

Zeitschrift: Hochparterre : Zeitschrift für Architektur und Design
Herausgeber: Hochparterre
Band: 17 (2004)
Heft: [18]: Schindler Award for Architecture 2004 "Access for All" [english]

Rubrik: Seven honorable mentions : Silhouette, Bridging, Structures, Zebra stripes, Sinking ship, Oriental dreams, Landslides

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Silhouette

Six high-rise apartment blocks give Saint-Gilles a new silhouette, while the cultural facilities are accommodated under a huge roof nearby. But whereas the jury welcomed the – easily accessible – towers, they had some doubts about the project's urbanistic quality.

• Six thirteen-storey high-rise buildings on the Carré de l'ancien Hôtel des Monnaies are an outstanding characteristic of the design by Małgorzata Burliga and Ewa Muca. The towers, which are visible from afar, make a slender impression since each storey accommodates just one apartment. Larger apartments extend over two floors or over two buildings on the same floor, united with one another at a dizzy height by glazed footbridges. The residents of these apartments live in one house during the day, and walk over the bridge to the sleeping zone at night. The façade of the towers is hollow, with balconies, interior stairs and planted areas rather like winter gardens inserted between the outer and inner layers. The modular construction of the ground plan permits great flexibility in the layout and furnishing of the apartments. The ceiling-high glazing provides the residents with contact with the outside world "even in bad weather," as the two authors write.

Thanks to the vertical development, the stock of trees on the Carré has been largely preserved. The much-frequented footpath from the Parvis across the Carré divides the Carré into two parts. The high-rise buildings are located on the southern triangle, whereas the cultural and commercial facilities consisting of right-angled volumes up to four storeys high under a triangular roof are centered in the northern triangle. Two narrow watercourses represent an attempt to join the two parts of the Carré. The multi-purpose hall can be opened up to the park and used in different ways: as a theater with ascending seating, or as an arena with stands on two or four sides.

As an analogy to the towers, pillars are placed on the Parvis de Saint-Gilles providing different possibilities for the creation of protected niches and stalls.

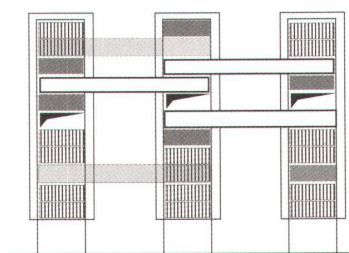
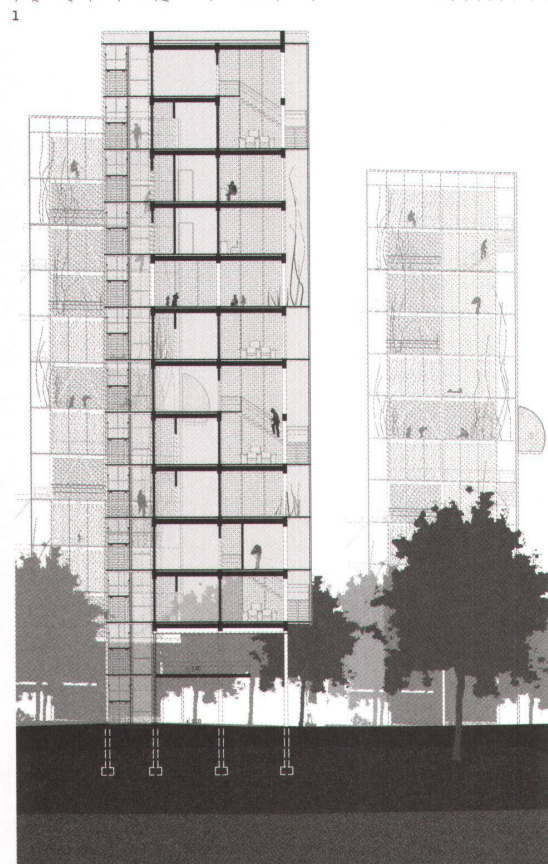
A radical solution

The jury was fascinated by the apartment towers' high degree of adaptability and flexibility, something that is crucial for changing requirements of accessibility. Residents have the option of arranging their apartments within the given structure to comply with their respective needs. However, the jury was of the opinion that the plans – with the exception of the residential towers – were hard to read since they illustrate a thought process rather than presenting a completed design. Gardens, trees and watercourses connect the buildings with one another, but the relationship between the design and its surroundings is insufficiently clear. The jury regarded the conceptual and structural aspects as the strong points of the project rather than the contextual and urbanistic quality. Their verdict: a radical solution! •

--> School: Politechnika Śląska, Wydział Architektury, Gliwice (PL) (Silesia Technical University, department of architecture, Gliwice, Poland)

--> Professor: Jerzy Witczek

--> Students: Małgorzata Burliga, Ewa Muca



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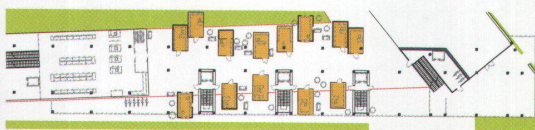
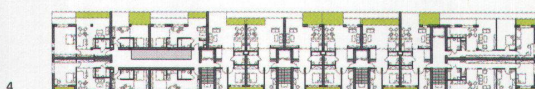
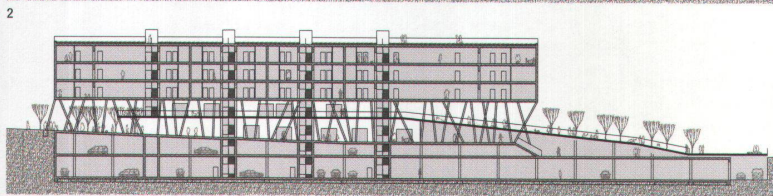
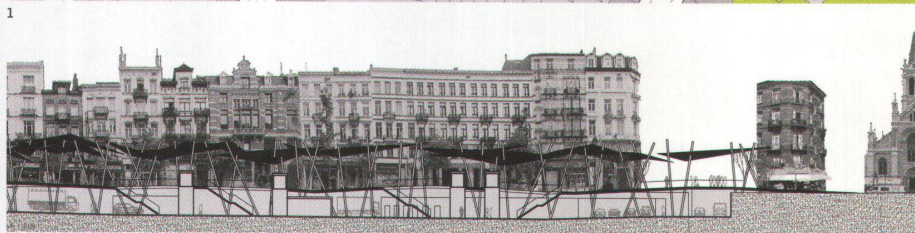
1 Six residential buildings stand on the southern part of the Carré, the cultural and commercial facilities occupy the northern tip.

2 The cross section shows the double-wall façade construction of the towers and the arrangement of the maisonette apartments.

3 The diagram shows how the glass bridges connect the towers high above the town.

2

Bridging



1 The footbridge extends from the church forecourt across the Parvis and along the Carré.

2 Cars and lorries are banned from the Parvis to an underground tunnel. A textile roof provides protection from sun and rain.

3 The residential buildings are placed on slanting supports on either side of the footbridge.

4-6 The residential buildings are located over the public areas of the street and the footbridge.

A footbridge extends from the forecourt of the church over the Parvis and encircles the Carré, connecting all the public areas and providing the design with élan and continuity. The buildings, on the other hand, are somewhat ponderous, and the apartments, although spacious, are conventional.

• The connecting element that gives the project by Jan Velek its name is the "footbridge." The author proposes to unravel the stream of traffic on the Parvis de Saint-Gilles, directing cars and lorries underground at the Chaussée de Waterloo, and reserving the town level for pedestrians. From the forecourt of the church a ramp – the footbridge – soars above the Parvis, branches off to the right at the end of the Carré and then encircles it, continually ascending, on three sides. The footbridge is partially covered: a textile roof protects the Parvis from sun and rain, and the path along rue de Moscou leads through a forest of innumerable slanting supports that bear the residential building.

Two multi-storey apartment blocks on rue de Moscou and rue de la Victoire flank the sound-protected park in the middle of the Carré. Most of the single-storey apartments are spanned between the two longitudinal façades and are accessible to wheelchairs throughout. The two narrow sides of the Carré are framed by an art gallery on the hand and the multipurpose hall and a building accommodating a medical center and classrooms on the other. As a staged conclusion to the footbridge, a ramp winds round from the height of the second floor in five straight sections to the ground in front of the art gallery façade. A covered, flexibly exploitable square in the northern corner of the Carré serves as a forum.

A well-considered proposal

The jury liked the system of the – in part rather steep – ramps under or alongside the building. The footbridge connects all the public levels and endows the otherwise rather cumbersome buildings with a certain élan. The public space covers a large area. The jury felt that the ramps create a certain tension, but they also ensure a continuity between the Parvis de Saint-Gilles and the Carré de l'ancien Hôtel des Monnaies. They considered the transition from the roof to the ramp and the east end of the Parvis to be particularly effective. They also regarded the accessibility as sufficient, especially in the apartments, which, although generously designed, are somewhat conventional in terms of layout. The supports bearing the buildings separate the building volumes from the ground on a physical level. However, since a similar element bears the roofing of the Parvis de Saint-Gilles, the supports combine to form an element of design. •

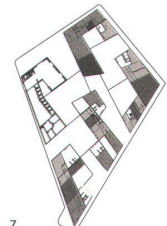
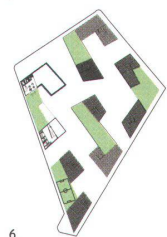
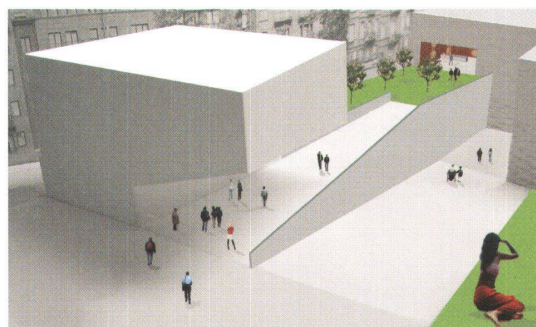
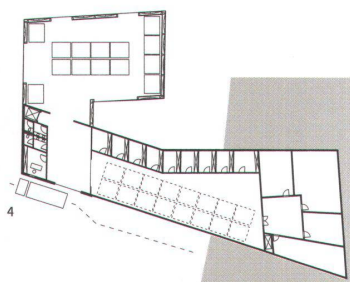
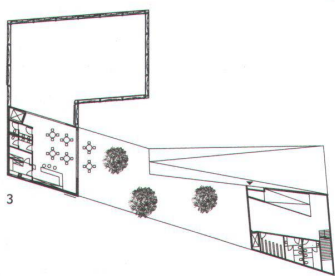
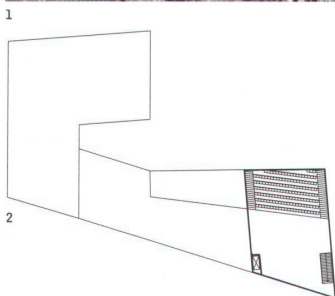
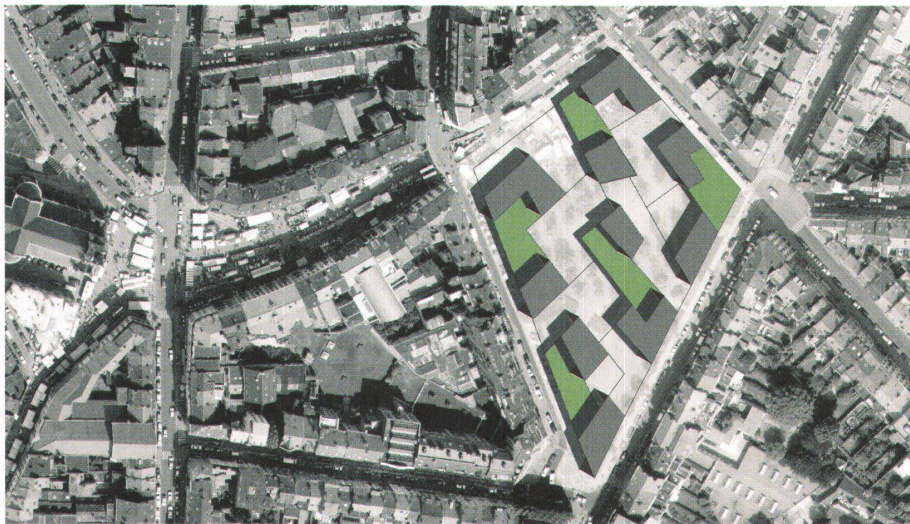
--> School: Technische Universität Wien, Fakultät Architektur und Regionalplanung, Wien (A)

[Technical University, department of architecture, Vienna, Austria]

--> Professor: Helmut Schramm

--> Student: Jan Velek

Structures



1 Five "structural units" on the Carré form part of a town within the town.

2-4 A building with the market located on the ground floor and the multipurpose hall and a bar on the first floor is situated on the corner of rue Jourdan and rue de Moscou.

5 Different levels and ramps connect the elements of a "structural unit".

6-7 The public facilities such as the market, shops and restaurants are accommodated on the ground floor, with the residential units and exterior spaces on the upper floor.

Five units with shops, restaurants and apartments located on the Carré reflect the urban structure of Saint-Gilles on a smaller scale. The Parvis remains unchanged. Although the jury recognized that the authors had carried out thorough research into the urbanistic qualities, they were of the opinion that the project was rather too roughly sketched out.

• The two students concentrated their work on the Carré de l'ancien Hôtel des Monnaies. The Parvis de Saint-Gilles remains – intentionally or coincidentally? – untouched. On the Carré, Christian Rayermann and Felix Tönnis worked with four fundamental elements: various levels, ramps connecting these levels, public exterior spaces on the ground and private exterior spaces on the roofs. The authors translated the urbanistic pattern of Saint-Gilles into a smaller scale on the Carré. Together with exterior spatial fragments and ramps, single- and multi-storey building volumes form a "structural element." Altogether there are five of these elements occupying the Carré in different forms. Together, they form a section of a city within the city with multifarious, folded exterior spaces designed as parks and small squares.

Shops and restaurants are planned for the ground floor of four of these units, with apartments and offices on the upper floors. The fifth unit on the corner of rue de Moscou and rue Jourdan is described in detail. Here, the ground floor accommodates the extension to the market with the necessary storage premises. There is a snack bar on the upper floor with a direct view of the market hall. A tree-populated terrace accessed from the street level by a ramp is situated in front of the bar. The foyer of the multipurpose hall is on the same level, whereas the hall itself is one floor higher up and is accessed – somewhat unfavorably – only by stairs and an elevator.

Urbanistic quality, sketchy project

The competition jury recognized the high architectural value of aspects of the project such as scale and structure, development patterns and spatial quality. The two authors researched these values thoroughly and elaborated them in around thirty models. They have convincingly documented their ideas on urbanization in a book that promises to be worthwhile.

In the jury's opinion, however, the synthesis has not been elaborated as thoroughly as the analysis. The project is simple and clear – a flexible string of buildings. Ramps are an integral part of the design, but they are often more of a sculptural than an architectural element. The jury criticized the lack of a proposal for the design of the Parvis and – perhaps as a result of this – the fact that the project is not integrated with its surroundings. The jury's verdict: the design has unquestionably excellent qualities, but it does not provide sufficient information about the program. The project is theoretical and sketchy. •

--> School: Bauhaus-Universität, Weimar (D)
(Bauhaus University, Weimar, Germany)

--> Professor: Michael Loudon

--> Students: Christian Rayermann, Felix Tönnis

Zebra stripes

A fanned-out line grid structures the area of the Parvis and the Carré. The culture center and the residential buildings follow this zebra-like pattern. While this is not an obvious reaction to the urbanistic context, the jury nevertheless considered the solution remarkable and beautifully presented.

Although Saint-Gilles borders directly on the "Pentagon" enclosed by the small ring in the center of Brussels, the commune is nevertheless largely cut off from the center. This design by three students is based on this observation. Branching off from boulevard du Midi, the intention is to direct the people of Brussels through avenue Jean Volders to the Parvis de Saint-Gilles and on via the Carré de l'ancien Hôtel des Monnaies and rue Jourdan in the direction of place Louise. In this way, the center of Saint-Gilles, with the emphasis on the Parvis and the Carré, will be connected with the pulse of Brussels. The cars will be directed into a tunnel connected with the adjoining roads by means of numerous entries and exits and with access to a car park for 500 vehicles.

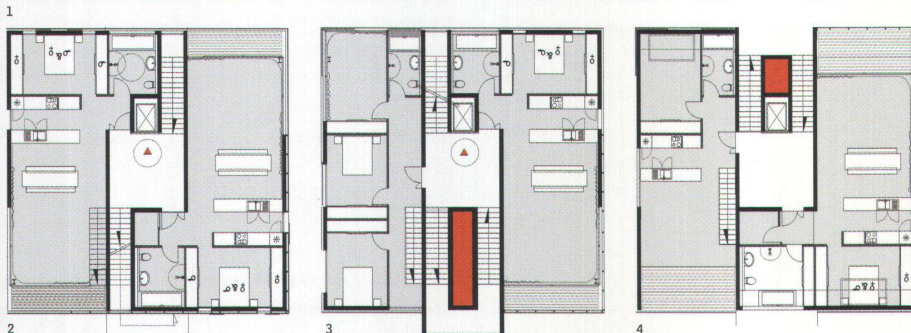
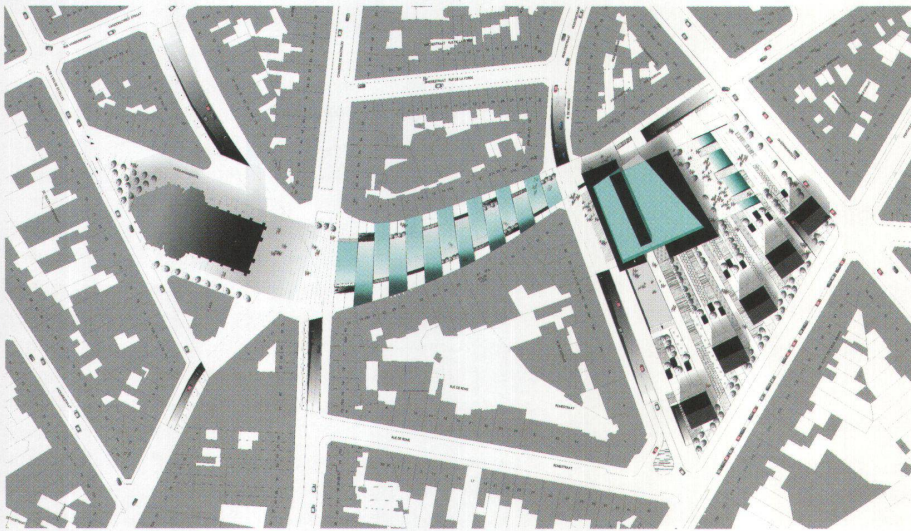
A fanned-out line grid – the zebra – extends over the whole area between the church of Saint-Gilles and rue de la Victoire. Both the square in front of the church and the Parvis, which is spanned by cables bearing lengths of cloth for flexible sun and rain protection, follow this arrangement. The culture center with exhibition rooms and a bar on the ground floor, more exhibition rooms on the first floor and the conference hall on the second floor are located on the Carré de l'ancien Hôtel des Monnaies, at the corner of the Parvis. A swimming pool and a sun terrace are placed at the top of the building, under the open sky. The floors are connected by ramps, but no stairs or elevators.

Rue de l' Hôtel des Monnaies, which also follows the zebra grid, is the scene of five tall, narrow residential buildings representing an analogy to the type of narrow terraced houses that is widespread in Brussels, with shops and offices on the ground floor. The zebra structures the space between the houses and the culture center in "urban areas" – an interpretation of an element of landscape that is typical in Belgium.

Remarkable and beautifully presented

The jury was of the opinion that although this project did not represent the obvious reaction to the urbanistic context, it nevertheless reflects this on the basis of the two buildings of the Saint-Gilles church and the culture center: the eclectic strength of the church is balanced by the secular, profane power of the culture center. The zebra-structured Parvis with the market place extends between the two buildings. The jury also recognized similar elements in the residential buildings: using the trick of rotation away from the street, structuring in five building volumes and a surprising change of scale, they assume the aspect of dream-like images of their constructed predecessors. "A remarkable solution and beautifully presented," was the verdict of the jury.

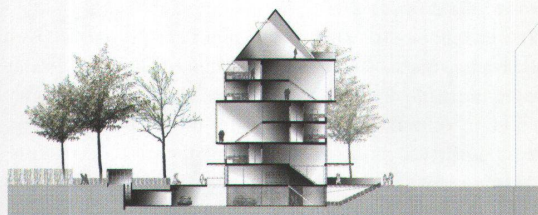
--> School: Ecole d'Architecture de Strasbourg
(Strasbourg School of Architecture, Strasbourg, France)
--> Professor: Georges Heintz
--> Students: Lionel Debs, Jean-Paul Meyer, Fabien Pihan



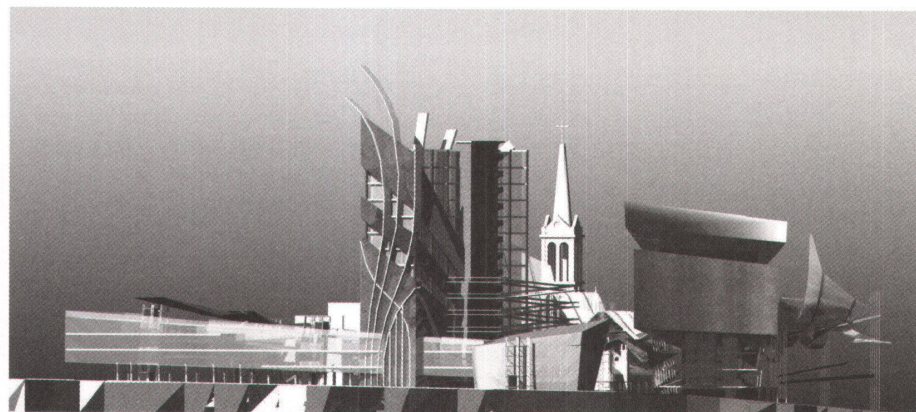
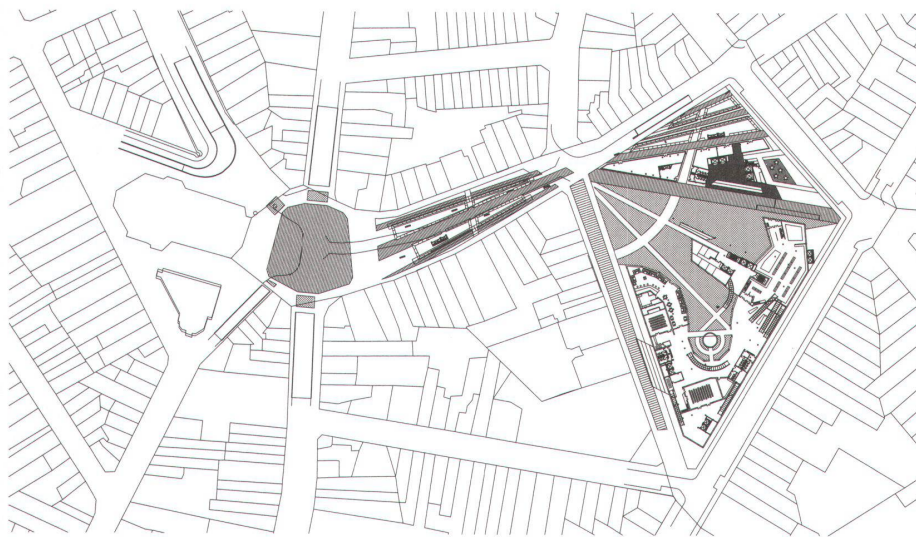
1 The site plan shows how the striped pattern covers the Parvis and the Carré. The five residential buildings are placed along rue de l'Hôtel des Monnaies.

2-4 The apartments are grouped around the central hall. The upper floors of the maisonettes are accessed by an elevator.

5-6 The five free-standing residential buildings interpret the type of the Brussels multiple-family terraced house.



Sinking ship



- 1 The public functions are located on the ground level on the Carré.
- 2 The author interprets the twelve-storey apartment building with the pylons bearing the balconies as a "tree of life".
- 3 The expressive architectural vocabulary of the project is unfamiliar in Brussels and Western Europe.

The multipurpose hall as a fragment of a ship's deck, the high-rise housing block as a symbol of the tree of life – it is with poetic images of this kind that Aleksander Katsitadze substantiates his concept. Nevertheless, the jury were of the opinion that the underlying spatial concept was sound.

• Aleksander Katsitadze from Georgia based his design on a poetic notion: "The ship of freedom lies wrecked in a sea of dreams. With our own culture and our high moral standards we must become its passengers. The time is now ripe to recognize higher values in ourselves and to become more sensitive."

The author extends the market from the Parvis de Saint-Gilles into the Carré. The enlarged market is the main axis of the center of Saint-Gilles. Beneath it is a car park from which the market stands are supplied via elevators. A dominant aspect of the design is the multipurpose hall, which Aleksander Katsitadze regards as a metaphor of "a fragment of the ship's deck." He interprets the ramps and elevators that lead to the multipurpose hall as the "road of life" for the people. The building is located on the eastern tip of the site, to the south of the enlarged market. The social premises are housed in an office block on rue de l'Hôtel des Monnaies. The building's basement accommodates an entertainment complex with a cinema and marionette theater, an art café and a supermarket square. These premises are set in the terrain towards rue de l'Hôtel des Monnaies, and they are open on the side of the Carré owing to the downward slope of the site.

The twelve-storey apartment house is incised into the two-to three-storey office building. The roof of the office building is designed as a garden for the occupiers and employees of the social facilities. The glass façades of the office building reflect the surroundings, and people walking round the building "can see the sky" in the reflecting surfaces of the high-rise building. Despite its twelve storeys, the high-rise building is lower than the Saint-Gilles church, and represents a symbol of the tree of life with its pylons supporting the balconies.

Sound spatial concept

The jury were of the opinion that these "allegoric escapades" are based on a sound spatial concept. This begins with the covered market place that extends the Parvis into rue Jourdan and continues diagonally through the Carré to the supermarket. All public functions are logically organized on the street level or accessible via long ramps and elevators. The jury regards the crossing of the space as an experience, particularly where the ramps penetrate the roofs of the public areas and open up onto breathtaking views over the roofs and streets of Saint-Gilles.

The jury experienced the expressive architectural vocabulary as unusual to say the least – almost as if it were from another world. But unrealistic as it may be, the project is proof of an artistic and uncompromising analysis of the surroundings. And, despite its explosive character, it really does comply with the premise of "Access for all."

--> School: Architectural Institute Tbilisi, Georgia

--> Professor: Xojava Teimutaz

--> Student: Aleksander Katsitadze

Oriental dreams

A free-flowing network of paths and squares is reminiscent of an oriental souk, out of which three structures protrude. Vehement discussions ensued among the jury: "Surprising spatial quality" was one opinion; the project would "lead to more people with disabilities" was another emphatic view.

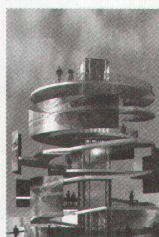
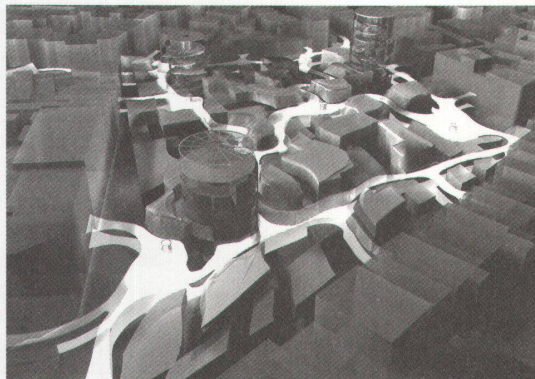
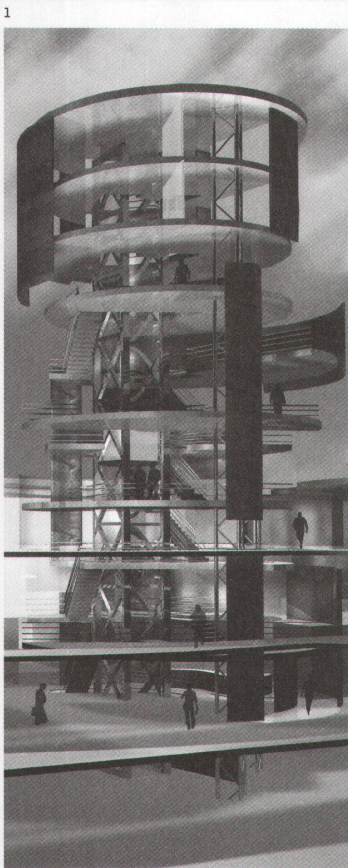
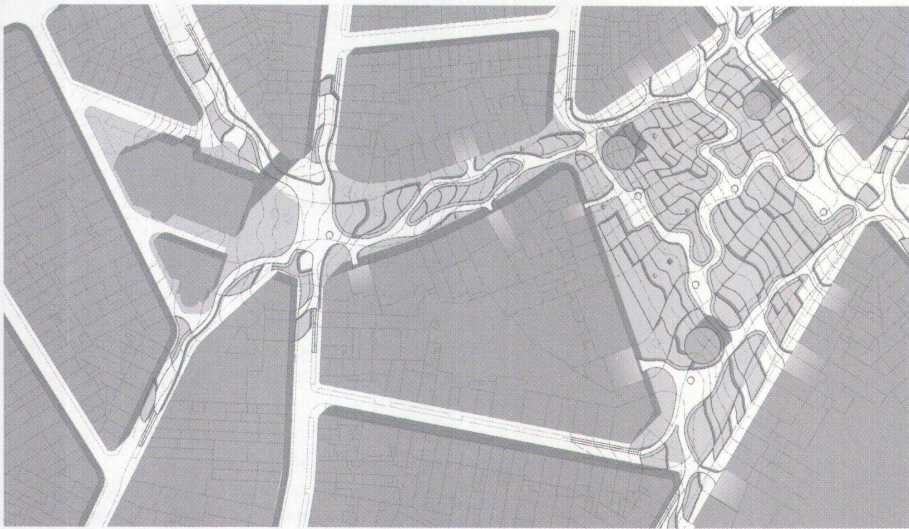
As the starting point of their work, Mathias Aström and Alexander Lusin established that the center of Saint-Gilles accommodates various spaces and functions that are fixed and separate from one another. The buildings on the Carré and the Parvis can scarcely be either altered or integrated. The two students wanted to soften these boundaries and create a mixture of different activities. On the basis of the surrounding buildings, they covered the Carré and the Parvis with a vibrant grid. This free-flowing grid forms the basis of a weave of different interior and exterior spaces, creating a labyrinthine network of paths that, sometimes broader, sometimes narrower, wind their way between the buildings. In places they widen out into small squares or flow out into the streets. Three towers project out of these two- to three-storey structures: the vertically arranged market, the multipurpose hall and the casino. Elevators or ramps along the façades proclaim the aspect of accessibility, at least for wheelchair users. The rest of the facilities are accommodated in the flat buildings: shops and restaurants on the ground floor, as well as apartments bordering on private exterior areas. The structure is reminiscent of an oriental market – a picture that would appear appropriate enough in view of the composition of the population of Saint-Gilles.

Highly controversial

No other project in this competition was the subject of so much passionate and controversial discussion as this proposal. One member of the jury thought it represented a surprising and hitherto unknown quality of space, a continuation of blob architecture. Others argued that it was confusing, in particular for partially sighted and partially hearing persons. One member was even of the opinion that the project would lead to "more people with disabilities," referring to the streets and squares in which partially sighted and partially hearing persons might have difficulty in finding their way around.

However, a small minority of the jury was impressed by the quality of the free-flowing space held together by three vertical structuring elements. The three towers were also described as "massive rocks in a turbulent sea," and "transparent and fragile communication centers in a 'jungle' of inhabitable niches." It was envisaged that this "jungle" would be the scene of every imaginable function: "delirious Brussels." While being aware of the project's obvious deficiencies in terms of accessibility, the jury appreciated the authors' courageous attempt at seeking spatial solutions outside the well-trodden academic and practical paths. •

--> School: Kunsthochschule Weissensee, Berlin (D)
(University of Art, Berlin, Germany)
--> Professor: Wolfgang Scholz
--> Students: Mathias Aström, Alexander Lusin



1 A labyrinthine network of paths winds between the buildings on the Parvis and the Carré.

2 Three dominant cylindrical elements project out of the "oriental bazaar".

3-4 Accessibility is provided by ramps and stairs in the towers.

Landslides

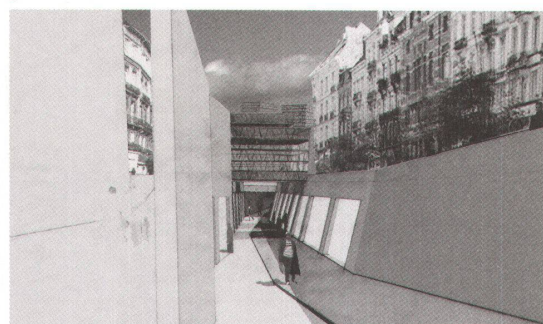
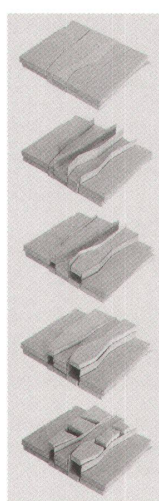
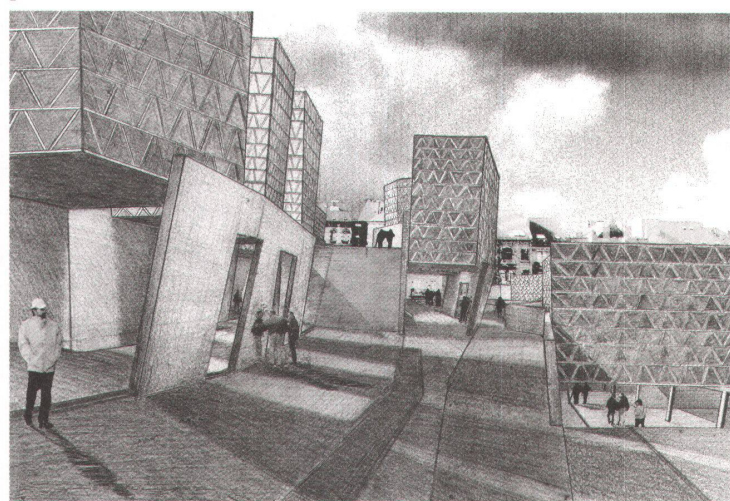
Like furrows between geological layers, diagonal lines and uneven levels cover the Parvis and the Carré, with the buildings protruding like eruptions. But although the jury were enthusiastic about this poetic idea and its presentation, they felt that the urbanistic analysis and the aspect of accessibility were not sufficiently developed.

• "Landslides" is the title of the weightiest of the Schindler Award projects: eight heavy, format A1 wooden panels put together as a collage constitute the design. The form – panels which, overlapping, can be joined together – reflects the content, for the three students worked with the tectonics of the site. Interstices and fissures such as appear in nature between the different layers of earth cover the competition area of the Parvis and the Carré rather like "tectonic layers." The turbulent landscape forms the basic pattern for the development of the site. The edges of the interstices between the layers constitute the boundary between the different functions and levels; like eruptions, the buildings project out of the furrowed terrain: residential buildings, office blocks and public facilities. As in nature, the project "Landslides" evidences no parallel edges or right angles, the lines of the breaks and fissures are really bundles of crooked lines and uneven levels. The dividing lines between the buildings and the roads and squares are blurred – "Landslides" as a whole resembles a sculpture flowing from the highest point of the crossing between rue de l'Hôtel des Monnaies and rue Moscou through the Carré to the Parvis. But this sculpture does not merely lie on the level of existing roads and squares: its tectonic layers extend downwards into the ground. Thus, for example, a deep furrow with sloping side walls developed as the façades of shops crosses the Parvis. Sloping surfaces and ramps provide unhindered access in the direction of flow of this "tectonic sculpture," while the wall panels rising at right angles set clear boundaries and permit passage only in specific places.

High poetic quality

The jury liked the project's poetic quality and artistic presentation. It recognized an intellectual combination of the typical Brussels "Ilot" and the reminiscence of the home towns of many of the immigrants who shop daily at the market. They were, however, less convinced by the urbanistic analysis. The tectonic principle dominates all other aspects of the design, and it is difficult to evaluate the aspects of functionality and accessibility. But the jury was of the opinion that the project is worthy of further development, particularly as it could become a means of unity between the different cultures •.

--> School: ISA Institut Supérieur d'Architecture St-Luc, Bruxelles
(St. Luc's Architectural Institute, Brussels, Belgium)
--> Professor: Marc Belderbos
--> Students: Rien Rossey, Jonas De Rauw, Youri Depelecijn



- 1 Diagonal lines and uneven levels cover the Parvis and the Carré like furrows.
- 2 The attempt at working with tectonics is also evident in the street areas.
- 3 The model shows how the project develops into the third dimension out of the terrain like an eruption.
- 4 A new valley crosses the Parvis and provides access to the shops in the basement.