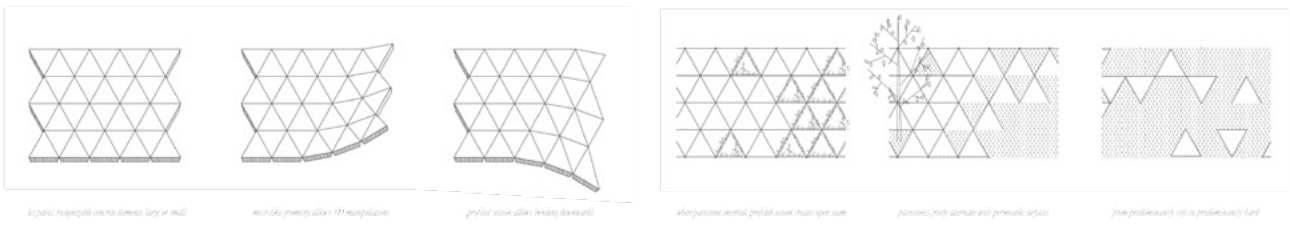


Against the prevalence of generic, utilitarian public space, we propose a masterplan that celebrates *collective* public space by taking its very pavestone as its iconic element.



With its vast size, classic nature and present condition as urban void, Place Destrée qualifies as fragment of urban landscape. Rather than a piece of urban tissue, it is a landscape typical of Charleroi: fragmented and disconnected. For in this city there is an abundance of landscape as backside, as negative space left over from urban growth which traditionally developed around streets and roads.



This backside condition of landscape explains the site's current failure in playing a collective role as public space for Gilly, but also holds the promise of becoming a different kind of urban centrality where the city could not only densify but also reconnect with its forgotten landscape. Thereby it will recover the sense of locality that is now fading out in a public realm of asphalt where roadways and parking lots dominate.

Against the prevalence of generic, utilitarian public space, we propose a masterplan that celebrates collective public space by taking its very pavestone as its iconic element. Gilly's very own pavestone. Its particular, yet quintessentially simple geometry is derived from the two main streets that cross through the site at an angle of sixty degrees, and allows for the integration of other public amenities in the form of topographic manipulations that underline the nature of Gilly's new main square as high ground in a continuous landscape.

Public space integrated, variegated and open

The pavement integrates the entire project area into one continuous ground cover, reaching to the surrounding buildings and nearby places of interest, crossing streets and even bridging level differences in order to connect to public amenities above and below ground level. Doing so it creates a dynamic topography that makes a direct reference to the city's particular landscape (both natural and man-made) and emphasizes the square's unique position on a ridge dominating two valleys.



The undulating ground cover establishes particular spatial relations, creates vistas, and gives shape to a unique public space that is truly

Charleroi's unique identity as a landscape made of vast outdoor areas can be made visible. Most notably, these are the green spaces that have been created in a great number of the city's urban blocks.



an event in the city. The variable topography combines with changes in materiality to induce the desired atmospheres or integrate specific functional requirements, such as vehicular access which can be organized in specific areas that would be marked by a different module of pavement. The concrete pavestone can be declined in small (like 30x30cm) and large elements (as much as 240x240cm). It alternates with green spaces as well, in a free composition that distributes different forms of vegetation throughout the space.



Public space openly interacts with existing buildings and new developments that will density the perimeter of the square, activating it with a broad mix of different uses. The

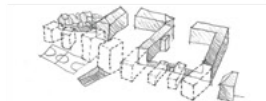
alternance of mineral and vegetal elements around and in between buildings adjusts to the desired qualities and atmospheres, stressing the publicness of a school entrance here, or the more residential character of a collective housing garden there. These interstitial spaces ensure an active relationship between the square and the urban tissue around it.



Urban tissue: open, evolutive and clustered

In a logic where public space is recognized as a part of bigger landscape that meanders through the site and connects it within a wider territory, it does not ought to be demarcated and outlined by a continuous front of build-

ings that should give it a recognizable, self-contained shape like in classical urbanism. We propose to guide the growth of the urban fabric towards the square in a way that doesn't limit its open character, but rather further enhances it and takes advantage of it. New buildings are invited to encroach on the space of the square, and vice-versa: public space seeps in between the buildings to create functional and visual relationships to spaces deeper within the fabric which is in truly open dialogue with the square.



This growth of the urban fabric is endogenous: it evolves from what is already there within the tissue. On a morphological level, public facilities in and around the site already organized an open order. And on a programmatic level, they hold the seeds

for further development and activation of the site if they are properly combined with other urban functions. Ongoing residential developments around the square show the potential for further growth; all we have to do is invite it with an attractive public space that can serve as a base (quite literally) for a qualitative urban development.

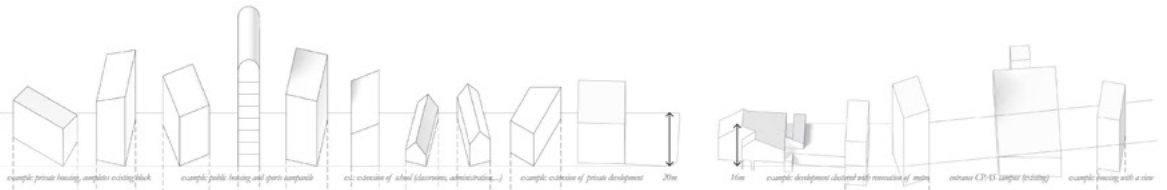
Collective amenities: clustered, representative and integrated

To further stimulate both public and private development around the site, we propose to group investments into integrated operations that will achieve a greater mix and density of functions. This will open opportunities for co-production by different actors and even help mutualize the costs between them. One opportunity for such a clustered project is the redevelopment of the sports centre, which could be combined for instance with a public housing project by La Sambrienne – on



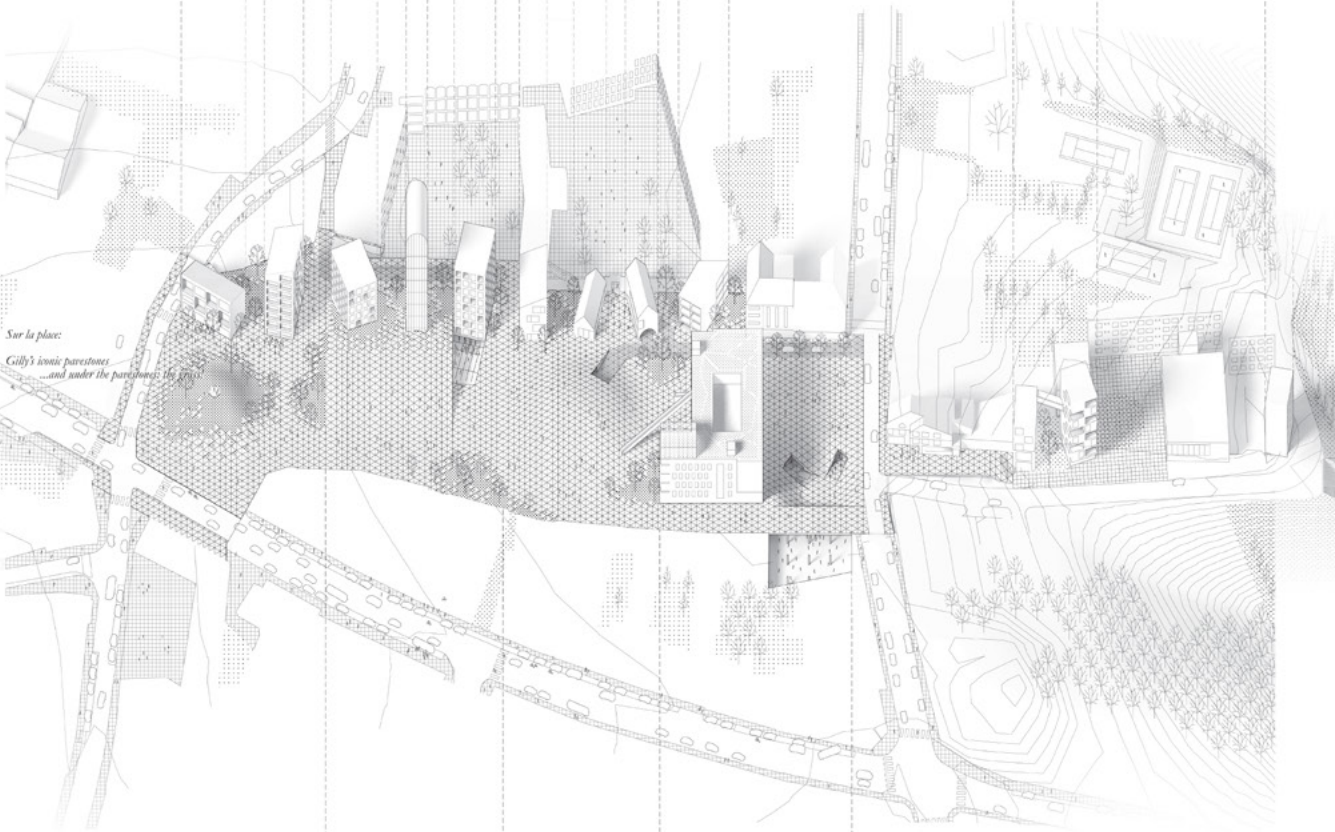
Par-dessus la place:

a new notion of the urban alignment
 • open array, like a row of trees
 • corners align, not facades per se
 • volumes seek free orientation



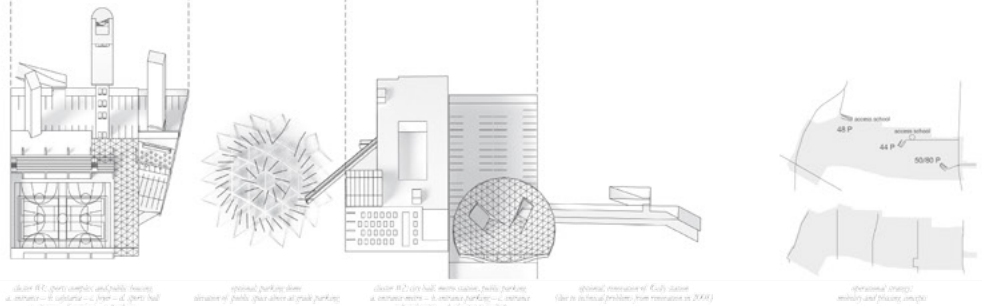
Sur la place:

Gilly's iconic pavestones
 ...and under the parishioners the city



Par-dessus la place:

Collective topography of integrated amenities



this strategic site within the city's framework for urban intensification. Inhabitants of the complex will enjoy the fitness-with-a-view, tennis courts and other first-class amenities!

Public buildings should also live up to an ambition of staging their collective significance in the public realm in a transparent and attractive way. The reconsideration of

the municipal building within the new vision for the site is undoubtedly an important project in this regard. In line with the principles of cluserization with other functions and integration within public space, it is deconstructed into a layered complex of urban functions that are all directly accessible from the square. The imposing staircase is removed to make way for an opening right

through the building. Public space extends into the glazed public info bar on the ground floor; it reaches the associative spaces on the upper levels via an expressively inviting access ramp; and it even connects onto the public rooftop thanks to the directly accessible lift (existing) behind the facade.

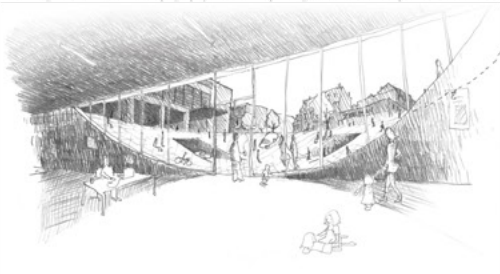
Also exemplary of the integration of public buildings into a collective topography is the

new opening that could connect the underground lobby of the Centre Culturel Temps Choisi to Place Destree, taking advantage of the necessary renovation of the metro station (yet again) to bring plenty of daylight and visual presence to this important institution on the square. Integrated collective amenities also means an integrated approach to mobility and the creation of underground parking infrastructure as part of the clustered

operations on public equipments. Up to 172 parking spaces can be realized this way, making the impacts of the masterplan neutral in terms of parking capacity.



Towards a new paradigm for Charleroi's rhapsodic centres



We believe this project is the first of a series of likewise projects in Charleroi where former urban centres are reconsidered through the integration of public space, urban tissue and collective amenities into new kinds of urban landscapes that take advantage of the city's undervalued, yet incredibly interesting natural spaces to enrich the daily lives of Carolos.