AN ARCHITECTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

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The Walloon region was one of the most profoundly shaped by industrialization in Europe starting from the 19th century, in particular by coke mining and steel industry. On a big scale we have the so-called “Dorsale”, a linear city shaped by the transportation infrastructures, which was the rivers Sambre and Meuse (Maas) before, the railway afterwards and eventually the highway. On the very local scale the territory is obviously characterized by the huge industrial structures remained from the glorious past and the notorious terills, cone-shaped mining waste piles which can reach the considerable height of more than 150 m.

THE CONTEXT

The location I chose for my project is in the south-west part of Charleroi, the center of the Spine. After my research I chose this because I think it is the resume of the aspects of Wallonia I introduced. The area is lying on the spine, in fact we have the river Sambre, the railway and the highway. Because of this good connection to all the transportation infrastructures, there is now here an industrial area with the freight logistic Hub of Charleroi-Chatelet. Moreover we have the biggest terill of Charleroi with 170 meters of height difference and an amazingly big abandoned industrial hall which could be one of the seven wonders of industrial architecture, with its 30 m wide span and more than 600 m of length.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

When I went to visit the place I climbed up the terill and from there it was immediately clear the dichotomy between the city on one side of the Sambre and, on the other side, the hilly countryside of Wallonia. The industrial area is in the middle. It is like a wall separating the city from the river and the countryside on the other side. So I thought why not build up a scenario in which I have to redesign this industrial area and freight logistic hub in a way that is not separating but connecting the city to the river and the other bank of it, in a way that integrates it in the landscape, in a way that the infrastructure becomes architecture. Important to me was also keeping in my project the old industrial hall, not only as witness of the past, but also as a proof that these kind of buildings can be reused and create new quality.
THE PROJECT

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RIBS
The area will be organized by long elements which, with an anatomical metaphor, since I am working on the spine, I called RIBS. These ribs are bridging the valley and organizing more rationally the area. In between them we have the industrial spaces and warehouses. But the ground floor of the industries would be on the same height of the river bank, so that when we are going far away from the river, towards the city, the industries would be almost completely underground, with less visual impact to the surroundings. There will be a road connection, a train connection and a water connection for the south part that would be the more logistic related one, on the north part there would be another road connection for cars.

The singular industrial/warehousing pavilions are organized with a secondary perpendicular road going parallel to the ribs, where the loading dock for truck is. The ribs themselves will house the service spaces and offices for the industries.

What I explained so far is the industry-related use of the ribs, but they have a second face, which is the public one. When I wrote the ribs are bridging the valley I meant they literally are bridges to reach the river bank from the city. This means that on the roof of the ribs, which in the higher part off the valley would be really close to the ground, there is a pedestrian and bicycle routing by whom people can cross the industrial site to reach the river bank and eventually the other side of it through two bridges.

Before reaching the river the ribs are meeting another element of my project a long perpendicular to the ribs and parallel to the old industrial hall building acting as a filter between the city and the river bank.

THE DECK
In some cases instead of the industries between the ribs there could be public green space revealing the natural slope of the valley. But what I wanted was really to bring the city to the river. This explains the exception of my system which is a constant 7 m above the river height deck with public green on top of it that eventually arrives until the old industrial hall crossing the rail. Underneath it there would be two stories of public parking spaces.

THE FILTER
With the new metro station, the public parking and the new train station the deck becomes the center of balance of the public part of my project and the access to it from the city and surroundings. Now that it is connected by all means of transportation the filter, the long perpendicular to the ribs building, becomes a place where you want to have an office and also the perfect place for satellite business activities to freight logistic and industries. That’s why I think at it as an office building.

Where the ribs are meeting the filter there will be this loggia/terrace where you can access the building or go down to the ground level. Where the deck is meeting the filter there is an interruption which is like a gate between the city on one side and the river-country side on the other. Here, after passing through a paved square, you go down in the old warehouse with a stair/tribune. When you are on the ground level you can access the train station from the sides of the tribune.

THE HALL
From the initial statement I wanted to keep the old industrial hall and there it is working as a public hall, a covered square in front of the filter. This hall is a flexible space where activities for the public could take place and also a strong visual image to advertise it. The tribunes could be used for outdoor shows and stages sheltered by the roof of the hall.

The ground floor of the filter could house public function, as restaurants or bars, which can use the hall to put their tables to eat and drink outside. In the western part, which is double, I bring the water in from the river creating a sort of arsenal for boats and leisure activities like rowing. In the winter, when it’s frozen, this could be also used for skating. In the eastern part I put sport facilities like basketball and tennis fields. The hall will be a people attractor that makes this place special.
impression of the industrial space
Public Territory

impressions of the tribune and hall

section a-a 1:1500

section b-b 1:1500

arsenal

public tribune

train station

ground plan of the office building and hall 1:1500
impression of the waterfront