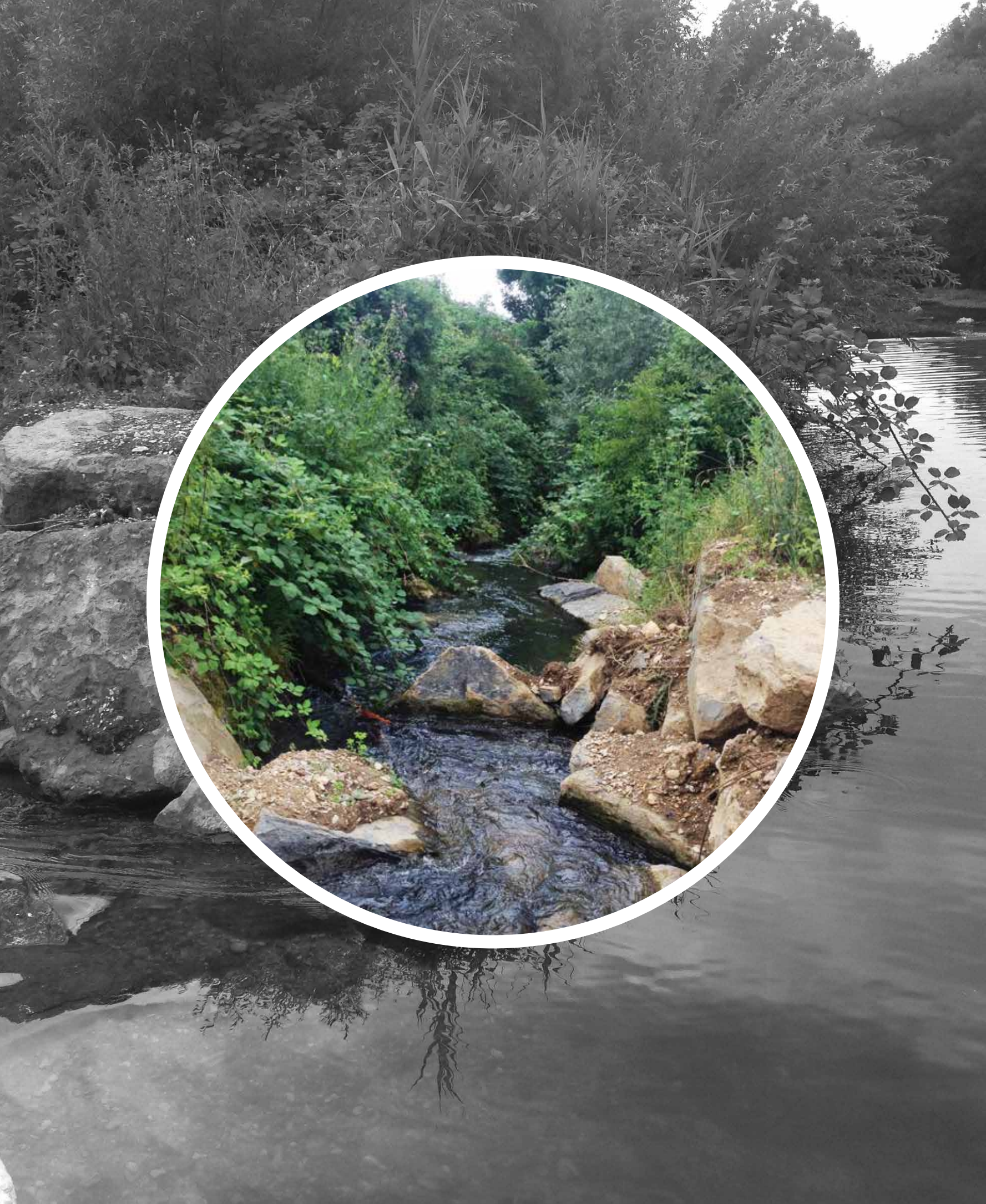
### The Fils Valley

The Fils valley is located to the southeast of Stuttgart, the state capital of Baden-Württemberg, a federal state in the south of Germany. The river Fils is only 63 kilometres long, but the difference in altitude between the spring at Wiesensteig and the mouth in the Neckar at Plochingen is no less than 377 meters. This makes the Fils one of the steepest flowing river in Germany. The water power of the river Fils was the first reliable energy source in the valley. As the river itself fluctuates greatly with the seasons, the water mills in the valley were supplied with a steady flow of water by means of side canals. Together with the railway line, the water power helped to industrialise the area from the start of the 19th century. At first, a paper and textile industry developed, but eventually steel industry became more important. Today, quite a few famous companies still have their factories in the valley, like the model train manufacturer Märklin, the tableware manufacturer WMF, or Schuler Pressen, who build presses that make anything from car bodies to euro coins.

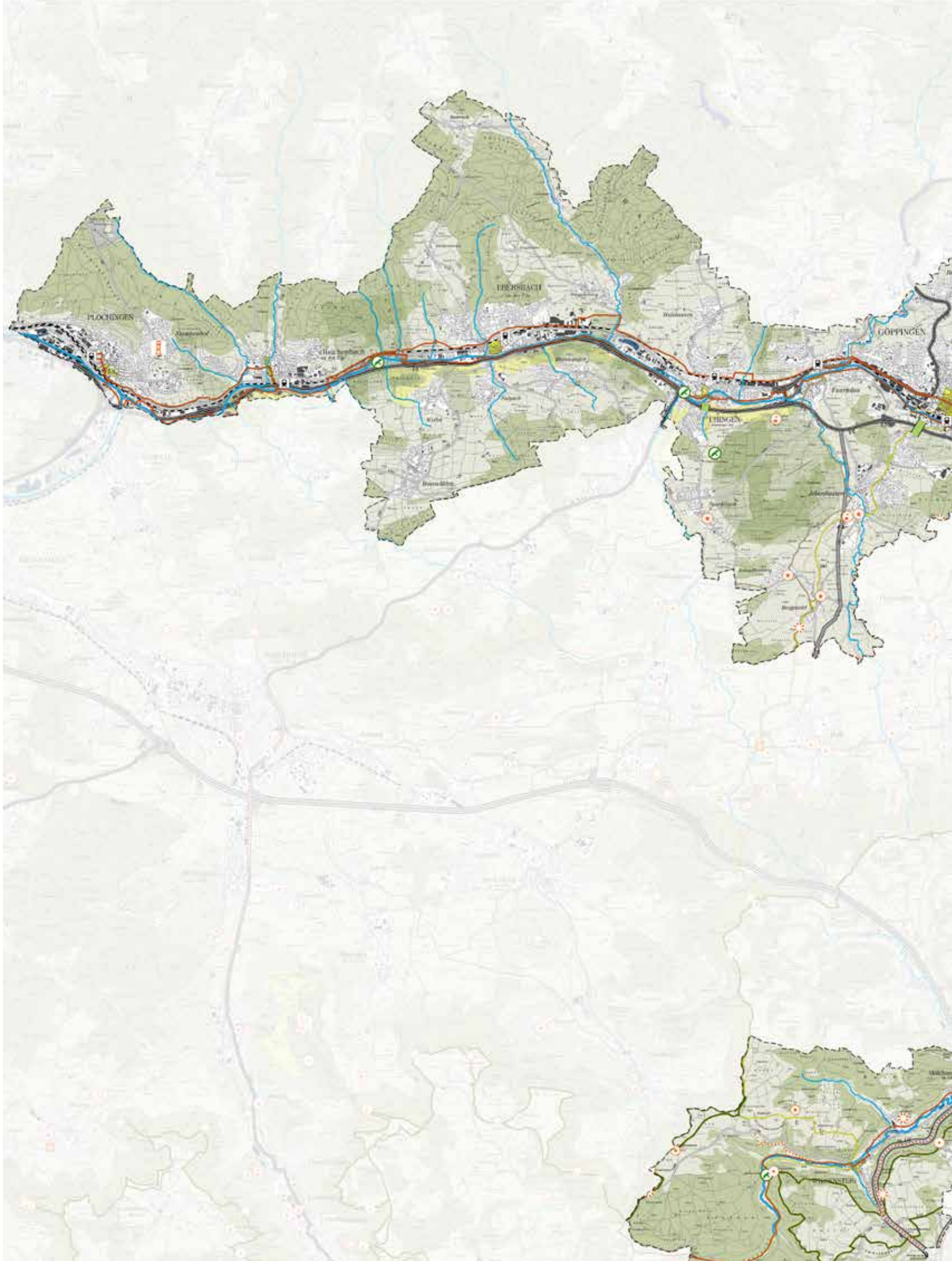
The Fils valley consists of two different parts that meet in Geislingen, where the river makes a sharp bend. The southern part, upstream from Geislingen, is a rural area where the villages are separated by farmland and wooded hillsides. This is a tourist destination for the people of the Stuttgart region, who mostly go there for hiking trips. In the northern part, between Plochingen and Geislingen, the villages have grown into one, more or less continuous, urbanised area, where almost 200,000 people live and work. As the landscape is dominated by infrastructure and factory buildings from different eras, this area is not immediately attractive for recreation in a traditional way. However, the industrial heritage could be used as the starting point for a different kind of tourism. Unfortunately, some of the older factory buildings have been demolished over the last decade. In order to retain and promote what is left of the industrial heritage, the Verband Region Stuttgart (VRS) has started a project called “Industrie Kultur im Filstal” (industrial culture in the Fils valley). The project is part of the masterplan for the “Landscape Park Fils” which aims at the enhancement of the recreational and environmental potential of the Fils valley.

VRS is a regional authority, responsible for spatial planning, landscape planning, public transport, and economic development in the greater Stuttgart region. Silvia Weidenbacher, project manager at VRS, explained: “In the Fils valley, we want to combine industrial heritage, nature and recreation to strengthen the identity of the region, improve living conditions and make the inhabitants feel proud of their area and history.”

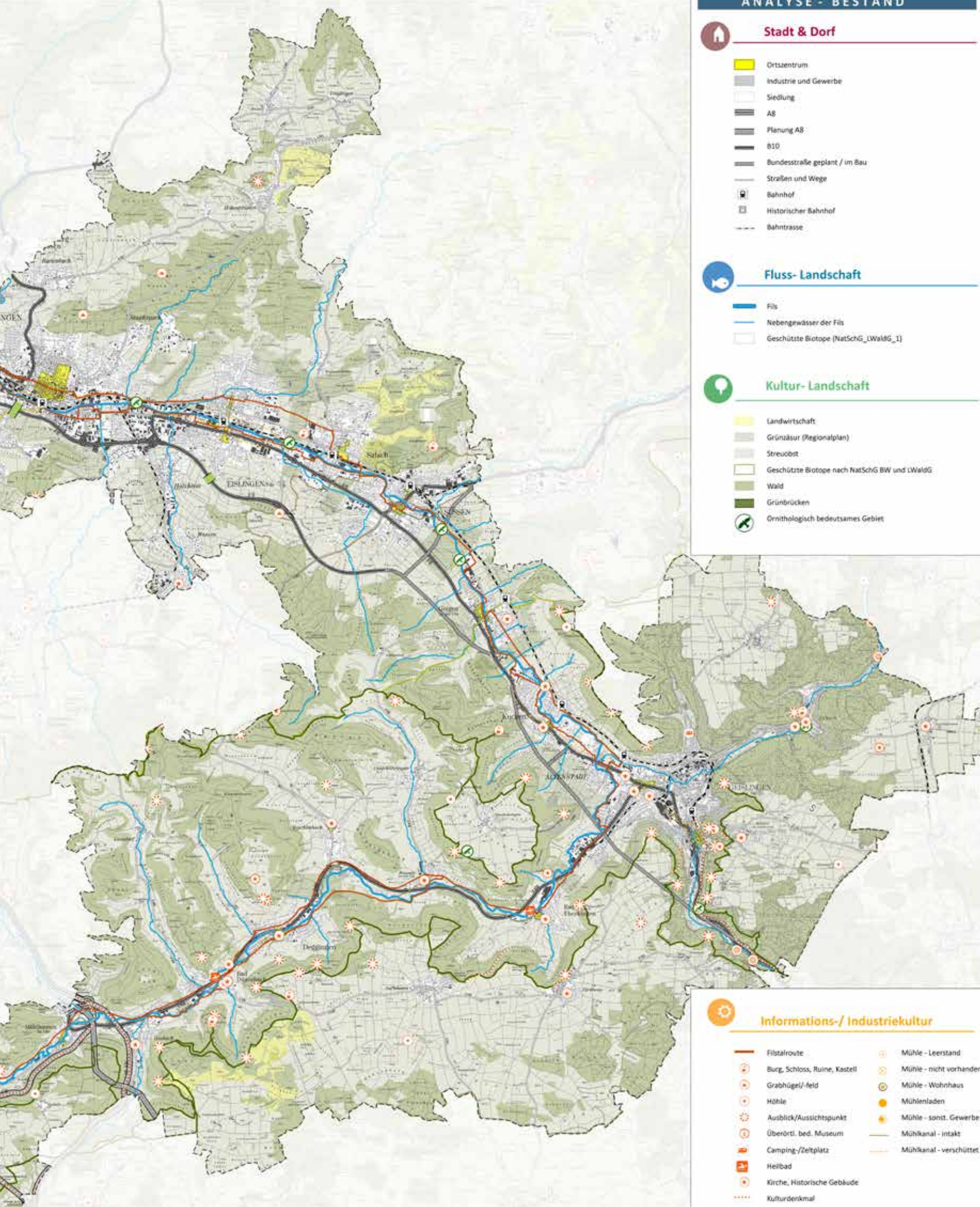
















## The students

The participants of the design charette were all Bachelor's students of Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences, from Velp, the Netherlands. These four boys and four girls all completed the first two years of Garden and Landscape Design and will be specialising in landscape architecture. As they will all be studying together next year, this workshop was an excellent team building exercise for them. Originally, the idea was to work together with students of Nürtingen-Geislingen University of Applied Sciences. Unfortunately, they cancelled because of examinations and other projects they needed to complete before the summer holidays.

## The field trip on Monday

The industrial heritage route in the Fils valley is a NWE Interreg IVB Value Added project. It aims to involve different stakeholders as well as integrate top-down planning with bottom-up approaches. On Monday morning, Ms Weidenbacher welcomed the students and explained the history of the region and the process so far. The project has been trying to involve a variety of different stakeholders. First of all, the 16 municipalities in the Fils valley, who need to continue and execute the Industrie Kultur project that VRS has started. Secondly, the county is involved because they are responsible for the bicycle track along the river Fils that links the various destinations. Other stakeholders are the companies that own the industrial heritage, as well as local historians and other experts. The inhabitants of the region have been invited to conversation cafés and they can also share their stories by means of the website [www.industriekultur-filstal.de](http://www.industriekultur-filstal.de). Experts in the area of tourism and history have also been involved to decide which objects and destinations are the most important. This has resulted in an industrial heritage route with 120 historical elements, 20 of which are certainly worth an extended visit. These are the so-called “anchor points” along the 63-kilometre bicycle path.

The goal of the design charrette was to develop design strategies for interesting places along this industrial heritage route. The plan was to make several “information islands”: public spaces that serve as a seating area along the river and the bicycle path, as well as information points about the industrial heritage of the Fils valley. Another challenge was to think of new functions and a design for some of the abandoned factories, specifically the Schachenmayr factory in Salach.

At the end of Monday morning, the group took a train from Stuttgart to Göppingen. The journey was continued on bicycle to the Filsterrassen, one of the brand-new public spaces along the river Fils. Mr Herbert and Mr Lindner of the municipality of Göppingen explained how this location became available when the bottle factory Lebenhauser Schlossbrunnen sold this area to Christophsbad, a private hospital, to build a new clinic. The municipality was able to buy the stretch of land along the river to widen the banks and build a terraced seating area with wooden platforms and planting. The river tides in the Fils are extreme and as the water in the Fils can reach the upper parts of the terrace, the whole construction needed to be extremely well founded. The third speaker at this location was Mr Blum, a local historian, who explained about the history of the companies located in this area. “With all the factories using the water of the Fils, the quality of the water used to be quite poor. These problems have been solved, and now it’s an excellent place to catch trout.”

From Göppingen, the group cycled upstream past various locations, such as a weir with a hydroelectric power station and a fish ladder (Filswehr Göppingen-Eislingen), an abandoned textile factory and the platform on the riverside in Eislingen. The bicycle path next to the river was sometimes interrupted, so the group needed to take detours through the industrial areas and try to find the way back to the river. Mr Keyerleber, a local history expert and environmentalist, showed the way. The field trip ended at Salach, where Mr Hilse and Mr Weber gave a tour of the Schachenmayr factory complex. The site consists of buildings for the textile industry from various eras.

**‘This has resulted in an industrial heritage route with 120 historical elements’**



Some are in disuse, others will be converted in the near future. The Döcker building, at the entrance of the factory site, is of special concern to the two gentlemen. Mr Hilse explained: “This is the last factory building in Salach of the 1920s and it will be torn down, unless it can be given a new destination.” The day ended at Mr Weber’s garden near the church, where everybody enjoyed cold drinks and home made cakes.

After dinner, the students discussed what they had seen during the day. At first they seemed a bit discoura-

**‘These people have a dream. It is your job to help them convince other people that this is a dream worth realising.’**

ged. The river could only be experienced at some points, and the bicycle path was often interrupted. The Schachenmayr factory complex was considered huge compared to the small village of Salach. They wondered which functions would be economically feasible in this context. Ad Koo-

len, their lecturer, challenged them to take another perspective: “These people have a dream. It is your job to help them convince other people that this is a dream worth realising.”

### **Studio work on Tuesday**

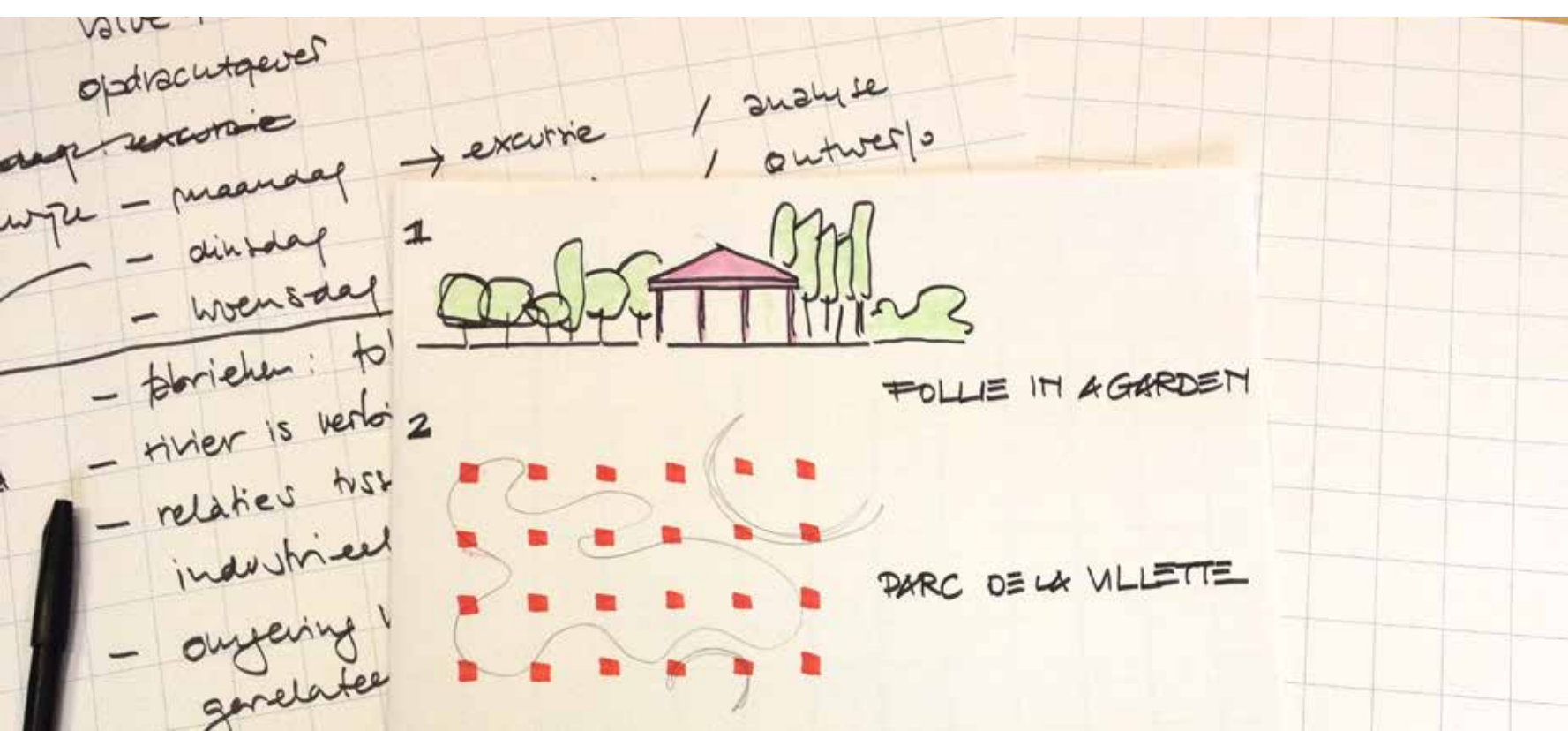
On Tuesday, the workshop took place at the offices of VRS in Stuttgart. It was a rainy day, so everybody was happy to work inside. As there was only little time, the day was divided in short sessions for individual brainstorming or group work. Each session ended with short presentations and a discussion. Peter Wendl, geographer of the AGL planning group, was present during the workshop to answer questions and give feedback. He helped VRS to develop the industrial heritage route in a previous stage of the project.

In order to get a better understanding of the area and the real challenges here, each student was asked to draw three concepts based on the following questions: “What does the client want? How did you experience the area? And what do you want?” After only 45 minutes, they presented their concepts to each other. Visibility and accessibility were key elements in most of the drawings. The students wanted to improve the experience of the river, as well as the connection between the river and the industrial heritage sites. Peter Wendl agreed with the students’ analysis and explained: “Nowadays, there is often no direct relationship between the river and the industries anymore, because the companies rely on other sources of energy. So they are often located at quite a distance from the river.”

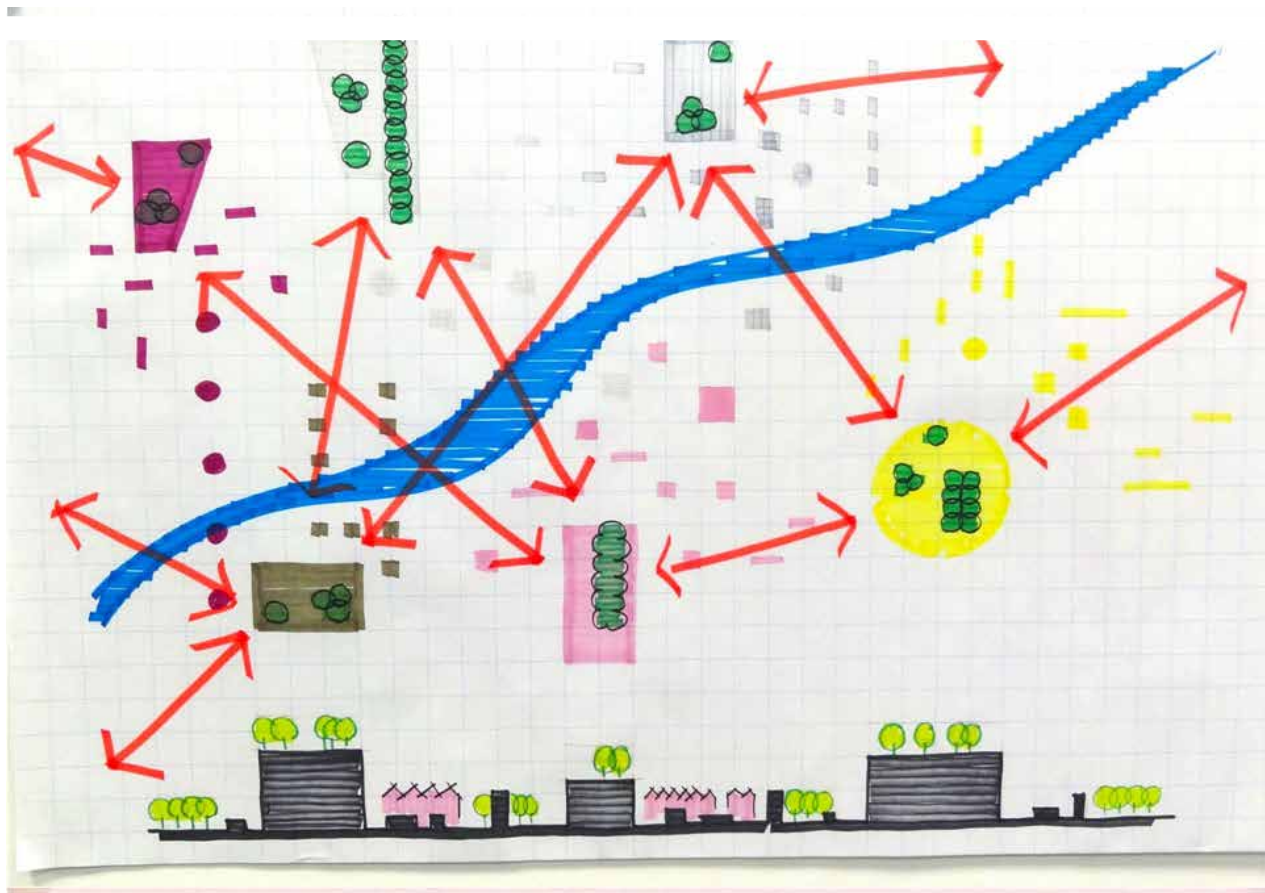
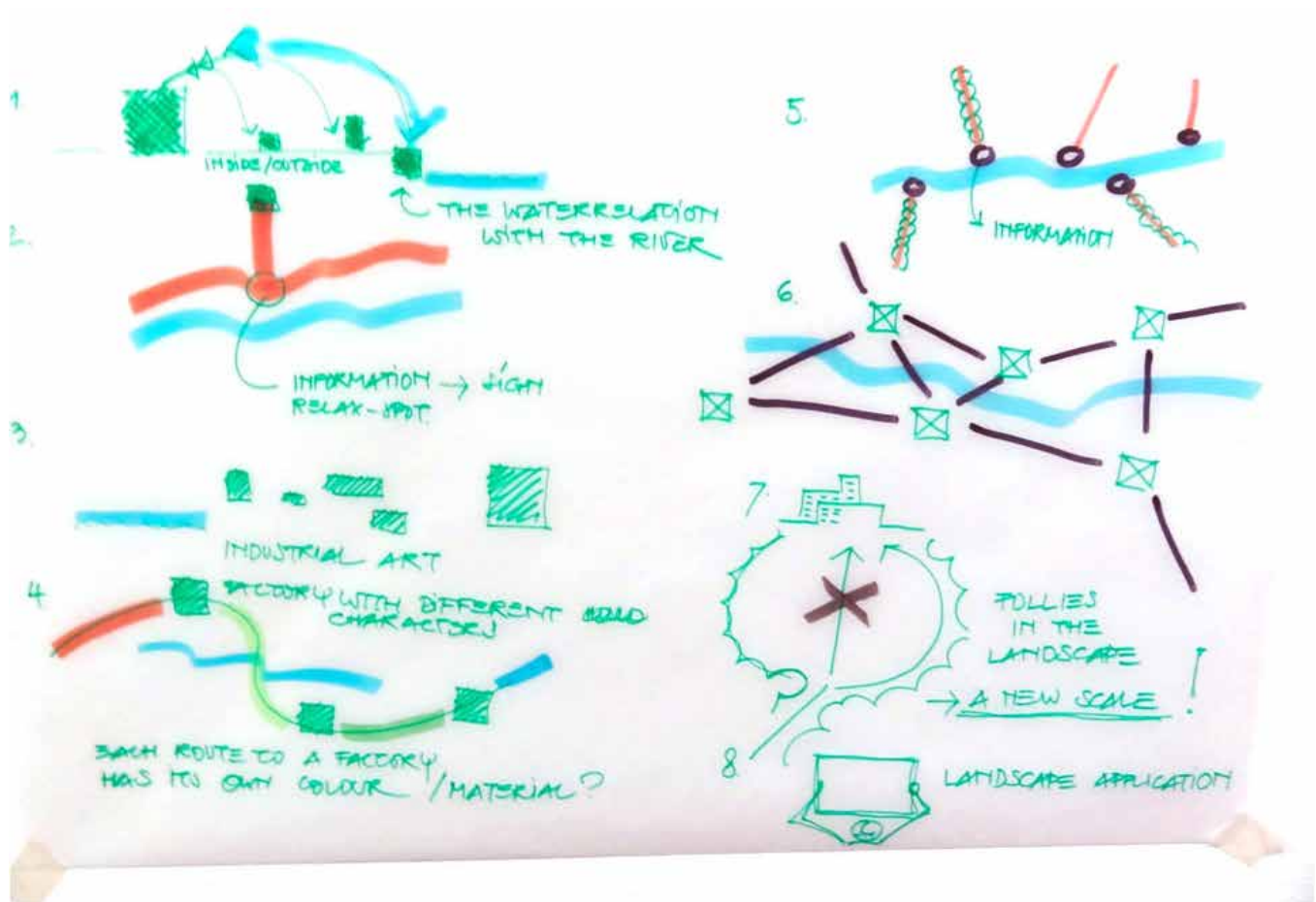
During the next step, the students were divided into two groups to integrate their analysis into visions for the future. Both teams concluded that it is all right if you do not experience the river all the time. However, this means that the locations where you do experience the river, like the bridges, become important points along the route. One group suggested there should be points where people can actually go into the water. The students also saw a need for design interventions on the routes between the riverside bicycle path and the industrial heritage sites.

There was not enough time to make detailed designs for specific locations, so the students were asked to develop design principles for three different types of areas: the public spaces along the riverside and bicycle path, the entrances of the industrial heritage sites and the routes in between.

The students identified the intersections of the bicycle path and the routes to the heritage sites as the most important recreation areas and information spots. These routes can be marked with industrial art: landmarks that refer to the specific materials used or products made in the factory that people can visit. Another option is to give the routes to each factory their own colour or material, or to plant them with lanes of trees. Once people arrive at the heritage site, they should be able to see the other points of interest, by means of high viewpoints, like the factory rooftops. On the scale of the landscape, the other factory buildings will then act as follies in a park. Follies are buildings and structures without apparent function, used as landmarks and decorations in







(landscape) parks. The folly originated in the Romantic Period, but is also used in modern park and landscape design. From high up, visitors can also see the relationship between the industrial landscape and the river. The students also proposed an application for smartphones with augmented reality. Visitors can use the camera on their phones to view the current landscape and overlay them with historic views, showing what these locations looked like before.

In the next group session, the students integrated their individual ideas into two plans. The first plan focused on the larger scale of the landscape and the visual relationship between the industrial heritage sites. This can be done by means of roof gardens on top of the factory buildings. The landscape surrounding the industrial heritage site is marked by a scattering of industrial art related to the factory. This way, it is not so important from which side people approach the factory site. The second plan focused on a variation in recreational areas on the riverside. There should be at least one larger public space with more facilities every 20 kilometres or so, as this is the distance people will probably cover by bicycle in a day, if they also visit some of the heritage sites. At these points people should be able to sit, relax, play and swim in the river. The other facilities along the riverside can be smaller. A nice place to sit and enjoy the view would be enough. Information about the industrial heritage will be provided at all stops. As the two plans had design principles on different scales, everybody concluded that these two plans could easily be integrated into one.

**‘... the other factory buildings will then act as follies in a park.’**

The day ended with a brainstorm session about possible functions for the Schachenmayr factory building. In contrast to the day before, the students now saw a lot of possibilities. Many suggestions were related to tourism and recreation, like a hotel, a museum, a theatre, a restaurant, an indoor biergarten, a paintball arena, go-kart tracks, a venue for events and parties, or a discotheque. As the location is easy to reach by public transport, it should not be a problem that the village itself is small. There are several examples of successful large discotheques in small villages in the Netherlands. Other options were a community centre, a day care centre, artist studios, or plant labs, where plants can grow indoors by means of LED-lighting. And why not make the buildings suitable for living? There still seemed to be a shortage of housing in the Stuttgart region and the factory buildings could be transformed into characteristic loft apartments, which would also add to the variety of housing in the area.

## **Final presentation on Wednesday**

The final presentation on Wednesday afternoon was attended by Silvia Weidenbacher and her colleagues Heide Esswein, Johanna Scholz and Regina Mayer. Jürgen Hilse, Alois Weber and Peter Blum, who all assisted at the guided tour on Monday, were also present. Simone van de Wiel presented the results of the discussions of the previous days. She emphasised the importance of the connection with the river, and thinking of the factories as follies in an industrial landscape park. She explained why it is better to see the bicycle path in terms of 20-kilometre sections, and the need for a distinction in bigger and smaller public spaces along the river and the bicycle path. The story was illustrated with photomontage images that visualised the students' ideas of viewpoints on the factory buildings, the industrial art along the roads to the industrial heritage sites, and the interior of a restaurant at the Schachenmayr factory. "The rough edges of the industrial heritage should be seen as a quality that gives the area its unique identity."

## **The response**

Ms Weidenbacher complemented the students with their clear presentation, which showed that they had developed a good understanding of the situation in only a few days. She confirmed the importance of visual relationships, and liked the idea of the follies. She also thought it was a good idea to distinguish smaller sections of the bicycle path, because people also make detours into the villages and industrial heritage sites. This also



corresponded to the requests of some municipalities, not to focus on the bicycle path alone. Her colleague Ms Esswein liked the idea of the viewpoints and roof gardens on top of the factories: "This certainly is an idea we can work with". Mr Hilse and Mr Weber are particularly charmed by the image of the restaurant in the Schachenmayr factory. They can very well imagine a restaurant there, as well as a budget hotel, an idea that they discussed during the field trip.

The following discussion focussed on strategies to realise this vision. How could they acquire this industrial art, for instance? And how could they convince the companies in the area to help pay for it, especially as many companies had been taken over by international corporations and now had their headquarters in other countries? How could they get the ownership of the Schachenmayr factory? And what about sharing information? Would it work to set up signs with QR codes that people could use to find relevant information on the website?

One of the students, Jasper van den Ende, admitted he hardly ever used QR codes to look up information, unless it was the only possible way. This was confirmed by the other students. Adriaan Bicker explained how a smartphone app might work better. "With some apps, you can simply point your telephone at a building and the app shows you what the location looked like a century before." Simone stressed the importance of visual communication: "Whenever I see an information board, I only look at the pictures and read the captions, never the complete text." Mr Blum concluded that to address different target groups, a combined strategy of a physical map, smartphone apps, the internet and local media should be used to promote the industrial heritage route.

## **'Some of the students' ideas will be incorporated into a small design competition for landscape architects'**

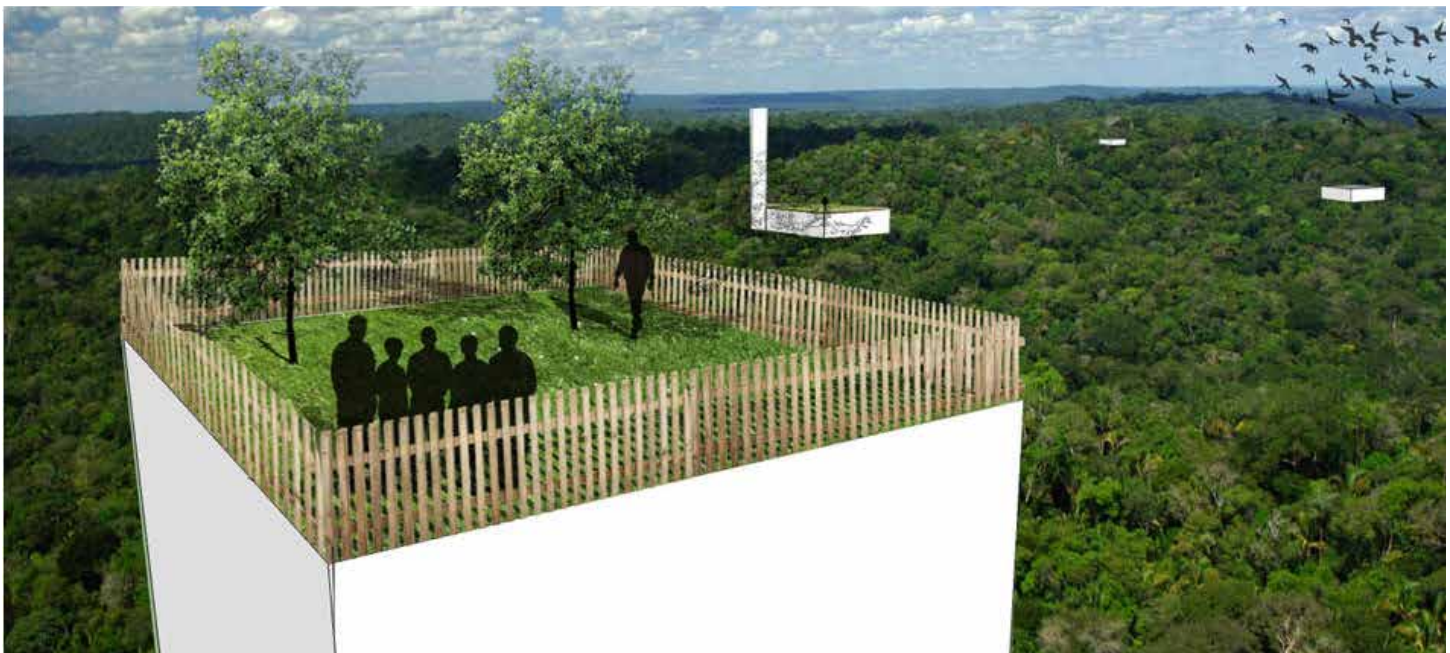
At the end of the meeting, Ms Weidenbacher explained how the project would be continued. "Some of the students' ideas will be incorporated into a small design competition for landscape architects, who are asked to create a catalogue of design principles for the public spaces along the river and the bicycle path. They are also asked to design one of these spaces in detail." She

added that they also want to organise an event in the autumn, "a day or weekend devoted to the industrial heritage in the valley of the Fils, with guided bicycle tours and visits to factories and other buildings that people cannot usually see from the inside." The Verband Region Stuttgart will continue to talk to companies in the area to get them involved. They will also continue to engage the general public, to raise awareness and to build this identity of industrial heritage.

### **Looking back**

The students looked back upon a successful workshop. First of all, they were very grateful for the excellent hospitality. "We all had individual rooms at the university hostel. My room was even better than my room at home," said Jasper. Jos de Graaf added: "The meals were so good and healthy, I did not even have to take my vitamin pills, like I usually do on holidays." The students valued the experience, which is certainly different from a normal design course. Adriaan explained: "We usually work with detailed maps for specific locations. Inventing and visualising design principles was more abstract and conceptual." Jos added: "The method worked really well: first we brainstormed individually, then we shared our ideas, then we combined the ideas into integrated plans and presented again." Rianne Luring agreed: "Everybody has ideas that you can work with and develop further as a group." She is also happy to practise her English again. Wessel van Vliet considered it "interesting to see how many parties are involved in a process like this and how everybody has different interests." Many students found that it was easier to make decisions when they were on a strict deadline. "I am proud of what we have achieved in such a short time," concluded Jos.

Silvia Weidenacher also looked back on a successful workshop. VRS has worked together with students before, but always during a whole term, never before in a three-day design charette. The hope was that the workshop would deliver new ideas, and challenge existing assumptions. "We were curious how outsiders see this project and how young people responded to the places and the ideas. Do they find industrial heritage interesting? We also hoped to gather additional ideas for the information islands and support the two gentlemen involved in the Schachenmayr factory." This has certainly been achieved. "The design charette has widened our point of view."





# Where Theory Meets Practice

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## Introduction

In recent thinking about planning, an open and participatory process is part of best practice (Roy and Ganguly, 2009). The integration of top-down and bottom-up approaches may lead to efficient action and sustainable planning and development, although it is also acknowledged that such an approach presents various challenges of implementation (Glasson & Marshall, 2007). In this research, we explore the international design charrette in which the strengths of both top-down and bottom-up approaches were combined. The research is based on the work done in the VALUE+ project (partly funded by the Interreg IVB NWE programme) and five case studies of design charrettes with students of VHL University of Applied Sciences. In this project, various municipalities from different countries, as well as universities and civil society organizations conducted research and experiments to see how cities can best integrate the top-down approach of policy makers and the bottom-up approach of local stakeholders. It was found that the involvement of students in the form of an international design charrette was a practical tool to integrate bottom-up and top-down strategies. The charrettes acted as a catalyst for communication, interaction, creative design, and social cohesion. They enabled a quick transition from planning to implementation and helped to find a common ground between different stakeholders. Student involvement in the official planning process turned out to be of mutual benefit to both the VALUE+ partners and the education of young professionals.

## Case study evaluation

The five selected case studies from the VALUE+ project included cases in Liège (Belgium), Sheffield (United Kingdom), Amersfoort (The Netherlands), Menen (Belgium) and Stuttgart (Germany). The five case studies all relied on the input from students in the official planning process, creating possibilities for an interface between practice and theory. The charrettes mostly worked with multi-disciplinary project teams, consisting of practice-oriented stakeholders (local communities, developers, local authorities, planners, experts) as well as theory-oriented stakeholders such as universities and students.

### Results of the Liège design charrette

Six second-year students of Garden and Landscape Architecture from VHL University of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands) studied the case of La Chartreuse, a derelict area in the city of Liège, and collaborated with three Belgian students, authorities from the Liège municipal government, a developer, several local residents and other stakeholders to redevelop this area.

La Chartreuse is an area covering 34 hectares with heights between 64 and 122 metres. It is characterized by untamed vegetation, tall grass bushes and empty buildings, making it difficult to urbanize the space. The council, local residents and other stakeholders were involved in this design charrette and stated their wishes and described the problems within the area. Recent research by the municipality and the University of Liège showed that some stakeholders wanted to keep the area's untamed character, but also raised concerns about the safety of La Chartreuse. Many local residents wanted improved access and more entrances to the park from the residential districts. In their plans for redevelopment, the students designed new entrances on the side of the railway and divided the park in a cultivated section and a wild section. They also proposed the demolition of certain buildings and renovation of other buildings in order to create a more inviting and visible open space (Chapter 2.XXX).







Bridging top-down and bottom-up approaches: Modest measures

The creative participatory approach “modest measures” was introduced in La Chartreuse. The direct communication with residents and other stakeholders contributed to the understanding of complexities and challenges within the area. It was demonstrated that a great deal can be achieved by making a couple of minor adjustments and this made stakeholders enthusiastic to continue with a similar approach. Successful participation with stakeholders was evident throughout the process.

Added value of student involvement in the planning process

Student involvement led to innovative design approaches such as the transformation of the central space in the park into a meeting area, changing the entrance gates to the park to be more inviting and adding additional entrances to the park to accommodate adjacent areas. They created a new perspective and vision for the area that was accepted by all stakeholders.

### **Results of the Sheffield design charrette**

Students of VHL University of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands) collaborated with Master and PhD students of the Universities of Sheffield and Manchester to improve Edward Street Park, an important junction in the area, connecting Sheffield’s city centre, the university and the tram stop. The city council had already developed a new urban park here, but the space was still underused and did not yet meet the needs of local residents. Recent research showed the main concerns to be litter, noise, safety and security. The students focussed on connectivity, permeability, safety and activities, linking this to the concept of Placemaking in which professionals, residents and local businesses work together to change a public space into a lively place, with the users and uses of the place as a point of departure. Multidisciplinary visualization research and development techniques were used, along with 2D overviews and a 3D walkthrough (Chapter 2.XXX).

Bridging top-down and bottom-up approaches: Creating a shared place

Edward Street Park was one of projects of Sheffield’s City Centre Breathing Spaces Strategy to improve and create open spaces where they are most needed. Students introduced new initiatives such as a better connection with the surrounding streets and more public art. They also initiated the EDDY scheme (Every Day of Da Year) where local students would organise monthly events for local residents to turn the park into a shared place.

Added value of student involvement in the planning process

In an interdisciplinary workshop with an international group of students, different perspectives come together. With the needs and wishes of local residents in mind, the students developed useful, creative and original plans to turn the park into a lively place. It was found that the students contributed to the participatory planning approach as they considered different scales and introduced new creative ideas to combat old problems. Students were able to conduct research and deliver proposed plans in a much shorter time than would be the norm in practice. The involvement of students within the official planning process led to creative thinking and new possibilities in terms of development plans.

### **Results of the Amersfoort design charrette.**

Landscape Architecture students of VHL University of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands) collaborated with the municipality of Amersfoort to develop strategies for the area east of the city of Amersfoort. The area was primarily used for recreation and agricultural purposes, and residents were not all supportive of the top-down planning proposals made by authorities to redevelop this area. Core stakeholders within the area included local landowners and farmers, the municipalities of Amersfoort and Leusden, Water Board Vallei en Veluwe, the Province of Utrecht and a provincial landscape foundation for nature conservation. The diversity of stakeholders emphasized the challenge of finding a common ground. Whereas the other design charrettes took place within the space of three to five days, this participatory process lasted a whole term (10 weeks).

The challenges in this area included more opportunities for recreation in combination with the improvement of the water system and the natural character of the area. Many local stakeholders were against any form of new development. They appreciated the quietness of the area and did not support an increased accessibility. The students proposed to use agriculture as a means to improve the quality of the area, as it was found that natural habitats were isolated and scattered across the area. The proposed approach would connect the recreational sites. The students made a master plan for the area, focussing on the strong points of the local area. The details were captured in a do-it-yourself toolbox (book) for residents to use and implement themselves. The toolbox first explained how the landscape was formed, geologically and by human hand. It also captured ideas for local residents and farmers to make groves, tree avenues and wood banks on the sand ridges, in order to enhance the agricultural character and strengthen the identity of the area (Chapter 2.XXX).



Bridging top-down and bottom-up approaches: The “do-it-yourself-toolbox”

The do-it-yourself toolbox was introduced as an alternative to blueprint planning, focussing on the initiative of the stakeholders to strengthen the story and the purpose of the landscape. As rules and regulations only increased resistance amongst local residents, the do-it-yourself-toolbox was more successful at involving local stakeholders and thereby bridging bottom-up and top-down approaches.

Added value of student involvement in the planning process

The new ideas were captured and used to create a toolbox for future implementation. The participatory process demonstrated that it is better to inspire and challenge people to make their own environment more attractive. This planning approach transformed the blueprint master planning approach to a modular and bottom-up approach.

### **Results of the Menen design charrette**

In Menen (Belgium), the purpose of the design charrette was to develop a new master plan for the riverside area and the city centre. With this project the city of Menen aimed at a different approach, called “designing the city together”. They wanted to create new plans in collaboration with citizens, companies and other stakeholders in the region. Menen is a densely built city with small row houses and back gardens. With the exception of the main square, public spaces seem to be designed for cars, not people. The design charrette focussed on creating an integrated framework to address transport and parking issues, redesign the main shopping street, the riverside around the new bridge, as well as the stream valley of the Geluwebeek. The bridge was proposed to be both an icon and an urban space of its own. The Geluwebeek was considered a forgotten treasure of the city, waiting to be rediscovered and students emphasized its ecological, recreational, and educational and storm water management functions. It was further suggested to reclaim the most beautiful public spaces of the city for people and nature and to redevelop the Rijsselstraat, the main shopping street, in order to connect green urban squares instead of parking lots. Local stakeholders were at first sceptical about these proposals, but the students’ ideas helped them to try and let go of old habits and convictions (Chapter 2.XXX)

Bridging top-down and bottom-up approaches: The “dare to dream” approach

The “dare to dream” approach challenged the city of Menen to think of long-term goals and to aim higher. The new management and local authorities were positive about the new ideas and development plans. Stakeholders agreed that this approach enabled them to develop a shared vision. The design charrette made residents and other stakeholders more willing to partake in future planning endeavours. It was found that students are more open to creative participation, leading to more direct communication between all stakeholders. The role of students within the participatory process enabled a quick transition from analysis to design.

Added value of student involvement in the planning process

The local authorities were pleased that the students had managed to disclose the potential of their city in only a few days and were able to think outside the box. With their ideas and images, the students have motivated more people to take an interest in designing the city together, both inside and outside the organisation. The project enabled creative thinking and resulted in the creation of a strong and positive identity for the area.

### **Results of the Stuttgart design charrette**

In Stuttgart (Germany) the goal of the charrette was to develop design strategies for an industrial heritage route in the Fils valley near Stuttgart in collaboration with local authorities and residents of the area. In order to retain and promote what is left of the industrial heritage, the Verband Region Stuttgart (VRS) had started a project called ‘Industrie Kultur im Filstal’ (industrial culture in the Fils valley) with the objective to combine industrial heritage, nature and recreation in an attempt to strengthen the identity of the region, improve living conditions and make the inhabitants feel proud of their area and history. The participatory planning approach was complex because of the multitude of stakeholders, including 16 municipalities in the Fils valley, the county, companies that own the industrial heritage, as well as local historians and other experts and the residents of the region (Chapter 2.XXX).

Bridging top-down and bottom-up approaches: Creating a wider view

The design charrette started with a tour through the Fills valley, with presentations by various local stakeholders, including the EU-champions. These are local people involved in the VALUE+ investment sites, who will ‘champion’ positive stories from real life projects and tell others about the benefits of being part of an EU-funded project (VALUE+). Studio work, individual brainstorming and group work, along with presentati-









ons and discussions formed part of the participatory planning process and led to the creation of new ideas. The charrette helped to gain a wider perspective on the challenges and develop new ideas for the industrial heritage route, information islands and industrial heritage buildings.

Added value of student involvement in the planning process

The student involvement in the participatory process led to the development of design strategies for the industrial heritage route and ideas for new functions for some of the abandoned factories, specifically the Schachenmayr factory in Salach. Students developed two plans focussing on different scales. The first plan focused on the larger scale of the landscape and the visual relationship between the industrial heritage sites. The second plan focused on a variation in recreational areas on the riverside illustrated with photomontage images that visualised the students’ ideas of new viewpoints connecting the different points of interest.

Overview of the results

The following table captures the comparative analysis of the case studies in this research, illustrating tools for an integrative approach, along with student contributions in such approach to link top-down and bottom-up approaches.

Table 1: Comparative analysis of case studies illustrating tools and student contribution

Case study	Tool for integrating bottom-up and top-down approaches
Liège case study (Belgium)	Useful results can be obtained with modest measures, like creating more entrances and a central meeting area.
Sheffield case study (United Kingdom)	Multitude of ideas to create a shared place and better connections with the surrounding area. Introduction of an events calendar.
Amersfoort case study (The Netherlands)	Do-it-yourself toolbox enabling local residents to be part of the planning process and take ownership of the environment
Menen case study (Belgium)	Long-term master plan disclosing potential of the city, not constrained by budget or legal constraints.
Stuttgart case study (Germany)	Creating a wider view, more viewpoints and visual connections, the use of industrial art to along the route, ideas for new functions for old buildings, and the importance of visual communication methods.

Benefits of the design charrette and student involvement.

The benefits of student involvement in the actual planning process were evident. The design charrettes succeeded in bridging top-down and bottom-up approaches as well as adding value to the authorities and students.

Benefits of design charrettes

A design charrette can be described as an intensive multi-day design or planning workshop with clients, stakeholders, designers and other professionals. The design charrette allows a diverse group of people to quickly generate design solutions that integrate a diversity of interests.

Design charrettes are useful tools in bridging top-down and bottom-up approaches because:

- All the time and effort of a diverse group of people is concentrated in one week. This generates a lot of energy, which is useful to kick-start a design process.
- Designers, local authorities, community members and other stakeholders start by visiting the area together. As the different stakeholders explain and point out their interests, this helps to build a mutual understanding between the different parties involved.
- The narrow time frame forces participants to focus on the big picture, there is no time to get lost in details. This ensures a more strategic approach in a bottom-up process.
- The narrow time frame also ensures a quick transition from analysis to strategies and design solutions.
- Interdisciplinary teams can quickly generate a variety of creative solutions.
- At the end of most days there are presentations of the latest findings or plans. This leads to discussion, which helps to develop consensus and a shared vision.
- The discussion also ensures immediate feedback, so that misunderstandings are avoided and feasibility can be tested.
- A collaborative approach helps to build trust and a positive working relationship between the community and local government.
- The collective energy and combined effort leads to fast results.



### **Benefits of student involvement**

Design charrettes are typically organised by architecture and planning firms. Organising a design charrette with students has a few additional benefits:

- Because students can only take a limited time off from their regular study programme, this necessitates the need for a narrow time frame and the concentration of effort and energy of the stakeholders.
- Students can contribute recent academic knowledge and theories, adopted to fit the local situation and environment.
- Students have no political agenda, personal interests or financial gain in relation to the area or the final plans. As a result, students can approach both the challenges and the other stakeholders with genuine curiosity and an open mind.
- Local stakeholders are more open in their discussion with students than with the local authorities and other stakeholders.
- Students are direct in their communication and unafraid to address uncomfortable issues.
- Students have an optimistic view of the world. They think in opportunities rather than problems. Students can quickly come up with a range of ideas and address challenges in a creative manner.
- Students are allowed to make mistakes and take risks. They also have conceptual flexibility, which is essential for creative thinking.
- Young people bring a lot of positive energy and a good atmosphere to the design process.

### **Benefits for the education of young professionals**

Design charrettes also have a number of benefits for the education of young professionals:

- Students have the experience of working on-site on a real-life project with real challenges and real people. They like making a contribution to the world and getting a realistic image of their future work.
- Students practice their participatory planning skills and can test their theoretical classroom knowledge in a practical situation.
- Students practice working in international and multidisciplinary teams. They get a better understanding of different cultures as well as transnational planning approaches. They learn the importance of different disciplines and how these work together.
- They improve their communication and negotiation skills by exchanging knowledge, opinions and ideas within the teams and interacting with a wide range of stakeholders.
- The international charrettes help students to build an international network in their field of studies.
- The design charrette is a memorable part of their studies and a unique life experience.

## **Conclusion**

Education benefits from real-life projects, as is demonstrated by these case studies above. These projects also benefit from student input. The selected case studies of the VALUE+ project created possibilities for an interface between practice and theory, mainly because of multi-disciplinary project teams, consisting of practice-oriented stakeholders (local communities, developers, local authorities, planners, experts) and theory-oriented stakeholders such as students and universities. Furthermore, the inclusion of universities within the project scope created opportunities for lecturers to incorporate case studies and new material in the current curriculum. The students' input and ideas were integrated in the projects and in various cases seemed to contribute to the level of creativity and innovation in the projects. As a result, mutual benefits were experienced and evident in all of the case studies.

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## **Into the Wild | Plans for La Chartreuse, a park that has run wild**

International student workshop in Liège, Belgium  
11 - 14 June 2013

### **Stakeholders:**

François Bertrand, Neighbour  
David Collard, Communication manager  
Didier Deville, Neighbour  
Serge Floëge, Inhabitants committee Longdoz  
Marie-Christine Gengoux, Public writer  
Dominique Jamin, Neighbour  
Lucie Lefebvre, Public Spaces Department, City of Liège  
Jean-François Maréchal, YAKA FAIRE SPRL  
Pierre Michaux, NPO La Chartreuse  
Gaëlle Michaud-Nérard, Urban Planning Department, City of Liège  
Anne Rondia, Public Spaces Department, City of Liège  
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## **Do-it-yourself landscape | Connecting stakeholders in the outdoor area**

Student project outdoor area, Amersfoort  
11 November 2013 – 15 January 2014

### **Organization:**

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## **A shared place | Upgrading Edward Street Park**

International student workshop in Sheffield, UK  
15 – 17 October 2013

### **Organization:**

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Jimmie Slijkhuis, Project Coordinator, at VHL University of Applied Sciences

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## **Dare to dream! | A Masterplan for Menen, Belgium**

International student workshop in Menen, Belgium  
5 - 9 May 2014

### **Organization:**

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Isabelle Putseys, Intercommunale Leiedal  
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## **A wider view | Design principles for the Fils Valley Industrial Heritage Route, Stuttgart region**

International student workshop in Stuttgart, Germany  
7 - 9 July 2014

### **Organization:**

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Silvia Weidenbacher, Verband Region Stuttgart

### **Participants field trip and sounding board:**

Peter Blum, tour guide industrial heritage, archivist  
Heide Esswein, landscape planner (Verband Region Stuttgart)  
Gunnar Herbert, environmental officer (municipality Göppingen)  
Jürgen Hilse, EU-champion (promoting reuse of Schachenmayr factory)  
Tilo Keyerleber, tour guide industrial heritage  
Hannes-Dietrich Keyn, urban planning officer (municipality Salach)  
Kurt Lindner, urban planning officer (municipality Göppingen)  
Regina Mayer, finance manager (Verband Region Stuttgart)  
Manfred Meister, project manager (Verband Region Stuttgart)  
Johanna Scholz, landscape planner (Verband Region Stuttgart)  
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### Cover image:

Detail from Fort de la Chartreuse, photograph by Ad Koolen

### Photos:

Ad Koolen, Dorith van Gestel, Dick van Dorp

### Project Images:

Participating students

### Press:

GLD Grafimedia

ISBN 978-90-9028978-6

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