

City of BRUSSELS Integrated Action Plan



2ND  
CHANCE

WAKING UP THE  
SLEEPING GIANTS

Strategy of Brussels for the  
reactivation and reuse of ARLON 104

English summary of the Integrated Action Plan

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## 1 Initial situation

### Why take part in the URBACT – 2<sup>nd</sup> Chance Network?

Although the URBACT 2<sup>nd</sup> Chance network aims to develop a specific action plan for the reactivation of one target building, in our case this is not the whole story. With our participation, we are simultaneously trying to gain experience in the facilitation of the reactivation of empty (office) buildings in the city in general. This experience will be used to develop specific strategies that can complement the existing ones.

Indeed, over the last few years, the city of Brussels has been working actively to fight against vacancy. As a result, some well thought out strategies have been developed, which vary from incentives to repressive measures, with the goal to reactivate vacant buildings, to create housing and to preserve protected buildings. However, there is still a gap in regards to other typologies, office buildings for example, so the existing strategies need to be expanded. Indeed, this typology entails a few particular challenges such as non-ownership by the municipality, strict zoning plan definitions which do not allow alternative uses, locations in central business districts with high m<sup>2</sup> prices for real estate,... Moreover, the role of the city itself in these different strategies could still be deepened as to play a more active role in accompanying both owners and grassroots movements in reactivation processes. This would allow the city administration to react quickly and efficiently to vacancy on the city's territory through means of a proactive and positive policy.

However, in order to be able to develop such strategies it is important to learn about all the barriers that could be encountered. This makes it necessary to go "all the way" into a pilot project, allowing us to learn by experience and be really effectively confronted by the challenges at hand. In this regard, the ARLON 104 building serves as a pilot project and a study case. Consequently, a very difficult case has been chosen, and after a 2 year working period, it has become clear that a definitive solution for the redevelopment of the building has *not been achieved*. Indeed the barriers described above<sup>1</sup>, which are simultaneously present in this case, have made it difficult to concretize any long term vision for the reactivation of the building that is accompanied by a realistic and concrete implementation plan. Nevertheless, we did manage to achieve some concrete and valuable results for this case in the short term and a lot has been learned in the process which will be used in the development of the broader strategy in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Most importantly: (1) Non-ownership by the URBACT- 2<sup>nd</sup> Chance pilot partner (the city of Brussels), (2) ARLON 104 is just one of many sites in the real estate portfolio of the (federal) owner and (3) the long term development of this building is linked to the adjacent parcels, still in use today.

## Why ARLON 104 as pilot project?

One of the more specific problematic typologies in the city of Brussels is the **office building**. In 2015, 1.3 million square meters of office space remained vacant in the Brussels Region (see table). Especially in the outer fringe, local percentages can mount up until a 16% local vacancy rate. This is due to the location, near ring roads, which has become less popular and the fact that these business estates are not embedded in the urban tissue. In the inner city vacancy rates are lower, with 6.9% for the European quarter, but, due to the high density of square meters office space, this district still contributes greatly to the total vacancy of offices in the city (22.33%). Therefore, the chosen building, which serves as a pilot case for the reactivation of empty office buildings within CBD's, is located in the European quarter.

VACANCY RATES FOR OFFICES IN THE BRUSSELS REGION - 2015							
location		stock in m <sup>2</sup>	percentage of local stock compared to total stock (citywide)	Vacancy in m <sup>2</sup>	contribution local vacancy to total vacancy (citywide)	percentage vacancy compared to local stock (per district)	
inner city	Centre	2607183	20,07%	155551	15,12%	5,97%	
	North District	1772804	13,65%	91579	8,90%	5,17%	
	European District	3439715	26,48%	229777	22,33%	6,86%	
	Louise District	1041865	8,02%	99695	9,69%	9,57%	
	Midi District	550154	4,24%	37397	3,63%	6,80%	
fringe	1st crown	Inner ring NE	310026	2,39%	13809	1,34%	4,45%
		Inner ring South	191818	1,48%	8837	0,86%	4,61%
		Inner ring SW	81561	0,63%	3726	0,36%	4,57%
		Inner Ring NW	162006	1,25%	11379	1,11%	7,02%
	2nd crown	Outer Ring East	714091	5,50%	89569	8,71%	12,54%
		Outer Ring SE	118848	0,91%	16832	1,64%	14,16%
		Outer Ring South	661228	5,09%	86603	8,42%	13,10%
		Outer Ring SW	476672	3,67%	76925	7,48%	16,14%
	Outer Ring North	861555	6,63%	107142	10,41%	12,44%	
		TOTAL	12989526	100,00%	1028821	100,00%	/

This dense, upscale administrative zone is suffering from a high turnover in office spaces, leading to a structural vacancy issue in the neighborhood. Moreover, in some specific cases, such as ARLON 104, buildings remain vacant for several years, diminishing the appeal of the neighborhood, and becoming more and more difficult to reactivate over time. Yet, an ambitious plan for the “Wetstraat”, the main axe in the neighborhood, will lead to the construction of a complete new stock of office buildings. Thus, a strategy is needed to avoid the demolition of the existing building stock.

In this light, office buildings not belonging to the newest generation are the most at risk. Therefore ARLON 104 has been chosen as a case study for the URBACT project, representing a highly challenging case due to its long term vacancy as well as its relatively “old” construction date (in comparison to the newest office buildings being constructed).

### **Why is it (still) empty? - Possible barriers for reactivation**

The chosen giant for the Urbact 2<sup>nd</sup> Chance project is a vacant office building that forms the corner of the rue d’Arlon and the rue de Jacques de Lalaing. It represents a highly challenging case for different reasons. First of all, the building is part of multiple adjacent parcels within the building block, belonging to the same owner. This makes the owner reluctant to develop a separate action plan for this one building. However, the other buildings are still let out and one of the lease agreements has been renewed recently for another three years. Meanwhile, ARLON 104 keeps degrading further so a separate “low threshold” reactivation becomes more and more difficult as time passes. Indeed, after multiple meetings with them, it seems that they would prefer to demolish the building and sell it as a “clean parcel” within a bigger development plan for all their properties within the building block.

Secondly, due to the lack of patrimonial value, there is almost no pressure by the public to protect the building by renovating and reactivating it. It also limits the possibilities for funding application at both local and national level. There is however pressure from the surrounding embassies to solve the problem of ARLON 104, because of security reasons. Thirdly, the building is owned by the Federal Building Agency who is responsible for the management of real estate properties on national scale. Among the projects in their portfolio are many monuments that are also in need of urgent restauration and ARLON 104, not their biggest, not their most dilapidated and definitely not their most visible building, is simply not a big priority. Fourthly, due to the fact that the city doesn’t own the building [combined with the lack of patrimonial value and the fact that it doesn’t involve housing for which separate strategies have been developed], the actions that can be undertaken by the city and the funds available in support are limited.

Lastly, the reactivation of the property by means of temporary occupation is complicated by the current land use definition as office building. Legally, this means that no other functions are allowed within the building. Yet, many of the traditional temporary occupation functions are related to socio-cultural activities or services and would require a demand for change of land use definition beforehand.

<b>Arlon 104</b>	Rue d'Arlon 104, 1000 Bruxelles
<b>Owner:</b> Federal Building Agency	Size (m <sup>2</sup> ): approximately 11 000 m <sup>2</sup> Vacant since: 2004

### Location – see map and areal picture in attachment

The building is located in the European Quarter, a business district on the eastern side of the historic city center (the pentagon). The building forms the corner of the rue d'Arlon and the rue de Jacques de Lalaing, which is the parallel of the rue de la Loi – the main office and traffic axe in the neighborhood. The neighborhood is characterized by the many European institutions and other institution linked to the European presence in the quarter. Typologically it is composed out of an orthogonal street plan, which is densely built with office buildings from the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The area is highly accessible by public transport, both train and metro or bus, but also suffers from traffic congestion due to the fact that the rue de la Loi en the rue Belliard are 2 important axes on the scale of the city (respectively for incoming and outgoing traffic). Consequently, there are some problems with the air quality and sound pollution. Although the quality of the public squares could be improved, there are however many green spaces in the surroundings such as the Frère Orban and the Léopold park as well as the big Centenaire park.

### Physical conditions – see photos in attachment

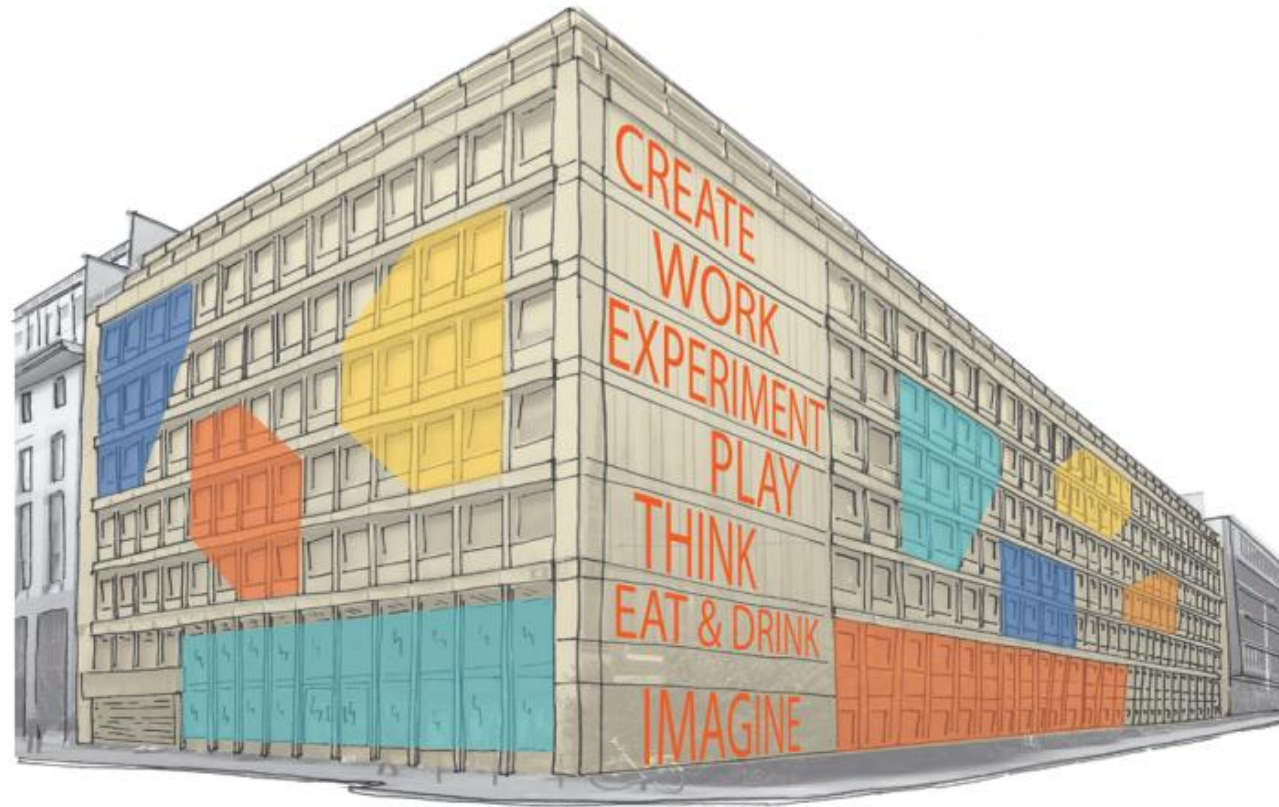
The building Arlon 104 is an office building of approximately 11 000 m<sup>2</sup> divided over 9 upper floors and 2 floors of underground parking. The underground floors as well as the ground and first floor occupy the full parcel and have a floor surface of approximately 1400 m<sup>2</sup> each. The second until the 6<sup>th</sup> floor are identical and have an L-shaped floor plan of approximately 1150 m<sup>2</sup> each. The street façade of the last three floors each jumps about 1m80 back compared to the floor below, resulting in smaller surfaces (resp. 1000 m<sup>2</sup>, 850 m<sup>2</sup>, 700 m<sup>2</sup>) and the possibility of creating roof terraces.

Built in the sixties, it hasn't been in use since 2004 and is currently in a highly dilapidated state. This is partly due to the fact that, in 2010, it was stripped completely, leaving only its bare structure, roof and façade. Consequently, the building is disconnected from all service networks (electricity, water, sewage or heating). Over time, several windows broke which were (partially) sealed off with wooden panels and the drainage system from the roof is broken, leading to water infiltration and mold in several places.

On the ground floor, a brick wall has been placed in front of the (broken) original façade of the rue d'Arlon in order to prevent people from entering the building. Luckily, an entrance door was negotiated in the framework of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chance project, allowing us to enter the building when organizing site visits and activities. On the same side, a gate giving access to the underground parking floors has also been blocked by a brick wall for security reasons. The third entrance, on the far end of the building on the Jacques de Lalaing side, is still intact and gives a direct access to the first floor thanks to the slope of the street (floor above the ground floor level on the Arlon side).

## 2 Vision & objectives for the reactivation

### A (RE)ACTIVE LOCAL PLACE TO...



## Vision

The ultimate vision for ARLON 104 is to be a multifunctional building in response to local needs [with the focus on inhabitants and local workers], thus stimulating the liveliness and the livability of the neighborhood. The image above sketches a possible desired outcome of the reactivation. The idea is to introduce multiple functions that would activate the building and the neighborhood at different moments in the day and in the week. In this way, they would have to be complementary to the existing functions, largely related to the office aspect of the neighborhood; this also means implementing functions that are compatible with a 24/7 neighborhood, thus stimulating the introduction of more residential pockets in the area.

The proposed functions in this image do not necessarily have to be fixed by the above icons, although most of them are a result of discussions we had as a ULG. They would likely evolve according to the concrete interest of stakeholders that can develop these activities. An important element however would be the multifunctionality at building scale, so that not one function alone can take over the complete building.

*Remark:* As mentioned earlier, even though this image is “shared” among the ULG members, an important limit is to be mentioned. The general idea is supported, but there have been no concrete solutions for the implementation. In reality the owner has communicated that any structural (definitive; long term) development will be the result of an economic reasoning, linked to the adjacent parcels. In addition, because they are a governmental institution, they have to respect the limits of their mission as the Federal Building Agency and comply with all procurement regulations.

## Objectives

Starting from the fact that the idea of the long term vision is shared but not *actively* supported, a more pragmatic set of objectives has been developed to facilitate the reactivation of the building. To do so, the focus has been put on the very short and the short/ medium term reactivation through a temporary occupation, framed by a “precarious occupation convention<sup>2</sup>” which serves as an alternative contract between the owner and occupant. The definition of these two objectives represents in itself a step by step approach where the short term project serves as a catalyst of the medium term project. Thus they are stepping stones in the reactivation of ARLON 104 and frame the actions elaborated further (see chapter 4).

The objective for the long term development, i.e. the permanent repurposing and renovation of the building, has not been developed into detail although the hypothetical exercise has been done during one of our ULG meetings (ULG 20171109). However, as mentioned in point 2, the parallel development of the strategy of the battle against vacancy of offices is *as* important as the reactivation of ARLON 104 itself. This means that in our case a parallel strategic objective is defined, supported by a set of actions that are being elaborated at this moment...

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<sup>2</sup> In French: «une convention d’occupation précaire». This contract provides a way of formalizing a temporary occupation and dividing the responsibilities between the occupant and the owner. There are no fixed durations on this type of contract, nor are there guaranties in terms of termination of the contract. In this framework, there is no lease payed, but both parties can agree on a participation in costs or a compensation for the use of the building.



*Short term objective: LOBBY 104 – workshop space on ground floor*

- The project: As a first step, the proposal is to reactivate lobby space of the building will be reactivated and use it as a workshop and meeting space for topics concerning the development of the European quarter as well as the reactivation of ARLON 104. This could potentially be realized by the European Quarter Fund in collaboration with the Brussels' Region and the City of Brussels. In a second phase, this space can be opened up to other institutions or organizations wanting to organize workshops or meetings.
- Benefits: The activation of the lobby is important to reconnect the building to the streetscape and limit its negative impact. It will also reassure the many surrounding embassies and organizations who are worried about security issues. On building level, it also serves as a feasible and manageable kick start of the further reactivation of the building. In this way it becomes a catalyst for the next steps. It will also limit the further degradation of the building. The collaboration between these three key partners is important in the context of the European Quarter, where the municipal level and the regional level are both strongly implicated in the development of the neighborhood. This basic ("safe") collaboration could strengthen existing and form new networks and "human connections" to improve collaboration in future projects.
- Fields of action Partnership & Management  
The refurbishment and equipment of the space  
The development of content

*Mid-term objective: ARLON 104 - Temporary occupation of 3+ floors*

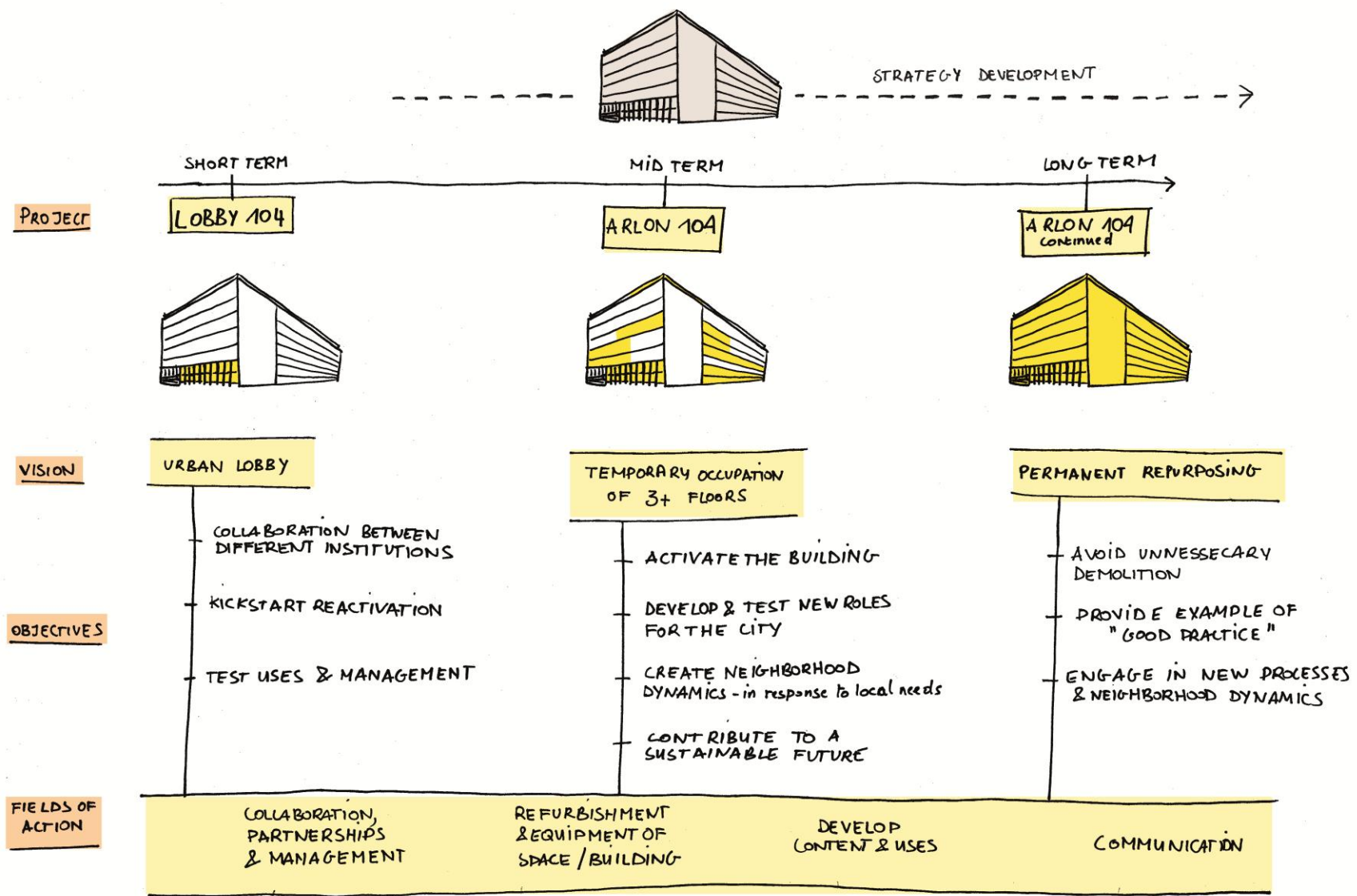
- The project: As a second step, the reactivation of (at least 3) several complete floors is envisioned, with a program in reaction to local demands. This would not necessarily be piloted by the same key partners (although a certain level of accompaniment would provide a better transition). Instead, development and management of this temporary occupation could be executed by local partners (e.g. in the non-profit sector). The objective is to arrive at a mixed program with a sound management at building level.
- Benefits: Providing space for necessary functions in the neighborhood  
Creating a neighborhood life, even if at modest scale  
Giving a purpose to the building.  
Avoiding problematic situations due to the vacancy of the building.
- Fields of action Facilitation  
Partnership & Management  
The refurbishment and equipment of the floors  
The development of content

*Long term objective: ARLON 104 continued – Permanent Activator of the Neighborhood – [results from discussion with the ULG]*

- The project: The full, long-term or permanent reactivation of the building as a space with activities servicing both the inhabitants and users of the neighborhood. If the temporary occupation of the building works well, is managed soundly and proves to be pertinent for the area, the same actors could continue the project. In this case, the role of the city in the transition from the temporary to the permanent occupation could be rather limited, even though some active support, mediation or facilitation might be useful. An important remark is to be made however in regards to the financial feasibility of this permanent reactivation due to the high real estate price in the area. The acquiring of legal rights to use the building on long term basis [either through a lease contract or a sale of the building, and this by the private actors or by a public institution], represents the biggest challenge. At the very least, the short and mid-term projects should be evaluated in terms of impact and pertinence for the neighborhood as to nourish the development program of a potential project of demolition-reconstruction. More precisely the question of necessary functions in the neighborhood could contribute to the evaluation of any proposed new project, which would be encouraged to integrate such functions if deemed desirable.
- Benefits: Supporting existing dynamics  
Rendering the created neighborhood life durable  
Creating a positive climate in the neighborhood  
Setting an example  
Striving for adequate program for the neighborhood and continuity within the proposed functions
- Fields of action Follow-up, facilitation and mediation  
Financial support through acquisition or project subsidy (?)

*Strategic objective: ARLON 104 as pilot project for development of strategy against vacancy of office buildings*

- The project: A set of tools specifically developed for the battle against vacant offices, thus completing the existing strategies already put in place by the City of Brussels (see chapter 7). This would entail the development of a (legal) action framework, the collaboration with different governmental institutions (on all levels) as well as the taking on of a new “facilitating” role by the city. Parallel to the development of these new tools, the evaluation of side effects of existing measures, which might induce barriers for temporary occupation for example, seems pertinent. For example, the general office tax is applicable whether the building is vacant or not. Combined with the vacancy tax and possible regional fines, this means that it is more profitable for owners to demolish a building rather quickly and to rebuild a new one when necessary, playing into the large scale real estate development dynamics of global companies.
- Benefits: Faster solving of problematic vacant office buildings thanks to a more suitable line of action;  
Clear message of the city’s will to battle against vacant offices;
- Fields of action Partnerships  
Strategy Development and Testing



### 3 Functions & uses for the building

The objectives defined above aim to clear the road towards the long term vision which, at this stage, isn't directly attainable for this building. The proposed short and mid-term projects for temporary occupation minimize perceived risks and pragmatically break down the *total, permanent* reactivation of ARLON 104 into feasible steps. In this way, these temporary occupation projects could serve as an intermediate phase<sup>3</sup> towards the end goal of a mixed building for the neighborhood.

In terms of functions and uses, this translates into the gradual insertion of different activities. This however, exposes an important challenge. In the current land use plan, the building is defined as an office building. This implies that, legally speaking, no other uses can be allocated to the building for a period longer than 3 months without a demand for change in land use definition of the building<sup>4</sup>; a procedure which is done through the application for a building permit. However, owners of office buildings are reluctant to ask for a change as long as the final development project isn't known. This is due to the fact that, in the European Quarter, it is rather easy to change the land use definition from office to housing or amenities/services for example, but not the other way around. This is linked to the ambition of the city – in response to local demand – to create a more mixed neighborhood, limiting the mono-functional character of the office district. This means facilitating, among other things, supporting services to make the neighborhood more livable as well as child friendly. In other words, owners know that they are likely able to develop “any project” starting from the land use definition of office building. Indeed, they could still develop an office project, or rather a housing or mixed project accompanied with an application for change in land use, very likely to be accepted.

Consequently, since the Federal Building Agency isn't able or willing to change the land use definition of ARLON 104, this has an impact on both of the stepping stones in the reactivation of ARLON 104. Indeed, as will become clear in the action plan table, there are no financial guarantees for the effective realization of these temporary occupation projects at this stage, nor for the direct continuation of these projects into the long term. As said, this is largely due to the limiting legal framework and (linked to this) the absence of concrete investing commitments by either public or private partners. Nevertheless, the proposals have been developed fully in order to serve as a learning case for the further strategy development of the battle against vacant offices. At the same time, the ambition is still to find a concrete intermediate solution for the ARLON 104 case.

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<sup>3</sup> However, there is no guarantee, that this permanent reactivation will be the actual result of the temporary occupation.

<sup>4</sup> Any project lasting less than three months is exempt from any legal obligation to comply to land use definitions and doesn't have to apply for a permit.

## Short term: LOBBY 104

Indeed, in the case of the lobby project, where the municipal and the regional level of Brussels itself are two of the three piloting partners, the city cannot disregard its own laws. Therefore, the lobby project proposes functions that respect the current land use definition. The proposal reconverts the lobby space, which served merely as an entrance and reception area, into an active meeting and workshop space.

In a first phase, the workshops would be organized by the European Quarter Fund, supported by the City of Brussels and the Brussels Region. The proposed themes at this stage are the integration of expats in social and cultural life of Brussels, the feasibility and desirability of the development of a house for interns within the European Quarter, commercial development of the district, tourism, the impact of "smart city" development on the area, and a general session on urbanism and architecture (spatial approach). The methodology for these workshops is being developed by the lead actor of this project, the European quarter fund<sup>5</sup>, and mimics a radio documentation studio.



1. Project Archeology



2. Radio documentation of users



3. Radio studio as platform for stakeholders



4. Sketching of solutions

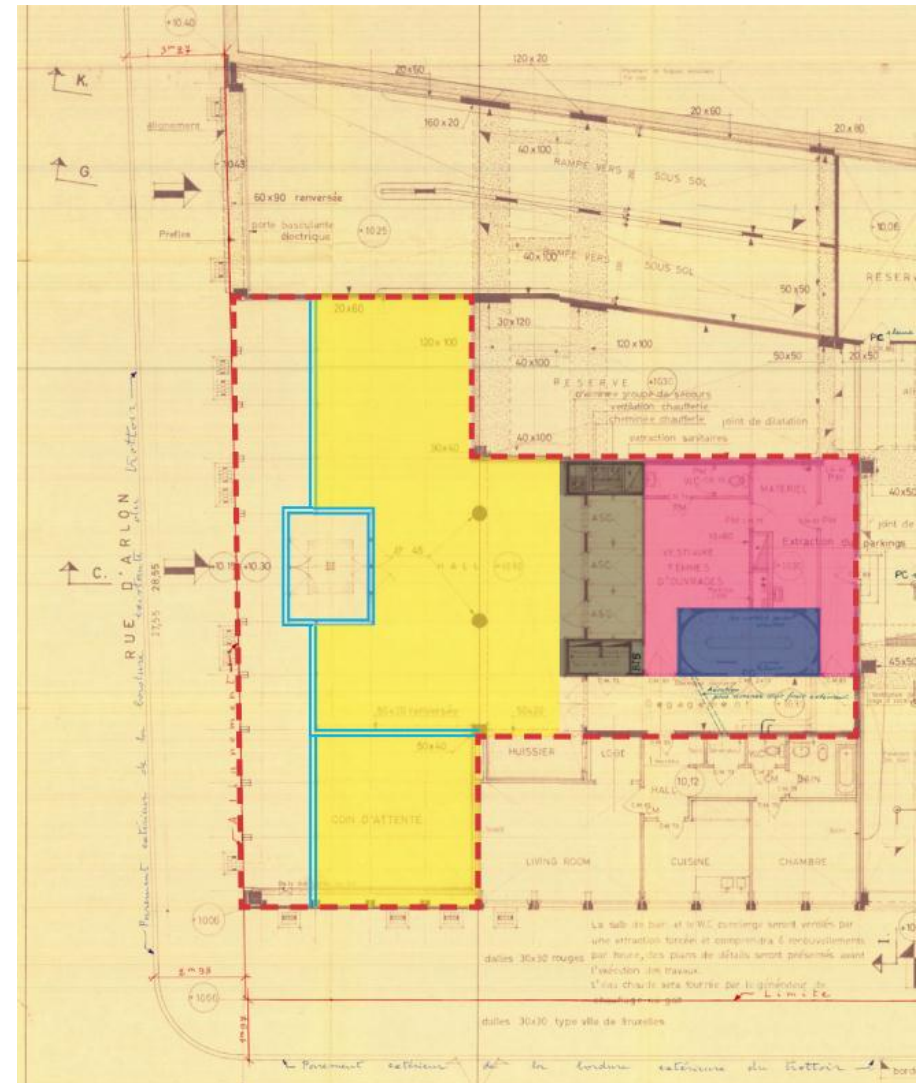
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<sup>5</sup> Le **Fonds Quartier Européen** est un fonds d'entreprise créé en 2001 par la Fondation Roi Baudouin afin d'améliorer l'image du "quartier européen" de Bruxelles. La mission centrale est la promotion du dialogue entre acteurs publics et privés, en vue de transformer ce qui était une zone monofonctionnelle et sans plan urbanistique spécifique, en un espace de cohabitation harmonieuse entre société civile, acteurs privés et Institutions. Le FQE est statutairement composé d'un comité de gestion de huit membres: quatre, dont son Président, proviennent de la société civile; trois autres représentent des contributeurs issus du secteur privé (sociétés patrimoniales, propriétaires et promoteurs immobiliers); le dernier étant l'Administrateur Délégué de la Fondation Roi Baudouin.

Project Archeology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Baseline study per subject;</li> <li>- Analysis of current projects;</li> <li>- Photographic inventory;</li> <li>- Background interviews;</li> </ul>
Radio documentation of users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Radio documentary per subject</li> <li>- Interviews with various stakeholders</li> <li>- Showcasing different points of view</li> <li>- Understanding perception of users</li> <li>- Grasping expectation and needs of users</li> <li>- Spreading of documentary before workshops</li> </ul>
Radio studio as platform for stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Half day workshops with stakeholders per subject;</li> <li>- Goal of idea generation with focus on quick implementation of projects;</li> <li>- Based on inventory, partners can propose existing opportunities which are developed during the workshop;</li> <li>- Synthesis of ideas with short presentation;</li> </ul>
Sketching of solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sketch as spatial translation of proposed solutions;</li> <li>- Definition of outline of project possibilities;</li> <li>- Preliminary costing to get evaluation on steps for start-up;</li> <li>- Final booklet to defend the project towards institutions, real-estate developers or public subsidy funds;</li> </ul>

The ambition is to hold the workshops in the lobby of the sleeping giant "Arlon 104", which, in collaboration with the owner, would be minimally refurbished to allow the reception of a public, and the organization of workshops and meetings according to the above described methodology. The adjacent plan shows the layout and the perimeter of the space. It also shows the direct relationship of the lobby with the streetscape, allowing us to imagine the impact the reactivation will have towards the rue d'Arlon.

**See photos of existing situation in the attachment**



- glazed facade
- technical spaces
- staircase
- lobby space
- bathrooms

### **Medium term: ARLON 104**

For the occupation of (at least) 3 floors of the building on a temporary basis, a bigger mix of functions is desirable. During the URBACT project, there have been many discussions with different interested partners and a combination of co-working space, artist studio's and exhibition space, a street food market,... would seem to be the most interesting functions at this stage.

This of course has some consequences on the extent to which public bodies can take the lead. First of all, a project like this would require a careful management which does not necessarily fall within the role of the city administration. On top of that, many of the proposed functions do not fit the land use definition of office space, so it becomes difficult for the city itself to push this type of project in the current legal context.

However, some creative solutions would be possible. For example, it would be an option to focus on the co-working and artist studio uses, which would comply to the office land use if the definition is interpreted "largely". Subsequently, these activities could be considered as the main functions, whereas the exhibition space and street food market could be seen as auxiliary functions. If such a project were to be carried out by a collective or grassroots movement, the city might be inclined to not actively block or sanction it. Nevertheless, a better legal framework is strongly preferred and is subject of one of the strategic policy recommendations made as a conclusion of the URBACT 2<sup>nd</sup> Chance project.

Although some interested parties have come forward, the exact combination and spatial lay-out of activities has not been fixed yet. This is because a preliminary process needs to be gone through, determining a "total project" with management and funding issues determined. The necessary actions for this have been determined in point 4.

### **Long term**

The long term vision resulting from discussions in the Urbact Local Group, would be to develop a multifunctional building where, ideally, the functions of the temporary occupation could find a permanent space. However, as pointed out in the "objectives", the financial feasibility of such a project represents the biggest pitfall. Multiple solutions can be looked into. Financial support from the public sector could be looked into; however another line of thought could be to find a compromise in terms of functions – in relation to their cost/ profitability. It would be imaginable for example, to redevelop part of the building (higher floors) into housing together with a real estate developer (public-private collaboration) but keep the lower floors for services to the neighborhood; or to use the parking floors to generate revenue for the building.

# 4 Actions & next steps for the reactivation

Short Term (Please consult table in attachment for better readability)

SHORT TERM: LOBBY 104										
Field of Action	Objective	Action Title	Short Description	Lead Actor	Key Partners	Intended outputs	Timescale	Resources needed	Financing secured	Funding By
(F1) Collaboration, Partnership & Management	(STO 1) Horizontal and vertical collaboration between institutions: workshops for the European Quarter	STA 1.1	Convention defining the scope of collaboration in regards to the joint organization of the workshops as well as the responsibilities of each partner.	European Quarter Fund	EQF, City of Brussels, Brussels Region	Signed framework agreement between the 3 partners.	3-6 months	Working hours of staff involved	yes	partners involved
		STA 1.2	Supplementary agreements that can be added to the framework agreement for collaborating with ad hoc partners, depending on the theme of the workshop in question.	European Quarter Fund	EQF, City of Brussels, Brussels Region + External Partners	Standard add-on agreements that can be filled in and signed when necessary.	3-6 months	Working hours of staff involved	yes	partners involved
		STA 2	Contract of temporary occupation of the lobby space.	European Quarter Fund/ City of Brussels	EQF, City of Brussels, Brussels Region	Signed convention of temporary use between the owner and 1 (or more) of the partners of the lobby project.	3-6 months	Working hours of staff involved	yes	partners involved
		STA 3	Bilateral agreement on the financial input by the owner, the Federal Building Agency, as well as the definition of the payment modalities for the preparational works for the lobby - in relation to the possibilities for tax exemption. Agreement should include details on the division of responsibilities of follow-up of the works.	City of Brussels	City of Brussels, Federal Building Agency	Signed agreement and set-up of tax exemption	3-6 months	Working hours of staff involved	yes	partners involved
		STA 4.1	Trial Agreement on the financial input for the architectural concept study as well as the equipment (furniture, appliances,...) of the lobby space by the different partners involved as well as on the division of responsibilities of follow-up of the works.	City of Brussels	City of Brussels, EQF, Brussels Region	Signed convention dividing the costs & budgets allocated	3-6 months	working hours of staff involved	yes	partners involved
(F2) Refurbishment & equipment of space building	(STO 2) Kickstart reactivation of the building	STA 4.2	Definition of each partner's responsibilities in management of the space once in use.	City of Brussels	City of Brussels, EQF, Brussels Region	Agreement on each partner's responsibilities	3-6 months	Working hours of staff involved	yes	partners involved
		STA 5	Execution of preliminary works to make the space useable: - demolition of brick wall facade - making space water and wind proof - reconnection to water, electricity and sewage networks - installation of sanitary and heating equipment - installation of fire doors to close the space off from the rest of the building	Federal Building Agency	City of Brussels	A refurbished space until the level of installed equipment - finishing and interior design see S.6 and S.7	6 months	+/- 80.000	in negotiation	Federal Building Agency - in relation to tax exemption
		STA 6.1	Launch of architectural study/ concept for the interior of the space	European Quarter Fund	EQF, City of Brussels, Brussels Region	A detailed vision and working plans to get to the finished state of the space	6-12 months	< 8.000	no	?
		STA 6.2	Execution of the finishing interior works and equipment of the space	European Quarter Fund	EQF, City of Brussels, Brussels Region	A completely finished and ready-to-use space	6-12 months	< 8.000	no	?
		STA 7.1	Agree on and develop the content/themes as well as the approach of the workshops.	European Quarter Fund	EQF, City of Brussels, Brussels Region	Calendar of workshops to be organized, with details on the themes. Guidelines for approach for each workshop as well as	3-24 months	working hours of staff involved	yes	partners involved
(F3) Development of content & uses	(STO 1) Horizontal and vertical collaboration between institutions: workshops for the European Quarter	STA 7.2	Back-office preparation of the workshops by gathering and sharing all relevant information	EQF, City of Brussels, Brussels Region	EQF, City of Brussels, Brussels Region	Shared information on a communal file sharing platform	3-24 months	working hours of staff involved	yes	partners involved
		STA 8	Opening up the lobby at specific moments for the workshops to be able to take place	European Quarter Fund	EQF, City of Brussels, Brussels Region	Organization of 4-10 workshops around the future development of the European Quarter in the lobby of ARLON 104. The first workshop has been organized on 19/03/2018 in a temporary space.	3-24 months	?	yes	European Quarter Fund
		STA 9	Organisation of call for local users of an "open lobby space" in the neighborhood	City of Brussels/ European Quarter Fund (?)	EQF, City of Brussels, Brussels Region	Applications by local organisations or inhabitants with proposed activities to carry out in the lobby space.	6-24 months	?	no	?
		S3.3	Opening up the lobby space for other users by calling for ideas and partners, evaluating the proposals and partners, working out a collaboration structure and integrating proposals in the agenda.	City of Brussels/ European Quarter Fund (?)	EQF, City of Brussels, Brussels Region	Open lobby offering space to different collectives, organisations, inhabitants... To carry out their proposed activities.	6-24 months	?	no	?
		STA 5	Develop and communicate on calendar of activities as well as on the general collaboration model.	European Quarter Fund	EQF, City of Brussels, Brussels Region	Online communication campaign around the workshops and the lobby.	3-24 months	?	yes	European Quarter Fund
(F4) Communication	(STO 3) Test use and management	STA 9	Call for users	City of Brussels/ European Quarter Fund (?)	EQF, City of Brussels, Brussels Region	Applications by local organisations or inhabitants with proposed activities to carry out in the lobby space.	6-24 months	?	no	?
		S3.3	Opening up the lobby space for other users by calling for ideas and partners, evaluating the proposals and partners, working out a collaboration structure and integrating proposals in the agenda.	City of Brussels/ European Quarter Fund (?)	EQF, City of Brussels, Brussels Region	Open lobby offering space to different collectives, organisations, inhabitants... To carry out their proposed activities.	6-24 months	?	no	?
(F4) Communication	(STO 1) Horizontal and vertical collaboration between institutions: workshops for the European Quarter	STA 5	Develop and communicate on calendar of activities as well as on the general collaboration model.	European Quarter Fund	EQF, City of Brussels, Brussels Region	Online communication campaign around the workshops and the lobby.	3-24 months	?	yes	European Quarter Fund
		S3.3	Opening up the lobby space for other users by calling for ideas and partners, evaluating the proposals and partners, working out a collaboration structure and integrating proposals in the agenda.	City of Brussels/ European Quarter Fund (?)	EQF, City of Brussels, Brussels Region	Open lobby offering space to different collectives, organisations, inhabitants... To carry out their proposed activities.	6-24 months	?	no	?



Mid-term (Please consult table in attachment for better readability)

MID TERM: ARLON 104											
Field of Action	Objective	Action Title	Short Description	Lead Actor	Key Partners	Intended outputs	Timescale	Resources needed	Financing secured	Funding By	
(F3) Collaboration, Partnership & Management	(MTO 3) Activate the building; (MTO 3) Create Neighborhood Dynamics - in response to local needs.	MTA 1	Workshops	Organize - similar to other workshops in lobby - workshops around further development process of ARLON 104.	City of Brussels	Federal Building Agency, EOF, Brussels Region, Neighborhood Associations and other non-profit	Crystallized wishes for the reactivation program of ARLON 104.	12-24 months	Working hours of staff involved as well as small operational budget (+/- 2500 euros)	no	Involved partners: EOF, City of Brussels, Brussels Region (?)
		MTA 2.1	Matchmaking process: Call for candidate managers	Organize & communicate around call for managers of the reactivation project of the ARLON 104, building	City of Brussels (?)	Federal Building Agency, EOF, Neighborhood Associations and other non-profit	Published call for and communication campaign around search for Reactivation Managers.	12-24 months	Working hours of staff involved as well as small communication budget (500 euros)	no	City of Brussels (?)
	(MTO 2) Develop and test new role for city administration	MTA 2.2	Matchmaking candidate users	Organize a communication campaign	City of Brussels (?)	Federal Building Agency, EOF, Neighborhood Associations and other non-profit	Communication campaign, both online and offline	12-24 months	Working hours of staff involved as well as small communication budget (500 euros)	no	City of Brussels (?)
		MTA 2.3	Matchmaking Event	Organize event where candidate managers can encounter and discuss with interested (partial) users of different spaces. In preparation of as well as following to this event, candidate managers work out a fully developed proposal	City of Brussels (?)	Federal Building Agency, EOF, Neighborhood Associations and other non-profit	1. Event in Lobby 104, where selected candidate managers can meet potential users.	12-24 months	Depending on the location (lobby or not) and scope of the event. If in lobby: 500 - 2000 euros	no	City of Brussels (?)
(F3) Develop content & uses	(MTO 4) Contribute to sustainable future	MTA 2.4	Choose Laureat Manager	Choose proposal with highest quality, added local value, feasibility (operational and financial), sustainability of proposal.	City of Brussels (?)	Federal Building Agency, EOF, Neighborhood Associations and other non-profit	Reactivation Manager for ARLON 104 (*) responsible for pulling the consortium/cooperation of different partners/users.	12-24 months	Working hours of staff involved.	no	City of Brussels (?)
		MTA 3.1	Facilitate Start up of reactivation by laureat manager	Allow negotiation phase with Federal Building Agency and City of Brussels to detail and finalize some aspect of the proposal - with attention for the sustainability aspects.	Manager	Federal Building Agency, City of Brussels	Fully developed reactivation proposal	12-24 months	Working hours of staff involved	no	Partners involved
	(MTO 3) Create Neighborhood Dynamics	MTA 3.2	Formalize collaboration between participating partners	Formalize conventions between different partners/users and the manager, defining financial inputs, rules and responsibilities	Manager	Partner Associations/users	Signed convention	12-24 months	Working hours of people involved		
		MTA 3.3	Formalize use of space	Detail and sign a contract between Manager and owner	Manager	Federal Building Agency	Signed convention	12-24 months	Working hours of people involved	na	na
(F3) Collaboration, Partnership & Management	(MTO 1) Activate the building	MTA 4	Search for funding	At this stage - the financial feasibility of the project is the responsibility of the Manager - this will be an important criterion for the choice of the laureat. Search for funding can be supported by public partners but is responsibility of independent manager. Proof of financial feasibility should be given in proposal.	Manager	Public partners in support	Sufficient financial means for the realisation, running and management of the project.	12-24 months	depending on project proposal	no	?
		MTA 5.1	Evaluation of necessary works	Evaluation of necessary works to be carried out in terms of: - access to all networks (electricity, water, sewage,...) - making the envelope wind and water proof where necessary - installation of equipment - fire safety aspects .....	Manager	Fire department	Architectural study	12-24 months	Architectural expertise	no	consortium managed by the reactivation manager
		MTA 5.2	Execution of works	Necessary works to be carried out.	Manager	Partner Associations/users	Ready-to-use building	12-24 months	?	neg	?

It is important to remark once more that there are still many obstacles to be overcome in order to realize this project for the ARLON 104 building. In this light, the above action table still has a theoretical character at this stage. Nonetheless the development and outlining of this process has proven to be an essential exercise which will be used directly for the further strategy development of the city.

## **Long term**

Due to the uncertain future of the building at this moment, the mid-term reactivation in this case should be seen as a temporary occupation project. Indeed, even though a desired long term vision has been developed, many different outcomes are still possible in the long term. Consequently, a precise action table has not been produced yet.

However, in coherence with the environmental study of the land use plan that is being developed, more mixity is to be introduced in the neighborhood, with services supporting the livability of the zone. A perpetuation of a mixed ARLON 104 project could contribute to this mixity while at the same time capitalizing on the (by then) existing dynamics. Therefore it would be interesting to follow the evolution of the temporary project closely and evaluate the pertinence of a potentially strong support of public operators in the long term.

## **Actions on Strategy Development**

The actions for the mid-term are presented for the building ARLON 104 and the intention is to have it serve as a pilot case. However, it primarily serves as an outline for a replicable strategy for the reactivation (temporary – or not) of other buildings. In this light, if it turns out to be impossible to reactivate ARLON 104 within a reasonable delay due to non-ownership by the city of Brussels itself, the strategy and action plan could still be applied to another (or even a second, third,...) pilot case. In this light, the action plan links back to the strategic long term objectives.

## **Risks/ pitfalls and uncertainties**

Despite an intensive reactivation process during the Urbact project lifetime, there are still many uncertainties in regards to the reactivation of the building most of which link back to the non-ownership and the limiting legal framework . Important steps in regards to crystallizing responsibilities, definition of leading actors and funding are still to be made. However, thanks to the development of the action plan, a lot has been learned in regards to the possible strategies for reactivation. On top of that, a dynamic was created concerning the reactivation of the building, work which can be continued in the coming months.

## 5 Management & governance structure for the building (site) and the reactivation process

### Reactivation process

During the URBACT project lifetime, the reactivation process has been piloted by the city of Brussels. This would be continued for a short period in order to try to realize the lobby project<sup>6</sup>. At the same time, the realization of the collaboration between the European Quarter Fund, the Brussels' Region and the city of Brussels, as well as the development of the workshop approach is being piloted by the European Quarter Fund who is eager to kickstart the collaboration.

As laid out in the action table, the city of Brussels could play an important facilitating role in the preliminary process of the mid-term temporary occupation project. This would allow the city to develop a new role as facilitating intermediate in order to battle against structural office vacancy within the different business districts of the city. However, it is still to be determined whether this can be done in the short term for the ARLON104 project, due to the limitations of the legal framework<sup>7</sup>. Ideally, a matchmaking process, much like the one organized by the city of Ghent for the temporary occupation of the former public library building (Nest), would be elaborated. The different steps for this process are outlined in the mid-term action plan table.

For the long term reactivation, a strong link exists with the development of the new land use plan for the two building blocks adjacent to the rue d'Arlon. During the environmental impact study, different alternatives are being proposed, in terms of functions as well as in terms of building volumes. They are evaluated on different environmental aspects and will serve as basis for the elaboration of building and program prescriptions for the two building blocks. This land use plan will have a reciprocal impact on the long term strategy of the Federal Building Agency for the redevelopment of all the parcels of which they are owner, determining the maintaining or demolition of the ARLON 104 building. In other words, the impact of the city on the long term redevelopment is only of an indirect nature. It will be the Federal Building Agency itself that will decide on and lead, manage it.

### Management of the property

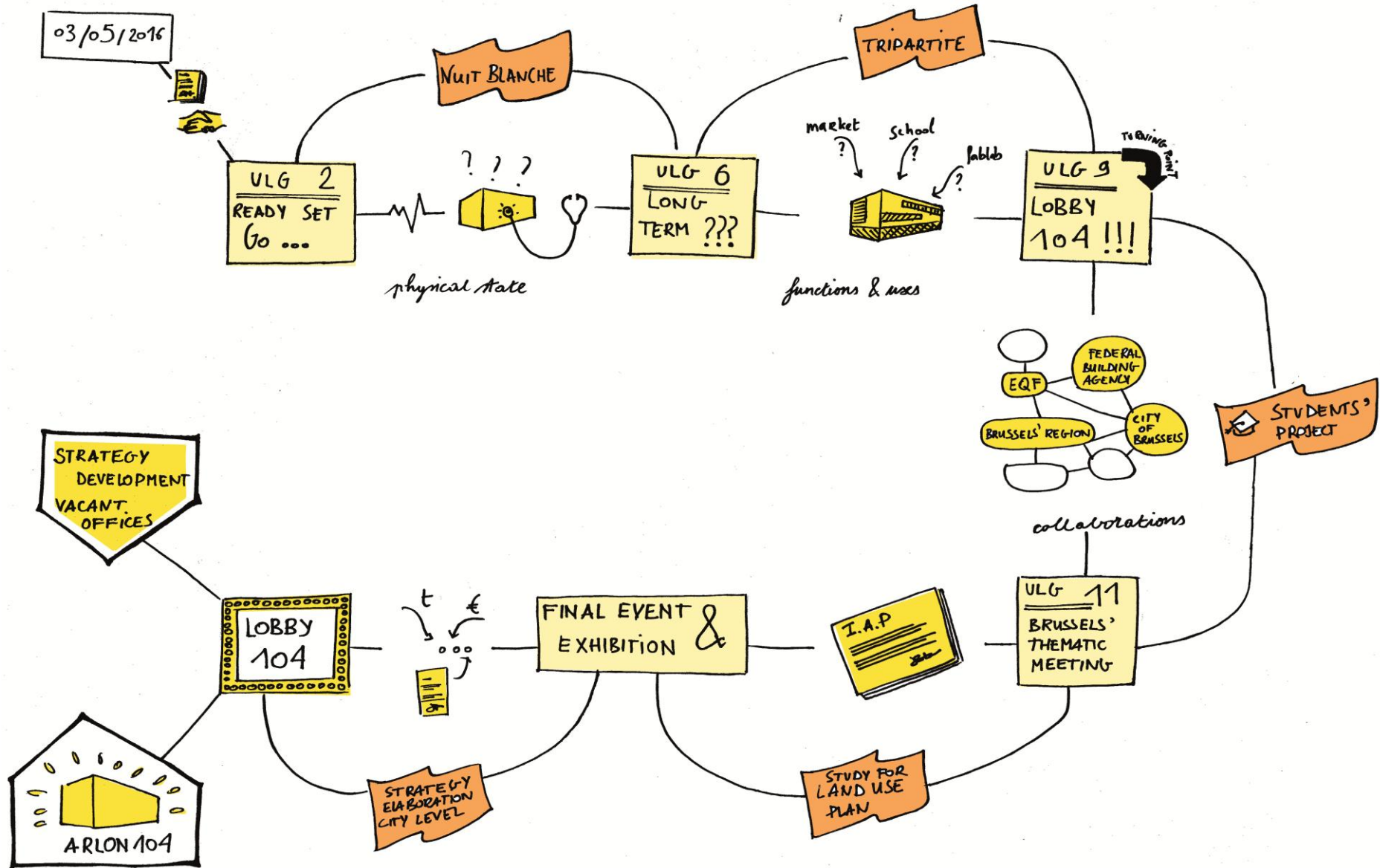
At the moment, for the short term lobby project, the management issues of the physical space are still being worked out. The city and the European Quarter fund need to find a balance between contributions and responsibilities in this light. For the mid-term project, if the temporary activation of the property would take place, a reactivation manager would act as a leader for the management of the space as well as for the coordination of the functions and activities that would take place in the building. This also includes the coordination of preliminary process of necessary works as well as the search for funding. As proposed in the Action plan table, this manager could be found through a public call and a matchmaking process with different interested users. He or she would be selected on the basis of a fully detailed and financially supported proposal for reactivation. It is important to state that this would be an independent party who would not be on the payroll of the city nor of the Federal Building Agency. It would thus be this person's own responsibility to foresee in his salary, either by sponsorship or by incorporating this aspect into the business plan for the reactivation process.

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<sup>6</sup> Piloting the reactivation process refers to the work load for facilitating the reactivation and does not imply bearing the financial responsibility as a pilot partner. This will be further discussed during the process with the key partners, as mentioned in the short term action plan table.

<sup>7</sup> This would depend on whether the city of Brussels considers it pertinent in this situation to push the project and gain experience even within the current legal framework. However, this would mean operating in the "legal border zone" and would thus require a definition of "pilot project" and/ or a joint ambition of the municipal and regional level.

## 6 The elaboration process of the reactivation strategy



## General overview

The process was characterized by different phases. In a first phase, grasping the issue was important and the city reached out to different actors who are either experts in the field of vacancy and reactivation or had an interest in the building itself. In a second phase, the possibilities for reactivation were explored and a common vision was determined, this also included a realistic check for feasibility and time perspective. In a third phase, priorities were determined and the focus for the short term collaboration was set out. This was followed by a fourth phase in which partnerships are being concretized.

## Key activities

- 12 ULG meetings: to develop the content of the project and to check the pertinence of actions proposed;
- A number of public visits or events in the ARLON 104 building such as:
  - o Nuit Blanche in October 2016: a yearly cultural event that focuses on a theme and showcases art installations/ performances/interventions within one city district.
  - o 2 day workshops in June 2017: organization of 2 days of workshops in the ARLON 104 building in the framework of the tripartite meeting of the urbact 2<sup>nd</sup> Chance, Re:fill and Sub>urban networks;
  - o Different visits with students, ULG members, interested parties...
- Collaboration with the University of Mons: architecture master students think about the possibilities for short or long term reactivation of the building in relation to the neighborhood and city dynamics. 1 engineering student evaluates the structural and technical aspects. This was important to open up the minds in terms of redevelopment possibilities of the existing structure.
- Organization of the Brussels Thematic Meeting in November 2017: a number of important issues were discussed and a number of local partners contributed to the meeting, coming in contact with external local experts as well as with the European level.
- Important internal meetings and coordination with the responsible team for the development and execution of existing strategies against vacancy, allowing the embedding of the project in a long term vision of the city.
- Final Local Event and exhibition, communicating and disseminating the results
- Coordination with the parallel development of the land use plan "Science"

## Stakeholders involved

- The project was coordinated by the "Planning and Strategic Development" unit within the department of Urbanism of the city of Brussels;
- For the Federal Building Agency, owner of the building, follow-up was insured by Mr. Delabie followed by Mr. Heneffe as primary contacts and Mr. Laurent Vrijdaghs and Mr. Philippe Leloux for strategic decisions.
- Political follow-up was insured by our alderman of heritage and urbanism, Mr. Coomans de Brachène and his cabinet;
- On a regional level (Brussels Capital Region), the coordinator of developments within the European Quarter was closely involved;
- The European Quarter Fund was involved from the start but took on a leading role for the development of the Urban Lobby and workshop concept;
- The Urbact Local Group meetings were coordinated by Wouter Bouchez from v.z.w. You're Up;

- Within the city administration, different departments were involved during the process such as the planning unit, the control unit, the local housing agency and of course the financial department on project management level;
- Different external public partners were involved as ULG members such as BRAL v.z.w., Citydev Brussels, Professor Nicolas Bernard,...;
- During the process, different private partners have come forward that are interested in participating in the reactivation of the building through temporary use: ONKRUID, Denis Noiret, Streetfood Market, Fiets Café Vélo,... ;

### Lessons learnt & Recommendations

The URBACT 2<sup>nd</sup> Chance program was the first European program for our team. This means that it was educational both on meta-level, in regards to the management of European projects, as well as on local level, in regards to the theme of the program (reactivation of sleeping giants) for both the specific case study and the general strategy development.

A number of lessons were learned through the project:

- Management of European projects requires a small team with different profiles (administrative, financial, content, communication,...). This allows of each employee involved to focus on their own set of goals and the development of parallel processes (communication campaign parallel to key activities for example while at the same time ensuring administrative follow-up) during the URBACT project lifetime;
- Communication is a very important means for the activation of key actors and the enhancing of political support. This includes creating a public “buzz” as well as the necessary steps to enlarge internal support between the different departments and political responsibilities
- A pre-set planning of key moments and activities for the local reactivation process helps in the maintaining of the engagement of partners and injecting the process with new energy at certain moments (defining of different acceleration periods). This includes a diversity of activities in order to keep different types of partners on their toes;
- When considering challenging cases, the reactivation process takes time and requires the involvement of many different partners. In this light is important to have a mediating figure that focuses on finding a solution that works for all partners involved, in a reasonable amount of time. This would imply a new role for the city administration as a facilitator and negotiator, keeping the long term benefits for the city of the reactivation of such problematic buildings in mind. This also means acting proactively, looking for problematic cases while at the same time focusing on the potential for reactivation and the benefits for the city and its inhabitants.

First step<sup>8</sup>s have already been taken with the vacancy inventory started in 2015 and updated in 2017 which inventarizes and categorizes all visual vacancy in the city. A next step could be the qualitative scanning of this database, looking for office buildings which are at the same time problematic yet have potential for reactivation or are located in strategic areas in the city. These could be defined as pilot projects for which special measures could be undertaken such as the contacting of owners and the accompaniment in the search for a solution.

- Another lesson learnt is the importance of temporary occupation projects in the reactivation of sleeping giants. Looking at other projects as well as ARLON104, it seems that a temporary occupation project helps to get results in the short term and create a dynamic around the project. However, this leads to a big problem in the case of office buildings (defined as such on the land use plan) since many of the temporary occupation projects are either cultural activities or services for which the land use plan definition doesn't fit. For the moment, there are no legal tools at hand which allow a quick and temporary change of land use. This can only be done through a building permit procedure, something which owners aren't inclined to do for a temporary occupation project. Therefore, and resulting from the URBACT project, it would be useful to start a discussion around the development of new legal possibilities for temporary land use change, which is a regional competency in Belgium (see also chapter 7).
- Thanks to the URBACT program, a dynamic was created between different public partners. One of the conclusions of these contacts is that there is stratification in the strategies elaborated by different public institutions, especially in the case of the elaboration of vacancy databases. Currently, the first steps are being taken to ask for funding to set up a first collaboration project with the Inventimmo team of Citydev to start sharing and aligning information.

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<sup>8</sup> Please see chapter 7 on next pages.

## 7 General prospect dealing with vacant properties in Brussels

As defined in the long term strategic objective, the URBACT 2<sup>nd</sup> Chance program is also meant to serve as inspiration for the development of reactivation strategies for vacant office buildings within the city, thus supplementing the already existing strategies developed over the years. During the Brussels' Thematic meeting, Hervé Delhove of the Development Strategies Unit in the Department of Urbanism of the city of Brussels presented a structured summary of these existing strategies (see italic text below).

*Since the 90's, the city of Brussels has been considering unoccupied and abandoned buildings a threat to the public safety, the mixity of functions, the preservation of heritage and the commercial and economical dynamics of the city center. The last few years, with the demographic boom, unoccupied floors above shops have been also been considered as a solution for the massive lack of housing in the region of Brussels.*

*To establish the amount and location of the abandoned and unoccupied buildings in Brussels, three main activities for a systematic inventory of vacant buildings have been developed:*

- 1. A field survey which consists in estimating vacancy through a visual assessment from the public space;*
- 2. The collection of a list with buildings with an under consumption of water & electricity;*
- 3. A check of the population registers to know if there is a domiciliation in the building. .*

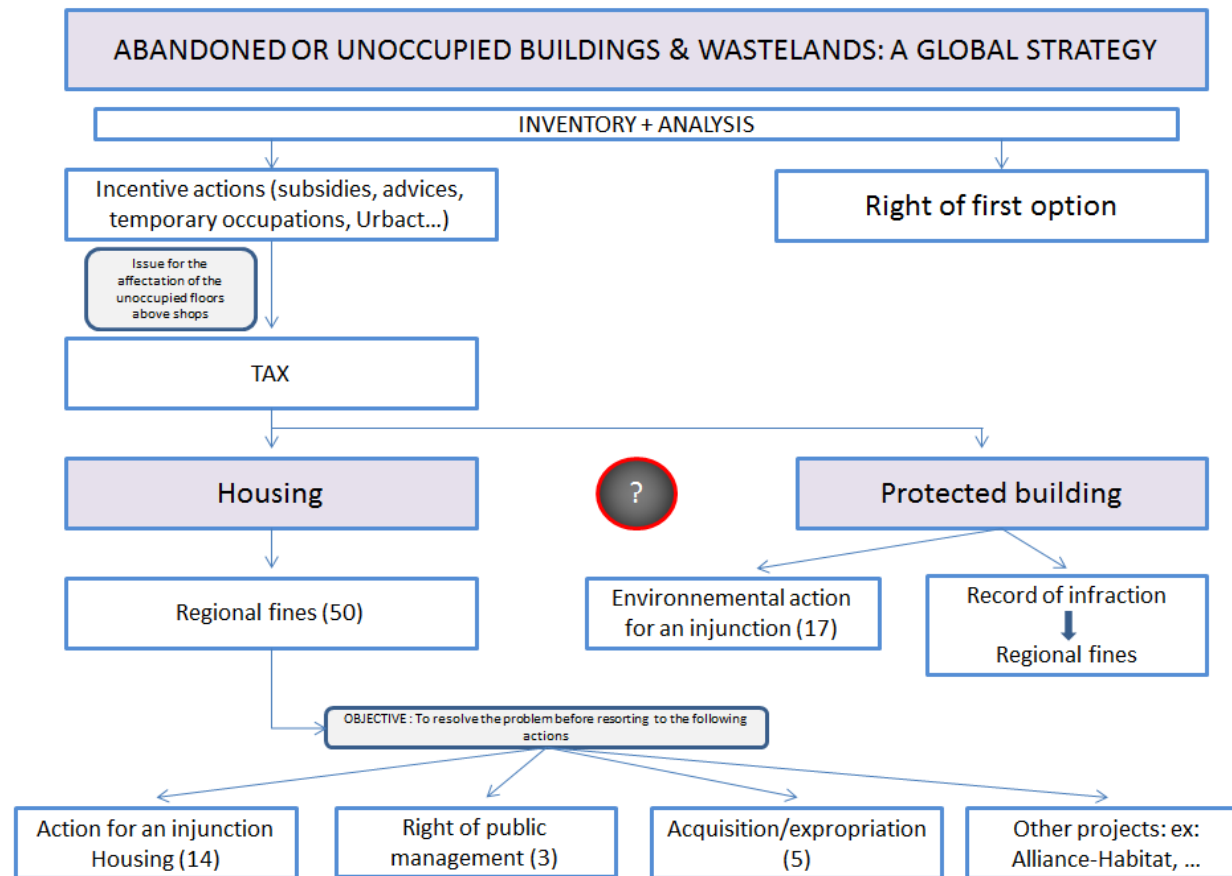
*When all the problematic buildings/sites have been identified, the city of Brussels collects all the available information within the public administrations about these buildings/sites (i.e. potential building permits or applications-applied taxes-measures of security or prohibition of occupation-legal actions and affectations).*

*After having identified and analyzed the abandoned and unoccupied buildings and sites, they are centralized in a web database. This database is accessible for all the users who work on the unoccupied buildings issue. Thanks to the inventory and the analysis all the buildings/sites concerned are mapped on a GIS program. The mapping gives a geographic overview of the issue and helps the administration to define a territorial approach.*

*Finally Brussels has developed a global strategy of actions with a gradual system of tools to first incite and then force the rehabilitation and reuse of vacant buildings.*

*The strategy functions as a cascade. The idea is if the 1<sup>st</sup> tool has not the desired effect, the next one in the cascade will be applied till the objective of the reactivation and reuse of the building is achieved.*





**Tool 1: Incentive actions OR "right of first option"**

Incentive actions: Brussels proposes different tools to help owners with the occupation of their buildings. For example: subsidies for renovation, subsidies to create a separate access to floors above shops, a team of experts to help with the renovation of protected buildings, mediator in projects of temporary occupations, ...

Right of first option: For a well-defined perimeter and if accompanied by a valid argumentation, authorities can have a right of first option to buy a building on sale.

If these incentive tools don't resolve the issue, repressive tools are applied varying from relatively "light" to "severe", defined by legal framework.

## **Tool 2: Tax**

Tax: The municipality of Brussels has developed a tax on the abandoned and unoccupied buildings/lands. This tax is charged according to running meters façade times the number of floors and is due on yearly basis, for every past year of vacancy.

*If the building/site is still problematic despite the municipal taxes, a number of measures are possible, but only if the concerned building is either a protected building (see tool 3.1) or has a "housing" land use definition or is intended for a residential development (tool 3.2)*

## **Tool 3.1. : protected buildings**

Regional fine: the city of Brussels can request the region of Brussels to deploy a regional fine for neglected heritage on top of the municipal tax.

Environmental action for an injunction : the city of Brussels can go to court to force the owner to renovate the protected building.

*These tools save the heritage. But they don't solve the vacancy.*

## **Tool 3.2. : Housing**

### **Tool 3.2.1: Regional fine**

Regional fine: the city of Brussels can request the region of Brussels to deploy a regional fine for unoccupied building on top of the city tax fine.

### **Tool 3.2.2: Other**

**(However: the objective is to resolve the problem before resorting to the following actions)**

Action for an injunction "Housing": the city of Brussels can go to court to force the owner to renovate AND to resolve the vacancy.

Right of Management: the owner keeps the ownership of his building but is obliged to transfer its management to the municipality, in the city of Brussels. The city renovates the building, and rents the property out to a people in precarious living situations.

Acquisition/expropriation: the city of Brussels can apply at regional level for a subsidy to buy or expropriate an unoccupied building in order to create housing.

Alliance-habitat: the city of Brussels can apply at regional level for a subsidy to buy an unoccupied office building in order to create housing.

As becomes clear in the above scheme, the existing strategies, though very valuable, aren't yet fully adapted to the specific problem of empty office buildings. Consequently we hope to develop a specific set of tools for the reactivation of this typology in the long term. This demands a lot of work still and will require a step by step approach.

As mentioned in the lessons learnt, the facilitation of temporary occupation projects could be one of the measures to be developed in the future. In this light, the testing of the matchmaking process on the ARLON 104 building would be pertinent. This could also allow the city to support desired socio-cultural functions and improve life quality in the city. In a second phase, other pilot cases could be selected to further refine the tool. These pilot cases could be selected from the inventory of vacant buildings based on a specific set of criteria, depending on the political priorities that are set out (possible criteria are: location, number of years of vacancy, size of the building, potential for easy reactivation, state of the building, public buildings, owned by owner with multiple problematic buildings,...).<sup>9</sup>

Of course, considering the office typology, the problem of land use definition emerges. Thus, the elaboration of a legal framework for temporary land use change seems interesting. One of the concrete outputs of the urbact program will be a letter addressed to the regional level to ask for an “order of government” which would facilitate and regulate a temporary change of land use definition for the elaboration of temporary occupational projects. This facilitates the reactivation towards socio-cultural services, thus providing a twofold benefit for the owner: avoiding the vacancy tax as well as the general office tax in the city. In this regard, a brainstorm session during the Brussels Thematic Meeting and further structuring of the input has put forward some aspects to consider in the development of such a legal framework (see italic blue text below). These could be the starting point of discussion with the regional level, which would be responsible for creating this legal framework.

Another important benefit of this temporary change in land use definition would be that it would allow public services to undertake a procedure for “prise de droits reels ou de gestion”, which (in short) would allow them to manage the reactivation process as well as the physical space itself, renting out the property to socio-cultural associations for example.

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<sup>9</sup> From an administrative perspective, it seems to be interesting to develop experience through these test cases concerning specific aspects: non-ownership; restrictive land use definitions, building prescriptions,...

## *"Developing regulation for temporary change in land use definition, things to consider..."*

*Results from the brainstorm session during the Brussels' Thematic Meeting*

### **1. Duration criteria:**

- a. *Should there be a minimum and/ or a maximum duration to the change in definition?*
- b. *Should it be extendable or not? What would determine this?*

### **2. Applicability:**

*Different possibilities were discussed to determine the applicability of this regulation*

#### a. Based on project evaluation – ideas:

- i. *Pass a project jury who evaluates*
    1. *The proposed program and functions*
    2. *The impact on the neighborhood (local!)*
    3. *The social, cultural and/ or economic contribution (relevant!)*
    4. *The feasibility of the project: financial, management,...*
    5. *Technical/ fire and structural inspection*
    6. *Ambitions of and collaboration between the owner and project pilots*
- Proposed supporting measures:*
1. *Create a quality chamber*
  2. *Create a guiding task force*
- ii. *Not a full blown jury but projects fill out a minimal template*
  - iii. *Projects have to be piloted by a public body (?)*

#### b. Based on building criteria – ideas:

- i. *Only buildings that have been empty for a long time (problematic cases)? But what about possible perverse effects?*
- ii. *Any structurally sound and safe building is eligible; official declaration of this "safe" status to be delivered by...?*
- iii. *A beforehand determined list of eligible buildings (comparable to the list of protected buildings in the city)*
- iv. *Only if the surface of the building is bigger than a threshold?*

- c. Based on priority of a thematic problem – ideas :
  - i. Only to battle against vacant offices > which would mean that only office buildings are eligible
  - ii. Only to create more housing (although this would mean temporary housing and it remains to be debated if this is a good solution or not) or only to create more neighborhood supporting activities
  
- d. Based on priority of perimeter – ideas:
  - i. Only in deprived neighborhoods
  - ii. Only in CBD's
  - iii. Only in areas with the highest vacancy
  - iv. Only linked to Sustainable neighborhood contracts which already in itself have a defined duration (1 + 4 + 2 years)
  
- 3. Generic Project Criteria (alternative for case by case evaluation):**  
 Determine a list of criteria the project must meet, without it being explicitly evaluated on a case by case basis. These criteria are very similar to those determined for the project evaluation (2a):
  - a. Technical criteria
  - b. Program type: only local programs (to avoid mobility problems if city scale attraction is created);
  - c. Impact criteria
  
- 4. Reversibility criteria:**
  - a. Limit the disruptiveness of the activities or works that are carried out for the development of the temporary uses
  - b. What responsibilities after leaving?
  
- 5. Transition to permanent situation :**  
 Would this acquirement of temporary change in land use definition have an impact on the permanent/ long term situation?
  - a. Should this facilitate the permanent change?
  - b. Should this guarantee the permanent change after evaluation?
  - c. Should this be limited? To reassure owners or to avoid that this would be used as an "easy way" to change land use definition?

Side note about the tool of the vacancy tax that could be used as a structural tool to facilitate temporary use: The city could develop the possibility for owners to avoid paying the vacancy tax if they show that they are spending at least x% (50%; 60 %?) to facilitate temporary use on a qualitative temporary occupation project.

Furthermore, thanks to contacts with the city of Ghent, lead partner in the Re:fill network, in the framework of national level urbact activities, the possibility is being discussed to develop a joint letter and together with our National Contact Point, maybe a meeting or event with the two regional partners concerned.

On a municipal level, a tradition of stimulation of temporary occupation projects could be created. This could be kickstarted by a communication campaign towards owners who are paying vacancy tax at the moment to incite them to facilitate the temporary occupation of their buildings. Indeed, in many cases (especially for office buildings), the necessary investments for these types of projects is inferior to the amount of tax payed, particularly if considered over multiple years. This would not require a change in legal framework and is simply an application of the existing laws. Therefore, it could be implemented quickly.

In conclusion, it is clear that many possibilities have been discovered throughout the project lifetime, be it in the form of new partnerships, new processes, new legal frameworks or other. They will be elaborated further in the coming months and years with all stakeholders involved and will hopefully be tested and detailed through means of real pilot cases in the city.

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