IN HEYSSEL

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We’re Londoners. So we don’t know much about the Heysel Plateau and its context (apart from the Atomium and Heysel Stadium) – so we looked at it with fresh eyes and no agenda. We were asked to find ways of fitting in 20,000 new homes.

We heard about the ‘Flemish Diamond’ – the four cities of Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent and Leuven – the Vlamsee Ruit.

If the four cities can work together, perhaps they can become more competitive and help Europe compete with Asian economies.

We heard that Flemish people north of the ring road don’t want Brussels to expand north while the city needs more homes.

We looked at alternatives to moving the national stadium, no longer fit for purpose, to ‘car parking c’ next to the ring road. This seems too obvious, and would further block off Flanders from Brussels. And we looked at where new transport links might make North Brussels work better.

We had one night and two days.

What we know now – thanks to the invitation from the Spatial Planning Department of the Flemish Government – is that the Heysel Plateau is a great opportunity for Brussels to make the most of its world-famous Expo Park and to forge new links between Flemish and Wallonian communities. Perhaps an improved Heysel could be a way of resolving some sensitive issues for Brussels and also for Belgium?

It could also be a really cool new place with homes around a world-class city park, making closer links between surrounding communities.
WALKING AND LOOKING

We walked around Heysel on a Sunday night, and over the Ring Road towards Wemmel.

We had a briefing on Monday morning. Then we went for another walk round Heysel. Half of us thought about green spaces. Half thought about new homes. We started work on our ideas in the afternoon.

To be able to think about Heysel we needed to look at it closely. It was walking with our eyes turned on paying close attention to details as well as the area's character.

On Tuesday morning we worked up our ideas for spaces, homes and ways to improve the Heysel park.

In the afternoon we presented them to the spatial planning department's team and guests.

We identified issues that needed tackling; excesses of car parking spaces, slack space that could all be developed, fences and barriers and a general poor quality of green land.

We liked a lot of things too; the Atomium, the older expo buildings and the variety of the Brussels street around the edges of the park. Mini-Europe and the food street is fantastic too. Let's extend it!
Uncoordinated uses have chipped away at the original Expo Park and there are lots of unused or underused sites and spaces around the edges of uses which waste land.

The Expo park’s public realm is poor and incoherent with endless car parking surrounded by undefined green spaces.
The over-abundance of fencing in the expo park make it feel very loose, with no real structure, entry, direction or coherence.

North of the Ring, there was agricultural land which might make either space for new homes, or much better green space serving surrounding communities.

Too Many Fences

Low Grade Land in the North
When we walked around the park, and in the communities north of the Ring, we saw lots of green space that was either not well cared for or underused.

We like the variety of the Brussels streets around the edges of the park. Because the way Belgians build their streets, they include lots of gardens. They work so well. Us Brits really like them.
Heysel was an amazing place

Expo 58 was the first major World’s Fair after World War II. It used many buildings of the Brussels International Exposition held in 1935. Some are still in use.

It covered 2 sq km and remains best known for the Atomium, recently refurbished.

It attracted more than 41m people and was a symbol of post-war optimism.

The adjacent Heysel stadium was inaugurated in 1930. It was already in poor condition by 1985 when a disaster took place.

The ground was rebuilt in 1995, but has been deemed unfit for purpose.

The key problem with the Expo Park was there was no ‘legacy’ plan – like many international events sites. London’s 2012 Olympic effort for example focuses on what happens after the Games.

In Heysel, the former Expo Park has been occupied in a haphazard way which doesn’t make the most of the area’s potential – but it has left behind a great opportunity.
VISION FOR THE 58’ EXPO - FOR PEOPLE

THE PRESENT REALITY - THE CAR RULES!
VISION FOR THE 58’ EXPO - INTEGRATED IN THE CITY

THE PRESENT REALITY - DISCONNECTED
THE EXPO PARK IN THE CITY

Visiting Heysel park today, there is a sense that the city failed to carry into the future the vision that it presented when the world expos were taking place.

The park is no longer coherent as a place to visit and carries no relation to the city around it. It is evident that the legacy of the expos was not considered at the time of the events or after.

The location of the expo park on the outskirts of the city is one of the reasons for the difficulty of integrating the expo site into present-day Brussels.

Paris and Barcelona are two examples of cities where historic expo sites were much closer to the city centre, enabling the city to grow around it and incorporate it as part of the urban fabric.

THE EXPO PARK SHOULD BECOME AN INTEGRATED PART OF BRUSSELS
SIZE MATTERS

Brussels Expo size compares more with the more specialized and smaller exhibition halls of Europe rather than the big global expo centre in places like Birmingham and Cologne.

Yet, the visitors number it attracts (per m²) does not reflect the numbers of the more national scale centres like London Excel.

By accepting its character function and down scaling its size to reflect this function, the centre can attract more visitors and sit in the park more comfortably and less like a barrier. There are other sites in Brussels that might be better for a large scale commercial expo centre less reliant on cars.

LONDON EXCEL
Indoor Exhibition Space: 100,000 m²
Visitors per Annum: 2,000,000
Visitors/m² per Year: 20

BRUSSELS EXPO
Indoor Exhibition Space: 115,000 sqm
Visitors per Annum: 1,700,000
Visitors/m² per Year: 14

BIRMINGHAM NEC
Indoor Exhibition Space: 198,983 m²
Visitors per Annum: 2,100,000
Visitors/m² per Year: 10.5

COLOGNE EXPO CENTRE
Indoor Exhibition Space: 284,000 m²
Visitors per Annum: 2,700,000
Visitors/m² per Year: 9.5
By embedding the new Heysel Stadium in the urban grain, as in London and Madrid, we can make better use of the public transport which Heysel does not utilise to its full potential - reducing reliance on cars.

The stadium could also have a stronger edge conditions to avoid it encroaching on green space.
A NEW PARKLAND

The new parkland could serve visitors and local residents alike as an easily accessible green corridor to match the highly popular woodlands located to the South of Brussels.

For both the city and the neighbouring area, the new green corridor will run from the canal area to the parks of Laeken and Osseghem before heading north to the Green Belt.

This principal green strip could provide opportunities for sport, cycling and walking with the incorporation of sports grounds.
A CONNECTED PARKLAND OVER THE BRUSSELS RING ROAD

GREEN BELT
Recreation & Sport

A ‘GREEN BRIDGE’

CAR PARKING C
Recreation Park

PUBLIC REALM
IMPROVEMENTS

Recreation & Sport

Brussels Ring Road
REGENTS PARK
London, UK
approx. 160 ha.

HYDE PARK
London, UK
approx. 250 ha.

GROSSER TIERGARTEN
Berlin, Germany
approx. 260 ha.

CENTRAL PARK
New York, USA
approx. 350 ha.

HEYSEL PARK
Brussels
approx. 280 ha.

A NEW URBAN PARK FOR BRUSSELS
PROGRAMME A REGIONAL PARK TO CONNECT BRUSSELS TO ITS HINTERLAND
How could 20,000 new homes be located and how would they relate to the existing and future park space?

**Sub-Urban (low rise)**
- 136ha @ 75 dwellings/ha
- = 10,200 homes

**Urban (mixed block)**
- 75ha @ 130 dwellings/ha
- = 9,750 homes

**Urban (high rise overlooking park)**
- 44ha @ 150 dwellings/ha
- = 6,600 homes

26,000 new homes can define the edge of a new continuous parkland.
NORTH: NEW GREEN FINGERS

EXISTING DENSITY
50 - 100 dwellings/ha

PROPOSED DENSITY
75 dwellings/ha
A MORE URBAN EXHIBITION CENTRE

INCREASED HOUSING AROUND TRANSPORT LINKS

EXISTING TRAM

EXISTING METRO

EXISTING DENSITY
130 dwellings/ha

PROPOSED DENSITY
130 dwellings/ha

SOUTH: CONNECTED COURTYARDS

130 dwellings/ha

SOUTH
Leopold II, commissioned a grand plan for the Royal Domain at Laeken to the north of Brussels city centre. It included a grand allee - a parkway - the Avenue de Meysse.

Today this grand idea has become the A12 - a six-lane motorway with additional dual carriageway feeder roads, either side of broad green strips - that’s 10 lanes of traffic.

It runs south from the Brussels Ring down the east side of the Expo Park.

Its generous proportions use a lot of land and divide communities to its east and west sides.

Could Brussels make do with a much more local road, with traditional strip development?

That would make available for development 172,000 sq m of land - a massive 17 hectare land windfall.

That’s over 2200 homes
A NEW DEMOCRATIC AVENUE DE MEYSSE

Develop the A12 Parkway - the FAT ROAD - and do what Brussels does so well - develop incrementally, individual sites along the A12 to create a whole new community, a new NOT SO FAT Avenue de Meysse.

SECTION ACROSS THE EXISTING A12

THE NEW AVENUE DE MEYSSE - A LOT MORE HOMES AND BUSINESSES
Today in Heysel there are over 15,000 car parking spaces with 10,000 spaces located in car parking C alone.

It’s a staggering amount and car parking covers a majority of the expo park, breaking down the overall coherency of the area and resulting in lots of slack and loose space.

If public transport was to become better integrated for Heysel then that could make 15,000 parking spaces worth of space available for development.

That’s almost 80 hectares of land that could be reclaimed!
Extending the metro & tram systems to increase connectivity to the wider region & unlock Heysel's potential.

A new rail link through Heysel with transport interchange to reduce car dependency.