

# Designing for the Public

Flemish  
Government  
Architect  
1999–2009  
Hans Ibelings

SUN

# Maaseik



The master plan for the development and landscape integration of a new town district that forms the link between the historic centre of Maaseik and the tourist recreational developments along the Maas has been drawn up by the temporary association of 360 Architecten (the firm of Jan Mannaerts, Greet Houben and Kris Buyse) and Bas Smets. It tackles more than the solution that was called for in the project definition: the development of a new housing area, with as relevant context the renewal of the bridge over the Maas to the Netherlands because of the raising of the dike and the diversion of the N78 that has unfortunately ended up between Maaseik and the Maas.

By comparison with the two other submissions for this Open Call (very exceptionally, two candidates had withdrawn), this project – which happens to have been drawn up by former students of Marcel Smets – offers the most profound analysis of the assignment. The master plan is based on a thorough reading of the landscape, the underlying geomorphology, and the settlement structure. The designers distinguish six elements in this: the core of Maaseik with its open ring of old fortifications; the core of Aldeneik; the meandering Maas and its banks; the unspoilt landscape of the De Sloot nature reserve; Herenlaak, which has grown to become a centre for tourism and recreation; and Bosbeek with its variegated green riverbanks. The plan builds on this foundation by continuing the avenues of trees beside the Maas and the N78. It also proposes to plant the open areas of the old town fortifications with trees using a grid of eight by eight metres. This grid rotates around the town following the lines of the old fortifications

and the edge of the town centre. Around the centre the zone of the old fortifications is filled with trees in the remaining open spaces so that a coherent ‘town fortification park’ is created between the centre of the town and the residential districts. De Sloot is widened to the bridge over the Maas and extended over the N78 after the latter has been widened as a parkway. In the area between Bosbeek and Herenlaak, they are linked by a dense woodland.

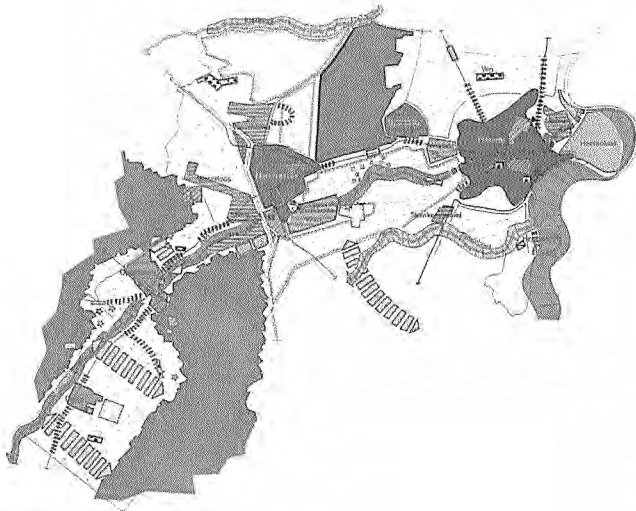
In this landscape approach, the new residential district follows logically from the rest: it is the zone that has been left empty between the various other elements. According to the designers, they offer ‘a unique potential for the development of a self-aware, highly dynamic new district of the town: self-aware because it does not want to be absorbed by its surroundings, but reinforces the surrounding elements in their specificity through a simple coordination; highly dynamic because it maximises the interaction with the surrounding fragments and distils its own identity from them [...]. “Small town” is not here synonymous with “feeble town” through an insipid mixture of town and landscape, but the typical interaction between highly dynamic, compact urban wholes and a powerful landscape forms the engine of the new development.’

Smets finds this project exemplary not only because of the analysis and the design, but also because of the clearly heartfelt conviction that in the expansive urban landscape that is typical of Flanders, a call for a highly dynamic small-town character can be one of the models for the town of the twenty-first century.

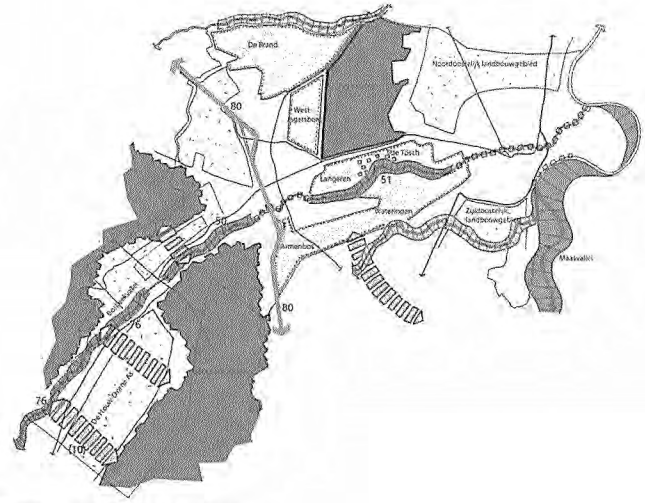
Complete study commission  
‘Stad aan de Maas’  
masterplan

Address  
Maaseik  
Architect  
TV 360, Gent / Bas Smets,  
Brussels  
Commissioner  
City of Maaseik  
Date  
2006–  
Open Call  
1208

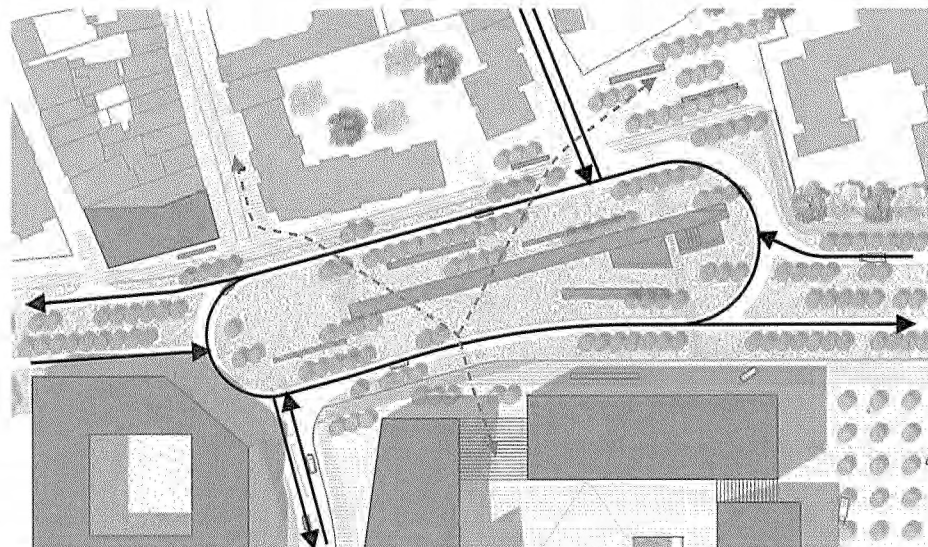




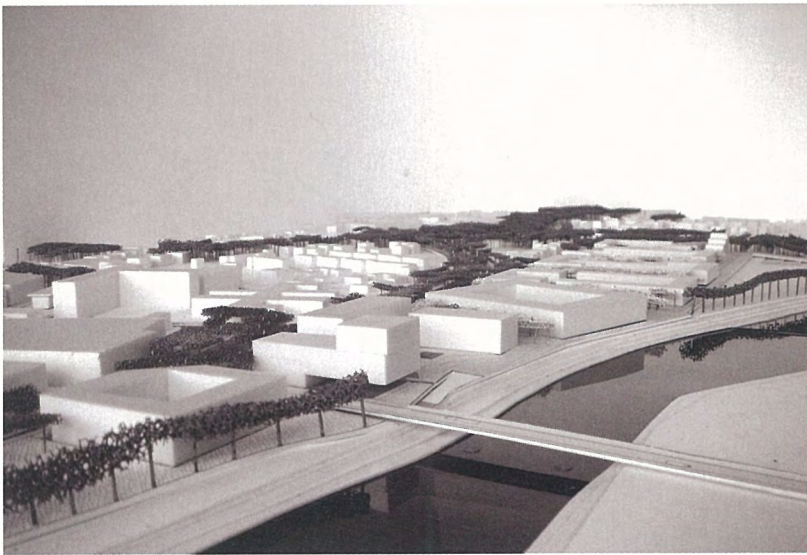
Spatial structure: synthesis



Spatial structure: open spaces



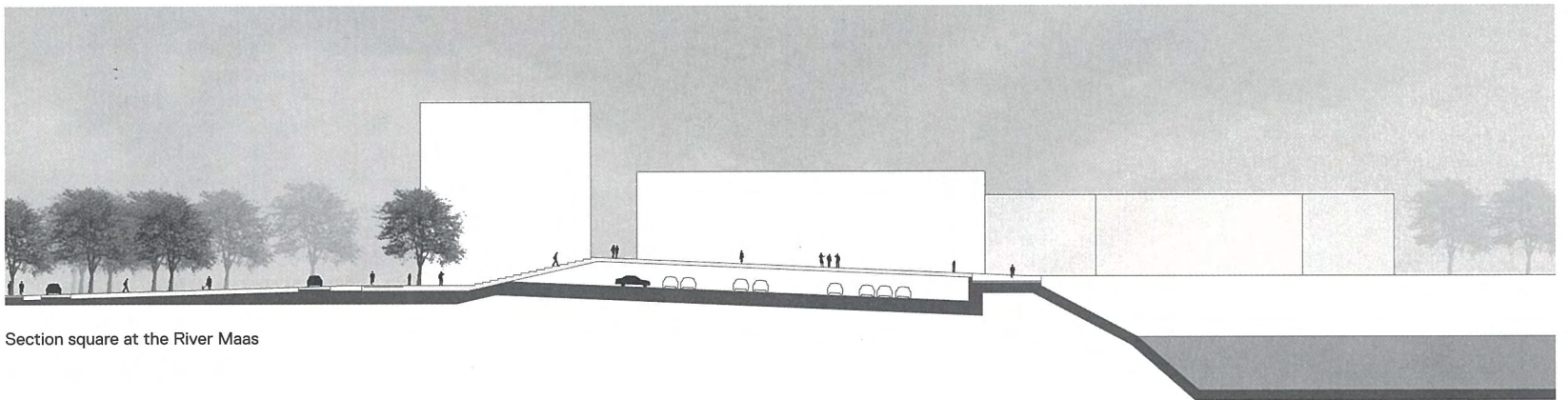
Ovonde, alternative rotunda at the N78 nearby the Bleumerpoort, suggested by the Flemish local authority



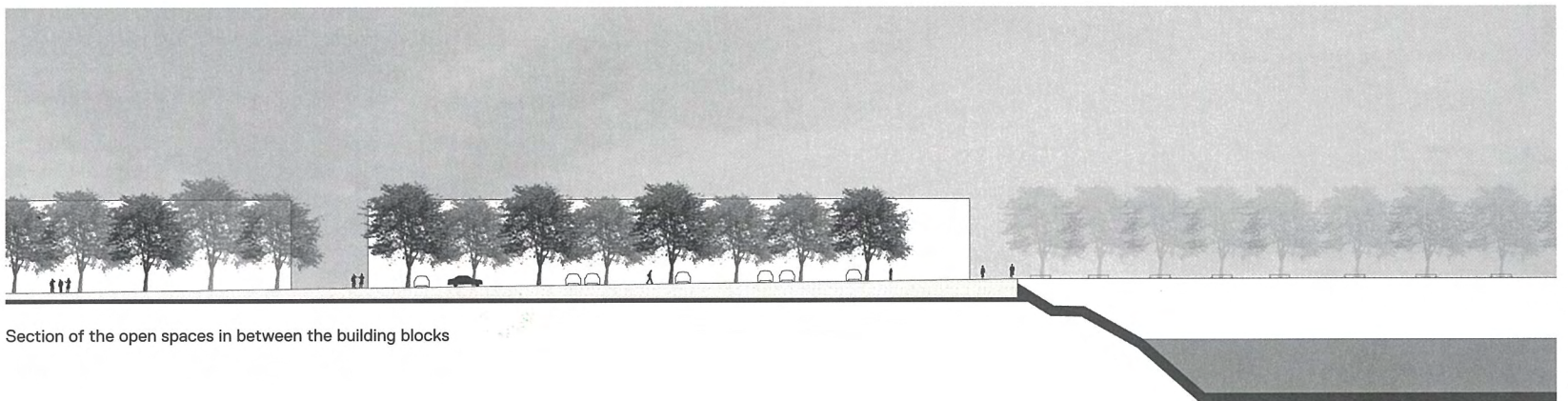
Maas bridge with the hotel



The unspoilt landscape



Section square at the River Maas



Section of the open spaces in between the building blocks