NOR.BRUXSELS 2019 - 2030

Redevelopment of the CCN site Quartier Nord, including urban planning, housing, offices, retail, public amenities and multimodal hub in Schaerbeek/St Josse



Site
rue du ProgrÃ¨s 80 1030 Bruxelles

Client
AG Real Estate and ATENOR

Other architects
DDS+

Structural engineer
Greisch

Services engineer
TPF/Arcadis

Budget
n/c EUR htva

Following an international call for projects launched in 2019 by ATENOR, AG Real Estate and AXA IM on the existing CCN site adjacent to Brussels' North Station (Centre CongrÃ¨s Nord) shown here, the jury has selected the design proposed by architectesassoc+_Multiple_TVK. The planned 160.000 mÂ² development articulating this key part of Brussels' North District is a significant act of long-term faith in what we consider important at the studio: teamwork, engaged interactions, and a collective commitment to a robust, inclusive and vibrant city. Consequently intensive cross-collaborations with city, regional and transport Authorities are progressing, with a shared desire to collaborate effectively federating all. The future project conforms to a mixed-use brief, with equal attention paid to housing, offices and neighbourhood amenities, and to built and unbuilt square meters whether public or private. Thus the permit documents currently taking shape embody the huge potential such a diverse program offers, buoyed by the North District's own innate but so far untapped potential.

Much of 2021 was spent wrapping up extensive evaluations of the existing CCN complex sitting atop Belgium's busiest and best-known multimodal hub, while work shown above on the vast project replacing it was underway led by architectesassoc+, engineers Greisch, Arcadis and TPF. This intense option testing and innumerable simulations have convinced clients Atenor and AG Real Estate, and indeed all parties, that the worn-out ensemble's flimsy structure, haphazard grid and deep dark self-centered volumes distinctly validate our albeit uncomfortable first intuitions: dismantling + newbuild is future's best bet here. This is certainly not more of the same, and notably because the debate usually tips towards maintaining existing structures to avoid pollution and waste, like architectesassoc+'s PACHECO project shown below. But in the long haul a sustainable option in this case given the huge people-positive impact a novel reciprocity-based design is capable of offering to generations to come compared to the present 1970's behemoth.

Working on the CCN makes it nevertheless clear that from now dismantling -not demolition- will predominate, fuelling new circular pathways. What cannot be reused will essentially serve as sublime counterexamples of what we must no longer do, shining the light on what we must do instead this time around: design reversible, flexible, accessible to all, in a nutshell: responsible. Obsessively outward-oriented, searching to connect dialogue enrich animate wherever we touch ground: entrances wide and welcoming energizing street space, shops of all sorts level with sidewalks, spilling out onto them, a continuous promenade along animated facades front back left and right, an uninterrupted canopy protecting us from wind and rain. Bus routes simplified, train and metro station accesses unscrambled. A life-filled mix of housing, offices, retail and public amenities connected by and interacting with qualified unbuilt space.

Straightforward things designed hand in hand with urban planners Atelier Horizon such as sun-filled plaza's, benches galore, tree-lined bus stops, or an uninterrupted softly sloping pedestrian mall nonchalantly herding the throngs flowing in from the canal scape beyond towards the new low-lying hub and disencumbered Gare du Nord reigning above it, its elegant light-coloured stone faÃ§ade overlooking a green leafy square where you can simply sit, watch passers-by, wait for friends, have coffee, or read a book before your train is due.