

From spatial planning to socio-spatial activation

Emerging new planning approaches in post war housing estates in Flanders – the case Luchtbal

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Abstract

In this paper we reflect upon emerging planning practices based upon an actor-relational approach of planning in the case of Luchtbal Antwerp, in Belgium. This approach draws on recent insights in planning theory, grounded in a relational understanding of space, Latours actor-network theory and urban regime theory. It breaks with traditional government-centred forms of planning and stimulates the formation of associative governance networks around spatial issues; hence the label socio-spatial activation.

The case concerns a deprived high-rise social housing estate in the northern fringe of Antwerp. Since 2005 the city of Antwerp and the social housing company have been taken initiatives to restructure the area, with the goal to increase the social mix of the area and to attract new inhabitants. Although a considerable effort had been made to develop a physical masterplan for the area, the implementation of the plan was very weak.

The failure of traditional physical masterplanning in this area led to the development of new and innovative approaches. Instead of relying on traditional resource-intensive physical approaches, following a technical and government-centred approach, the city opted to develop an approach focused on identifying and activating socio-spatial networks in and around the area.

In this paper we will discuss the context of the case, experiences with this actor-relational approach and its preliminary outcomes. This paper is written from an insiders' perspective of two practitioners. Whereas Coppens has been involved as the project manager within the administration of the city of Antwerp, Boelens has been involved as a planning consultant for the city of Antwerp.

Keywords: Actor-relational planning, social housing restructuring, socio-spatial activation

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Introduction

The revitalization of post war social housing estates has been a major concern for Belgian cities over the last 20 years, as in many other European cities. During the heydays of the European welfare state, many social housing estates have been built in reaction to the steep increase in housing demand, caused by a combination of a booming demography, economy and the need to sanitize the existing older inner city housing stock. Once attractive places to live in, many of these areas have changed for the worse. General impoverishment, ethnic tensions, high levels of unemployment, crime, social exclusion and physical decay have turned these areas into the most problematic neighborhoods in the European cities (Van Beckhoven and van Kempen, 2006). Already 15 years ago Peter Hall (Hall 1997) identified four typical interrelated problems regarding post war housing estates, including physical, social, amenity and economic problems. The physical problems not only relate to building technology failures, but also to the planning policies of the post war era. Planned as dormitory areas, post war housing estates often lack qualitative amenities and - due to the prevailing CIAM zoning models at the time - a local economic base providing job opportunities and local private services. Furthermore social problems have accumulated because of the attraction of the most marginalized social groups to these areas over time. The global migration processes forced many newcomers in European countries to settle in the least wanted parts of the cities, such as the post war housing estates, resulting in significant concentrations of ethnic minorities. That is what Doug Saunders (2010) recently called 'Arrival Cities', clusters of urban newcomers, struggling to survive and hoping to establish a new social and economic life; and if they do so moving out, creating room for the next wave of migrants and leaving the most disadvantaged behind. This concentration of the poor and hopeless people is further related with high levels of crime, and low career prospects for the younger. It has triggered social tensions and unrest over the years in Europe's major cities, as demonstrated for instance by the 2005 riots in the Paris suburbs, and the 2011 riots in London.

Unlike neighboring countries such as the Netherlands, France or the UK, post war housing policies in Belgium however, and especially in the Flemish speaking part, prevented large concentrations of post war social housing estates. The number of social rental dwellings per 1000 inhabitants is for instance 32 units, which is low compared to the UK (80 units), France (86.5 units) and the Netherlands (138 units) (Pittini and Laino 2012). Housing policies over the last century in Flanders have been primarily oriented to the acquisition of private property on individual parcels, and have inherently supported a process of suburbanization (De Decker and others 2005), avoiding strong concentrations and high densities of social houses.

Nevertheless, some of the larger cities such as Ghent and Antwerp, and some regional cities such as Leuven or Genk do have significant concentrations of social housing estates, facing the same challenges as in many European cities. One of these neighborhoods is Luchtbal Antwerp.

Introducing Luchtbal - From model city to problem area

Luchtbal is an post war social housing area with about 2500 families in the northern fringe of the city of Antwerp, bordered by large infrastructures such as the High speed train railroad and the ring road in the East, the Albert Canal in the south, the Noorderlaan and the port area in the west, and the A12 highway in the North (Figure 1). The social housing company “Woonhaven” (which is a fusion of MGH and Huisvesting, see below) owns about 90% of the housing stock, whereas 10% stock has been sold in the past to private owners, mainly the renters of these houses. Situated on a water-sick soil of a former polder landscape, the area was uncultivated until the 19th century. However, when in the early 20th century the port of Antwerp extended to the north, the water-sick northern polder area was reclaimed and sold to the Catholic housing company *Maatschappij voor Goedkope Huisvesting* (MGH) to house the dockers working in the port. Following the principles of the garden city, about 350 single family houses had been constructed in the 1920's, together with public facilities such as a school, a church and outdoor sport facilities. After the second World War, another socialistic housing company - *NV Huisvesting* - developed new houses, mostly apartments, to meet the fast growing demand resulting from the postwar economic and demographic growth, and the need for new laborers in the harbor-area. *Hugo van Kuyck*, who had studied at Yale during the war and was very much inspired by CIAM and post-war America car-based urban principles, delivered the extension plan. The plan consisted out of largely standardized, high-rise housing ensembles in an open plan layout with large green collective spaces, and amenities such as schools, sport infrastructure and shopping facilities along the Noorderlaan. At the time the apartments of the high rise buildings were considered very modern and convenient, certainly when compared with the 19th century dens and low quality housing stock in the inner city of Antwerp. Therefore, Luchtbal with its spacious and modern apartments was considered as a premium residential location in the 60ties, attracting not only workers from the port area, but also middle class families from Antwerp.

However, over the years, the reputation of Luchtbal dramatically changed from model city to an unpopular area. The relation between the workforce of Luchtbal and the port area gradually faded away, as the workers retired and the harbor area extended towards the Sea and on the leftbank of the Scheldt. As the first generation inhabitants aged, died or moved away, immigrants replaced the inhabitants. Although Luchtbal can't be regarded an 'Arrival

City' while its tenants need to live in Belgium for several years to be eligible for social housing, the one-side supply of social dwellings and the social housing allocation policy resulted in a constant import of relatively poor families in the area, and a fast and dramatic change in the social-economic and ethnic composition of the area over the last 20 years. The once almost mono-ethnic neighborhood changed rapidly into a diverse cultural neighborhood with about 47% of the population having its roots in various parts of the world, mainly North Africa and central Africa, and to a lesser extent from Asia and east Europe (Stad Antwerpen 2012). As a result social tensions in the neighborhood have increased, as well as the physical examples of decay and unemployment towards 18% at the time (Stad Antwerpen 2012). Given the demographic boom of immigrant families in the area, there is fear for a further spiral of negative decline (Sociale Planning 2009).

The failure of the masterplan Luchtbal

Although international scholars have stressed time and again the need for a long term, local embedded and integrated physical, economic, social and cultural approach in these areas, and have stressed that physical improvements alone are unsustainable helping to solve the problem (Christiansen et al, 1993, Parkinson 1998, Hall 1997, Musterd et al. 1999, Andersen 2001), until now basically two main strategies have been applied by the Flemish government, the municipal governments and the social housing companies. The first strategy has been the physical regeneration of these housing areas. Many of the houses from the interbellum and the post war era no longer meet modern comfort, technical and safety standards. The necessary renovation of the housing stock mostly not only aims to increase housing comfort, but is also used as an opportunity to change the mix and typology of dwellings and to invest in the public domain and additional amenities.

The second strategy has been "social mixing" (Loopmans and others 2010; Decker and Pannecoucke 2004). "Social mixing" refers to the idea that a change in the social composition of such a neighborhood could reduce the concentration and accumulation of social and economic problems and contribute to the liveability of social housing estates. The previous Flemish decree on social rental dwellings (or "huurbesluit" of 20 Oktober 2000), made an explicit link between livability and social composition, stating that *the care for liveability might require to aim for a social mix*. A social mix strategy thus tries to prevent concentrations of lower incomes, elderly people or ethnic groups, meaning in practice for many social housing estates the import of middle class, 'white families' into downrun areas. And although it must be noted that Flemish housing policy from 2007 gradually started to abandon the social mix matrix in the preparation of the new Flemish decree on social housing

(Heylen and others 2007), until now municipal governments still stick severely to the “social mix” strategy.

As such, the Masterplan Luchtbal, which De Nijl Architecten put up during 2005-2007 in assignment of the social housing company, the city of Antwerp and the Flemish agency for social housing, still consisted of both strategies mentioned before (Figure 2). On the one hand the masterplan opted for the regeneration of the existing housing stock, including the improvement of the existing public realm, the restoration of the spatial coherence of unfinished Van Kuyck masterplan, and the concentration the amenities in new so-called ‘centralities’ according to the present needs. On the other hand the masterplan opted also for an improved social mix by densifying existing open areas, especially along the Noorderlaan, with housing for new middle and high-income groups (De Nijl Architecten 2007). However due to the lack of a sound complementary social strategy, initially the masterplan was not fully supported by the city and the housing company. Therefore the social department of the city of Antwerp decided to make up their own strategy based on some interviews with several inhabitants and stakeholders. It resulted in an action plan of twenty ‘actionpoints’ in the social-cultural and spatial realm, and on the short and middle long term (Sociale Planning. 2009). But again, it didn’t consisted of an integrated physical, economic, social and cultural approach, while at the same time all the actions where very much dependent on the investment willingness of the Antwerp municipality.

Therefore, and after the masterplan together with the social action plan was approved, additional surveys in 2010 with regard to the expected traffic noise and market conditions made clear that the proposed densifications would hardly attract the intended target groups. The bad reputation of the area, its spatial isolation, its exposition to severe noise loads from large infrastructure and the improper potentials of the densification areas for new attractive housing typologies, made the area hardly competitive in reference to housing projects elsewhere in Antwerp. Even scarce new cheap housing projects and apartments, developed by the city, and put on sale below construction costs, are currently hardly sold. Moreover the rigid zoning scheme – which characterizes not only the current layout, but also the New Masterplan - makes the area hardly attractive for organic, self-organized, co-evolving urban regeneration processes. For this reason it became doubtful whether the strategy of ‘social mixing by densification’ would actually result in the desired social uplift of the neighborhood and its residents. Perhaps it would result into a subsequent internal social and ethnic segregation and a potential further economic impoverishment of the area, as Dutch research had shown in similar restructuring projects of post war estates (Kleinhans 2005; Ouwehand and Davis 2004). Moreover, big infrastructure projects in the direct surroundings of the neighborhood result in a growing social unrest, encouraging new resistance- and

actiongroups with new interests and ambitions. With this new information, the Masterplan Luchtbal got into a deadlock. Despite the fact that some parts of the masterplan were indeed implemented, the general strategy of "mixing by densifying" was obviously failing.

It was felt that the area needed a new, integrating, but open and communal investment strategy, not so much based on a municipal plan or municipal subsidies, but on a co-evolutionary strategy between the various public, civic and business stakeholders in and around the area from the bottom-up. And although Doug Sanders (Saunders, 2012) claimed that such an embedded, organic strategy would only be feasible when one could get rid of the rigid high rise post war housing areas all together, the challenge would be to implement such a bottom-up, organic approach within the existing layout. Otherwise physical, municipal, one-sided improvements would still precondition such a strategy and would need massive financial means. Therefore the main question was: would it be possible to develop embedded, organic, co-evolutionary planning strategies in post-war housing areas to improve resilient living conditions in as well a social, economic, cultural and physical sense? How would such a planning look like and in which way would it be different to existing strategies?

Actor-relational approaches

That kind of planning strategy is very much inspired by the poststructuralists ideas on geography (Thrift 1999, Graham and Marvin 2001, Belsey 2002, De Landa 2006, Murdoch 2006), in which space is not so much seen as a 'container', a prefabricated décor or platform upon which social, economic and/or cultural activities appear, but as an actor itself capable of influencing and stirring other actors, as that it is stirred and influenced by those actors and others spaces itself. Space is therefore not closed or contained in a pre-given three dimensionality, but it is made of relations; or in other words it is relational. The possible spatial developments of Luchtbal and its social-cultural practices are in this respect very much intertwined, as that they are related to general economic developments and institutional changes within and around the neighborhood. Moreover, especially over here it is connected to the increasing transnational settings of the people and communities living in the neighborhood (Appadurai 1996, Anderson 1998). Luchtbal, as space in general, could therefore be regarded a multiplicity, that is made of differing, spatial practices, (degrees of) identification and forms of belonging. Especially in cases like Luchtbal there could be acute struggles over who's reading on space should take priority, leading to new controversies and/or riots. But, if intertwined, it could possibly also lead to new 'openings', innovations and forms of spatial practices. In David Harvey's terms (Harvey, 1996) these new practices could

possibly evolve into 'temporarily permanences', meaning that they only stabilize provisionally, and need to be made and remade by various actors continually. Moreover in our differentiated and volatile society several of such continually changing 'temporarily permanences' exist next to each other - autonomously or interrelated - developing dynamically towards new, surprising and often unexpected (temporarily, but if possible resilient) urban assemblages (Farias & Bender 2010).

That kind of spatial planning goes beyond the plan, and takes the ongoing complexities and non-linearities of present day networked societies serious (Hillier 2007, Boelens 2009, De Roo 2010, De Roo/Boelens 2012). It is always focused on 'becoming', not on 'how to get to a prefixed ideal situation' (that is in essence 'the plan'). Its main drive is focused on facilitating a translation towards (temporarily) innovative, more resilient assemblages in space, embedded in specific local settings, but with an open eye to changing, reciprocal adaptive circumstances. That kind of planning goes beyond a simple engagement with new objects of analysis or with a broader orientation on various social, economic, morphological or political landscapes of concern, as that it goes beyond simple action research (Coppens 2011) or participatory, collaborative planning (Healey 1997). Instead it refocuses on, as that it takes part in the actual actor-networking between the various interests and space itself.

In this respect, that kind of actor-relational planning comes very near to the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) of Callon (1986), Law (2004) and Latour (2005). Like ANT it is no longer focused on the sociology of the social, or the 'planology' of planning, but it goes back to very core of engaged spatial planning itself; that is the best reciprocal adaption of space and society, such for the sake of society (Van Veen 1973). However there is no such thing as **a** society (anymore), nor **one** prefixed idea of space. There are several societies and various interconnections to space, and therefore various spaces, evolving autonomously, next to or at its best intertwined to each other. Moreover, we have got business societies with a principal focus on money making in last instance, public societies with their representational democratic principles, institutional means, laws and regulations and focus on periodic (re)election, as that we have got civic societies with their struggles for survival, daily experiences, growing (multi-media) self-organizations around specific, common interests and/or civil disobediences. Each of these societies identifies itself to space differently, showing various forms or ambitions of belonging.

Therefore this kind of planning goes also beyond the restrictive confines of governments (Boelens 2009, Boonstra/Boelens 2011). It is not so much focused on collaboration or coproduction around specific issues, objectives or ambitions of representative governments, from the inside-out, such for the sake of the public interest in general. Instead it is focused on

co-evolution of the various forms of spatial belonging mentioned above, from the outside-in. While it is convinced that this kind of coevolution between leading actors of the business, public and civic society, in reference to the specific institutional setting and local situatedness, promises the most sustainable, innovative and resilient cross-overs. These kinds of co-evolutions evolve along the four phases of translation of ANT: problematization-interessement-enrolment-mobilization (Callon 1986), or the four collectives wonderment-consultation-hierarchization-institution (Latour 2004). However, while ANT particularly proves its strength in retrospect, and planning is mainly a prospective operation, several adjustments of ANT to an Actor-Relational-Approach (ARA) are introduced to deliver a suitable strategy for spatial planning (Boelens 2012).

One of the first is the interpretation of ANT's notion of 'all (heterogeneous) actors are equal'. Although ARA takes non-human actors very seriously, while it is convinced that collective actions are not only dependent on the interests and ambitions of humans, but also on the specific conditions of the soil, the morphology or the characteristics of the build environment, existing plans and the like; it is also convinced that in prospect these non-humans are always mediated by humans in some way or another. In our case it would mean that the specific morphological, social, economic characteristics of post-war housing areas, including the specific layout of the garden city and high-rise Luchtbal, condition the specific possibilities and even changes of co-evolutionary planning over here. However these characteristics (their flexibility to adapt, stay foot or change) are highly mediated by the respective homeowners, spokespersons of the housing corporations, municipality, architectural organizations, inhabitants etc. To coevolve with these non-human actors, would therefore mean coevolving with those intermediaries.

About the normative grid of ANT: although Latour (2004) has highly disputed the normative characteristics of ANT, Callon (2009) and Venturini (2010) recently produced the idea of hybrid forums, bringing opposing forms of delegative democracy and dialogical democracy together in order to constitute collective decisions, without excluding the continuous exploration of possible worlds and new identities beyond those decisions. But while Venturini and Callon remain very vague what this would mean exactly and seem to be convinced it would be possible within the existing realms of representative democracy, it remains unclear how these ideas should be implemented. How could representative delegates, locked-in by the path dependencies of their delegative powers, still explore all the identities en possible innovations beyond those restrictive confines? In this sense representation, or more specific representative democracy – on which planning relies heavily – is already strongly and widely

disputed (Harvey 1989, Cohen & Rogers 1992, Gans 2003, Hirst 2001, Swyngedouw 2004, Purcell 2008). Representative democracy would widen an already enormous gap between the representative democratic bastion and the daily lives of citizens and businesses, mediated through a growing bureaucracy. The middle of the road, 'one-size-fits all' policies of representative democracies wouldn't be no longer adequate for a growing pluralism in present day society. Furthermore representative democracies would always relate to a nice, but precisely bounded, organizational hierarchical stratified piece of land, while in present day societies many (spatial) questions cut right across different levels or just fall in-between. In the last decades many alternatives have been sketched to deal with those issues in a better way. But here we take the stance that a more associative democracy would fit in with the non-linear and co-evolutionary approaches described before, while associationalists plea for a more direct self-organized (in)formal governance, promoting an organic representation of currently underrepresented interests, and thus encouraging the formation of pluralists, independent associations around specific interests.

Although associative democracies could occur (not instead, but) next to representative democracies, for planners it would mean to move more and more beyond representative governments, and to serve emerging self-organizing (if necessary multi-level) actor-networks around specific issues from the outside-in. It would be consistent with the pleas of Elinor Ostrom (1990) with regard to common pool resources management and the collective self-governance, in which she identified eight design principles. But that would also mean that planners would become less spatial driven, but more and more issue and involved actor-network driven. Nevertheless, their 'spatial instruments' – their design researches, spatial explorations, plans, graphs and the like – would become important tools (instead of means or objects) helping to discover new possibilities, innovations and crossovers in those co-evolving assemblages. Following Deleuze & Guattari (1980) and Jean Hillier's (2011) 'strategic navigation towards a speculative future', at least four alternative kinds of decisive planning documents are distinguished in its proceedings, intended to stimulate so-called 'tipping points' in the formation of new alliances (Sanders 2009, pp. 166-179):

- tracing documents, exploring the potentials of the site or of the planning challenge involved;
- mapping documents, tempting an educated matchmaking between the potentials traced and possible actor-networks;
- diagram documents, following the transformations of actor-networks and their fields of influence during the proceedings and

- agency documents, the potentially more binding and passive elements for actor-networks, such as laws, regulations, contracts, arrangements, etc.

Each of these documents plays an important role in each of the aforementioned translation phases of possible co-evolving networks.

Applying ARA to Luchtbal.

Bearing these ideas in mind, let's go back to the planning practice of Luchtbal. Faced by the deadlock of the master plan, we engaged the municipality and housing company to explore new approaches, by which the inhabitants themselves would be activated to (self)organize their living environment, if necessary or possible with help of other stakeholders, like the government, (new) entrepreneurs in and around the area etc. Urban Unlimited executed this program in cooperation with the Flemish consultancy firm Omgeving, in assignment of AG Stadsplanning Antwerp, the Flemish Government and the housing cooperation Woonhaven, with help of the Universities of Leuven and Antwerp. Since November 2011 they applied the aforementioned new relational co-evolutionary ideas to an experimental planning strategy for Luchtbal Antwerp. Until now it has consisted of four phases, navigating through the complexity and multiplicity of Luchtbal

- tracing the unique selling points of Luchtbal by design research
- exploring the needs and ambitions of the civic, business and public society within and round Luchtbal;
- roundtables with regard to first ideas on communal, coevolving opportunities based on those (mono-, bi- or trilateral talks)
- ideas for a communal investment strategy in reference to that.

Tracing Unique selling points

First we executed a short inquiry into the Unique Selling Points (USP's) of Luchtbal. On first sight, Luchtbal is a generic social housing estate, following the rigid CIAM-principles. However, going beyond the clichés of post war housing estates, we searched for elements that differentiated Luchtbal from its look-alikes. To do this, we used various interpretative methods of analysis, such as mapping and ethnographic methods, each of them revealing specific assets and opportunities of the area, trying to understand Luchtbal from an insider's perspective. In our analysis, we have involved Master students of the Master Urban and strategic planning (MAUSP) of the KU Leuven in the analysis, as part of their curriculum.

Because of the international orientation of the Masterprogram, some students came from the East and North Africa. This helped in overcoming cultural and language barriers. And from these embedded analysis we eventually found four unique selling points that provide opportunities for the near and long future, including a) the relation with the port, b) public space, c) the mix of public facilities and d) finally the relation with large infrastructures.

Relation with the Port

Pivotal in the history of Luchtbal has been its relation to the port and the port-related industries. In fact, Luchtbal owns its existence to the port. The sand dug out for the enlargement of the port and the construction of the new docks in the early 20th century was used to reclaim the water-sick land of the area. Moreover, the large scale and labor-intensive Fordistic port production activities of the post war area provided jobs for the new residents in the early history of Luchtbal. One of the main employers has been for instance the plant of General Motors, sited along the Noorderlaan, and one of the largest car constructors and employers in post war Belgium. However, over time, the link between the social housing estate and the production activities gradually weakened. When the global crisis of the Fordistic mode of production hit the port area, more and more industries closed their doors. As the Noorderlaan is a main traffic road within the Antwerp agglomeration for car commuters, new large scaled commercial activities, large facilities such as the fire station, sports retail, car retail and the biggest multiplex cinema of Western Europe replaced the production halls. Next to that new, temporally and informal uses are gradually taking up the new voids. But these facilities attracted not so much employment for the old Luchtbal dockers, but attracted large crowds, providing the area with potential visitors from all over the region, even from across the Flemish borders. Opportunities exist for the retail and construction companies at the former port plots to cooperate with the planned technical campus in the area, and to provide a link between education, innovation and practice. The lost link between Luchtbal and the port could therefore be reconnected in different ways, in finding both new employment and education and new relations with visitors and customers. Renewed alliances at the local level between inhabitants of Luchtbal and investors in the port might result in a new dynamic for the larger area. Also, the vast amount of unused space along the Noorderlaan might accommodate new informal economic activities and entrepreneurial opportunities for the residents of Luchtbal.

Public Space

A second important selling point is the vast amount of green spaces in Luchtbal. Designed as a modernist city, Luchtbal still has many open - though formal - green spaces. It is further connected to a larger green corridor along the ring Road relating the inner city with its

hinterland. Despite the abundance of open areas, the formal public space seems however to be underused and hardly appropriated. Although some 5500 inhabitants live in Luchtbal, there is hardly any public outdoor life. In the history of the Luchtbal, open spaces within the northern garden city played an important role in the social and spatial fabric of the neighborhood. Semi-public inner yards were used for recreational uses, and the semi-private gardens created a collective good for its inhabitants. The larger open area of the Schijn was used for agriculture for some time. Different sport, social and cultural clubs rooted in the area, organizing festivals and markets up until the seventies. But over time, the uses diminished as clubs disappeared and as the population shifted and ethnic diversity increased. Our analysis showed a very specific use for different ethnic and age groups, mostly outside the formal public spaces of Luchtbal. (see Figure 3). A renewed use or a new collective appropriation of public space in the area again could initiate a new dynamic in Luchtbal. The immigrants in Luchtbal don't tend to apply and pay for traditional Flemish club memberships, but they are interested in informal or free activities concerning urban gardening, exotic food markets and sport activities specifically for women. These kind of activities fit well within the original spatial structure of Luchtbal as a kind of 'garden city'.

Mix of public facilities

Third, unlike many other social housing estates in Western Europe, there is a large supply of public facilities in the area. There are many schools in the neighborhood, including a sport school and a swimming school, a community center, a cultural center, a child daycare center, a home for the elderly, a sports hall, and sport fields. The city is also investing in additional public facilities such as a large playground, a small sports hall and a youth center. From the analysis, we noticed that many of the existing public facilities have users outside Luchtbal, and that users from Luchtbal do not always make intensive use of the facilities, such as the cultural centre. On the other hand, contrary to the abundance of public facilities, there is a lack of commercial private facilities, certainly for daily needs. There is a large discrepancy between the large retail facilities at car commuters, and the lack of shopping facilities in the area, oriented at the residents themselves. Nevertheless, the abundance of public facilities can be seen as a specific asset for Luchtbal. Luchtbal provides a high level of cultural and sports programs and physical space for a large city audience, thereby escaping the isolation or possible ghettoization of the area. At the moment it provides a destination for visitors outside Luchtbal, but the actual audience doesn't mix with the Luchtbal people. It is a challenge to match the programs to the local demand without losing the city audience, vice

versa. Some of the public facilities could provide supra-local services, entangled with the outside attraction and the inside embeddedness of the area.

Good connections

Last, as already mentioned, Luchtbal is surrounded by large infrastructures: the Noorderlaan in the west, the A12 in the North, the ring road and main railroads in the east, and the Albert Canal in the South. Although these large infrastructures decrease in many ways the environmental qualities of Luchtbal, they also provide many opportunities. The main infrastructures make Luchtbal highly accessible by various modes of transport: it has two railway stations, it is a main entrance point of the city and in the future, a new tram connection with the city and the northern village of Eekeren will improve these conditions even further. However, in relation with the Noorderlaan the car has always been the main mode of transport. Worth mentioning is the fact that the plan of architect *van Kuyck* contained one of the first car-oriented shopping centers of Belgium along the Noorderlaan. But within Luchtbal, an over-abundance of asphalt is apparent; while at present an increasing number of inhabitants do not even own a car. Next to that, Luchtbal is also situated near the nature reserve of *Oude Landen*, providing a unique ecological background to the intense accessibility.

These USP's of Luchtbal provided us with additional information about the factors of importance (the so-called non-human actors), which could play a decisive role in our exploration towards possible new embedded innovative urban assemblages, e.g. actor-networks. But are these USP's also recognized by the inhabitants and other (mediated) human actors themselves? Therefore we proceeded to the interests, needs and ambitions of those human actors in our quest through complexity.

Exploring the needs of various societies

As mentioned before, here we distinguish the needs, interests and ambitions of the civic, business and public communities, while – differentiated in their primordial drives - we are convinced they could be complementary and co-evolve beyond more or less one-sided operations towards more resilient alliances.

Civic Society

Firstly the interests of the residents of Luchtbal themselves; that is those of the civic societies within the area. They are multiple and highly diverse. And since the introduction of participatory, communicative and collaborative planning approaches, these interests, needs

and ambitions have been put foremost on the agenda, trying to stimulate inclusionary plans. As such, these ideas have also guided the masterplan Luchtbal mentioned before, including other plans in the wake, like housing renovation programs, plans for new playgrounds, the neighborhood traffic circulation plan etc. Nevertheless – and although they have climbed Sherry Arnsteins (Arnstein, 1969) 'Ladder of Participation' profoundly - these participatory, communicative and collaborative approaches still receive persistent critiques. They would be time consuming and only result in another *Diktatur des Sitzfleisches* (Weinrich 1987, Schaap & Van Twist 1992, Frissen 2007). They would be foremost focused on process and hardly on content (Wigmans 1982, V.d. Cammen 1995, Bakker et al. 2006), and would not genuinely improve the quality of planning decisions that matter (Innes & Booher 2000). They would only meet a specific kind of citizens with time and know how (Flyberg 1996, De Graaf 2007, Van der Arend 2008) and therefore evolve in a kind of 'public support machine' (Pløger 2000, Hendriks & Tops 2001, Woltjer 2002). Therefore they would be indeed procedural, thematic and spatial inclusive, framing spatial developments in the public path dependencies of governments, and excluding novel, innovative and self-organizing activities in potentia (Boonstra and Boelens 2011). And precisely some of those features also occurred with regard to the spatial planning in Luchtbal. Experiencing and attending some of the participation meetings with regard to upcoming venues, revitalization programs, the neighborhood circulation plans etc., it became very much clear they attracted only the native, Dutch speaking, somewhat elderly residents, because they would have the time and preparedness for long lasting participatory processes and familiar with the options, rules and institutional (im)possibilities of the planning conditions in question.

Therefore we had to invent alternative ways to get a more genuine picture of the residential needs, interest and ambitions, of the growing immigrant population too, including their possible already strong self-organizing networks. For that purpose, in cooperation with the social faculty of the University of Antwerp (UA), we organized a half-our long door-to-door inquiry among some 800 random households (of the 2500 in total), with regard to a) their housing history and possible relocation ambitions, b) their appreciation of the neighborhood on several aspects, c) their functional, social and economic networks within and around the area and d) ideas about a possible future investment program (financial, in time, experience, physical, organizational) and their willingness to contribute themselves. It was executed by 17 bachelor-students (second year) of the Faculty of Social & Political Sciences of the UA. In addition, and in cooperation with the Catholic University Leuven (KU-Leuven), Faculty of Architecture, Urbanism and Spatial Planning, we organized with some 15 (research)master students 5-10 minutes long, so-called location-inquiries to by-passers at the small shopping

center in Luchtbal, the central pub, library, cultural center, elderly center, kindergarten, schools, mosque, church and the like. Eventually they got a response of some 250 inquiries.

Although the response with some 125 door-to-door inquiries was a little bit low (even compared to other surveys in immigrant neighborhoods), together with the location-inquiries and the periodic city-wide digital inquiries of the municipality we got a more or less accurate idea of the opinions, needs and ambitions of the residents themselves. It confirmed the notion that Luchtbal isn't an arrival neighborhood (see Figure 4). Moreover, overall, residents liked to live in Luchtbal, and responded that it was a nice, green and quiet neighborhood, although it is surrounded by main and massively used infrastructures. There are hardly any relocation ambitions on short and mid long terms because of the neighborhood itself; if there are any, reference is mainly made to the existing small apartments and the ambitions to live in bigger houses due to the number of family members. However one wouldn't recommend family, friends or other acquaintances to come and live in Luchtbal also (see Figure 5). One is worried about a possible negative spiral of the neighborhood. Here we can distinguish three populations camps: natives (mainly living in the garden city part) who are more or less intolerant to immigrants, immigrants (mainly living in the high rise part of Luchtbal) who have the perception that they are discriminated, and another group - natives and immigrants – (luckily still the vast majority throughout the neighborhood) who experience a lack of good communication among each other and look for opportunities for a better dialogue to live together. Surprisingly (in reference to the large number of transnational communities), the residents are also highly focused on the neighborhood itself; only with regard to work, shopping and other non-daily activities they orient themselves to (the greater region of) Antwerp as a whole (see Figure 6). Accordingly, concerning a possible future investment program, the respondents are mainly focused on improving the public, communal space; firstly (18 to 21%) with regard to better and more appropriate shops in reference tot the changing population and needs, and furthermore in better sport facilities (7%), economic activities and small business opportunities (6%), activities for the elderly, young people (5%) and investments in the maintenance and security of the public domain (4%) (see Figure 7). Approximately one third of the respondents would be willing to contribute (their spare time, experience and knowledge) to this program.

Business Community

Parallel to these inquiries, we explored the ambitions of leading actors in the business communities as well. It was executed by Urban Unlimited, firstly through an extensive actor-analysis on internet (investigating year reports, investment strategies, news items etc. on possible involved actors within and around Luchtbal in reference to the unique selling points

of the area) and secondly in primordial bilateral interviews with some twenty of those leading actors. From these explorations we concluded that there were hardly any leading business actors within the neighborhood itself; leading defined as those business actors who are willing and also able to (financially) invest in their physical, business, socio-cultural etc. environment in order to benefit from it by itself. Nevertheless we also concluded that in the (direct) surroundings of the neighborhood, several leading actors in the business society could be identified, which could possibly be involved in the investment strategy for Luchtbal at the right time and/or under precise conditions. Although the project was restricted by the municipality by the main infrastructures mentioned before, we decided to open up and extend the assignment beyond those borders (see Figure 8). Here we interviewed the directors of the St. Jozef schools and DAG/WAG organizations; two main actors in the broader Antwerp-region to organize education and after-school work and internal housing for physical and mental disabled people. They opted for an appropriate extension of their infrastructure, together with new amenities for their promising candidates for the Paralympics. Next we talked to the director of the International Seamen Hotel who had to move his hotel to the outskirts of Luchtbal and was looking for new promising arrangements with surrounding actors. Moreover we spoke with representatives of Kinopolis (the biggest multiplex cinema in Western Europe) who wanted to extend its program towards a 24-hours activity confronted with a downfall of traditional cinema visitors; or with those of Decathlon (a major European retailer of sportarticles), tempting to extend its interest in outdoor sport activities, also as a try-out zone for their products. We talked with the CEO of BRICO-Plan It (a major retailer in construction materials and garden supplies) to discuss if they were interested to invest in the greeneries of Luchtbal; with two main car retailers in Antwerp (Beerens-Audi and Jorssen-BMW) who wanted to revitalize the old, empty GM factory building at the Noorderlaan into a main leisure, car-selling center – Autostad – also as a new training and internship possibility for young, unemployed people from Luchtbal. We have discussed with the four directors of the secondary technical profession schools in Antwerp – who wanted to concentrate their activities in a Polytechnical campus in the north of Luchtbal – the possibility to erect new incubators, as well as the co-use of necessary amenities. We have talked with the regional director of the NMBS (the Belgian Railways) about the possibilities to extend and rearrange their two stations and station-areas nearby, according to a possible new investment program for Luchtbal. Etc.

Nevertheless, already during these open, primordial investigating talks it became clear that traditional bureaucratic, political ideas about predefined, restrictive planning blocked some of these discussions; partly because they were surpassed and partly of non-transparent internal

deliberations. These internal public path dependencies, or better still 'lock-ins', need to be overcome in order to stimulate a real open and innovative actor-relational progress.

Public Society

Therefore and in the third place, we organized several brainstormings with the main servants and officials of the involved departments of the public society; that is with Housing, the Economic and Shopping department, Mobility & Infrastructure, Youth & Education and the Public Domain. The main objective of these brainstormings was to inform and to be informed. Secondly we opted for an open mind, discussing possible new and/or innovative solutions. As such these brainstormings seemed to work. Especially with regard to the public domain and the youth & education workshop new ideas evolved with regard to a so-called 'green Luchtbal carpet', including a varied involved management of the different open areas depending on the social 'situatedness' of these areas within the neighborhood, block-wise urban farming experiments, community schools, additional sporting facilities and a more efficient reciprocal co-use of the available amenity spaces, during the day and week. The same occurred within the economic and shopping workshop, with regard to for instance the realization of a containerpark for start-ups and incubators, new financial models for self-producing neighborhood retail, Mediterranean markets, repair stores in combination with a new and already existing recycling shop, additional services around the planned bicycle highway etc. Next to that extra emphasis was put on an integrated event programming, in combination with a geared new image branding of the neighborhood. Nevertheless, especially with regard to the Mobility & Infrastructure Department main blockades became apparent; particularly with regard to main infrastructure projects, induced by the Flemish Government and De Lijn (The Flemish Public Transport Organization), like the Oosterweel connection and Brabo2 (reconstruction of the Noorderlaan). But also with regard to the domestic neighborhood circulation plan, which is in fact the responsibility of the northern district of Antwerp. Apparently it is hard for stratified governments and straightforward functionalistic and technical departments to deal with a more open, volatile and therefore non-linear process. However, while these infrastructures are conditional for the changes discussed, we needed to find a new balance between more objective and more intersubjective planning approaches.

Opportunity Maps and Roundtables around promising features

Nonetheless, at that moment we managed to get a sufficient insight in the actor-network possibilities, constraints, challenges and threatening deadlocks for 'temporarily and/or resilient Luchtbal assemblages'. There is a real threat for a further isolation of the neighborhood as a result of the so-called 'urban spine', of the Structureplan of Antwerp,

including its adjoining revitalization of the Noorderlaan (Brabo 2- project), Oosterweel connection, restrictive planning measures in Luchtbal its direct surroundings and the like. There could occur an ongoing negative spiral of the neighborhood, due to its bad image, the increasing concentration of the disadvantaged, low opportunities for work, non-adaptive public spaces, growing immigrant youth, acute struggles for belonging and riots in space. But it became also apparent, that there were several changes for new cross-overs, new innovations and embedded openings for resilient spatial alliances between several heterogeneous actors; improving the spatial conditions of Luchtbal not only for the inhabitants themselves, but also for visitors and new investors. We listed some 50 of those appealing practices, differentiated by the short, medium and long term. Provisionally we clustered some of those most relational and promising practices within three opportunity maps with regard to sport/leisure, relational green spaces and new adaptive challenges for work, retail and centrum facilities.

The sport/leisure opportunity map (Figure 9) concentrated around the existing, but down run athletic course in the South of Luchtbal, with relational connections to the Sports retailer Decathlon, the Multiplex Theater Kinopolis, the primary School Sportomundo, the Luchtbal Theater and the International Seaman House. Intention was to:

Short term (2012-2015)

- Revitalize and upgrade the athletic course for multipurpose sportactivities for the (young) inhabitants themselves, but also as a try-out course for the customers of Decathlon, the school and semi-pro soccer teams of visiting footballers from elsewhere;
- Extend the existing sporthal with a new entrance, and an adjoining Decathlon sportarticle lend center, annex cloth change and shower rooms
- Develop an outdoor cinema/playground/café, including climbing tower with Kinopolis/Luchtbal Theatre at the residual spaces next to the athletic course and Sporthal;
- Organization of a yearly Streetolympics in three age-categories (6-12, 12-18, >18) sponsored by the stakeholders mentioned above.

Medium term (2015-2020)

- Improve/realize a safe pedestrian crossing between Kinopolis/Decathlon over the Noorderlaan with the athletic course Luchtbal, including new biking routes with the International Seaman House;
- Rearrange the neighborhood traffic circulation adapted to the new developments above and the rearrangements of the Noorderlaan;
- Redesign of the public space between the Luchtbal Theatre/Sportomundo and the athletic course, partly also as the starting point of a neighborhood runcourse to the nature reserve 'Oude Landen' and back;

Long term (>2020)

- Development of a waterramp and climbing course towards abandoned and residual places in the Harbour area
- Revitalize the old Sporthal
- Intensifying the leisure/sporting program with additional facilities/sporthousing.

The Green Carpet Luchtbal opportunity map (Figure 10) concentrated on a renewed use and a collective appropriation of the public space in the area, to initiate a new dynamic outdoor daily live in the neighborhood again. It focused on:

Short term (2012-2015)

- The development of a flower carpet around the Towerblocks of Luchtbal, designed, planted and maintained by the residents themselves;
- A change of ownership of the courtyards in the Gardency of Luchtbal – from the Housing Company to the residents themselves – to stimulate urban farming, including improved pedestrian routing through the neighborhood;
- Redesign of the agora to an adventure park, next to the cultural center, by the growing immigrant youth according to their own ideas, needs and interests;

Medium term (2015-2020)

- Reorganization and refurbishment of the green areas between the Longblocks in the South of Luchtbal by the residents according to the principle of participatory budgeting
- Development of a green (car free) bike/pedestrian route along the neighborhood runcourse 'Oude Landen' (see above)
- Improvement of a green corridor between Luchtbal and Oude Landen, including green allotments and an improved entrance for the railway station Noorderdokken;

Long term (>2020)

- Revitalization of the Old Luchtbal Park in the north of the neighborhood, possibly intertwined with the new neighborhood circulation plan, a new appropriation of the adjoining Swimschool and the housing reconstruction on the south-side of the Park.

And finally the work/center opportunity map (Figure 11) concentrated on improving the possibilities for new start-ups and incubators in cooperation with the planned Polytechnical Campus in the North of Luchtbal, including the concentration of the dispersed shops, the week market and a new supermarket in the center of the neighborhood. Among others it consisted out of the following projects:

Short term (2012-2015)

- Development of a new neighborhood office for the Housing Corporation 'Woonhaven', including a 'Job-' and a 'Recycle-shop';

- Development of a polyvalent containervillage for new (neighborhood) start-ups and repair workshops, connected to the Recycle-shop mentioned before, with an average container rent-rate (80 m²) of € 1200,-/year;
- Extension of the horeca-facilities of the existing Luchtbal Centrum Pub, in reference to the developments above and in relation to the new Playparc;
- Implementation of new facilities for the weekmarket, including stands for the urban farmers (activity 12) and room for a periodic recycle/flee market and other venues;

Medium term (2015-2020)

- Revitalization of the old GM-factory towards a poly-functional CarCity (with Jorssen-BMW and Beerens-Audi), including polytechnical interships for young Luchtbal inhabitants and a new pedestrian/bicycle crossing of the Noorderlaan;
- Development of new incubator facilities along the central Tampicosquare, in cooperation with the planned Polytechnical campus

Long term (>2020)

- Development of a new pedestrian/bicycle bridge between Luchtbal and its neighboring village Merskem as part of the bicycle highway Essen-Antwerp;
- Integrated redevelopment of the old shopping center of Luchtbal, including a further densification of the area.

Each of these opportunity maps have been discussed in three roundtables of some 12-15 leading actors, roughly divided into 1/3rd of the business society, 1/3rd of the civic society (that is the Luchtbal inhabitants themselves) and 1/3rd of the involved public society and/or its civil servants. Criteria for invitation was if they appeared to potentially evolve into a kind of 'leading actor' from the first investigations mentioned before. We were looking for new cross-overs between each of these possible 'leading' stakeholders, challenged by the proposals in the opportunity maps. And although these 'leading actors' hardly knew each other or had spoken each other before, each of the roundtables resulted into a lively debate about the projects and possible spatial presented. Some of these proposals could only count on little support, but others were firmly embraced, or even extended and/or elaborated according to each and communal views. Therefore and on the whole, from each of these roundtables emerged a new dynamism and buzz, crossing old (physical, functional and social) barriers, with new perspectives for communal, innovative and even surprising development proposals. At the moment we facilitate this new buzz by elaborating integrated short term investment proposals in money, time, expertise, law, institutional arrangements and the like, in which each of the aforementioned 'leading actors' could perform its own role. Additionally and for the medium term we elaborate at the moment proposals for communal preparatory studies/measures in order to prolong the buzz after 2015 and for the long term a kind of co-evolutionary route how to proceed out of the self-reinforcing negative spiral. And although

this route could hardly be planned, let alone prefixed towards of a clear or promising future, we will present all three proposals for a broader public of involved stakeholders in August this year, as a possible more resilient and innovative way to go. At that time, it will become clear if the prominent old plan stakeholders, would like to co-evolve with the broader public and investors along this route, or that they will stick to the traditional planning path-dependencies with their apparent clear roles, jurisprudence and stratified means, but including its constraints and sometimes even lock-ins.

Conclusions with regard to post-war area planning strategies

Due to this ongoing process and at the moment of the writings of this paper, the results of the new strategy are still unsure. Moreover the proof of its effectiveness will only be given over time, when resilient and robust new alliances in Luchtbal have formed and resilient new socio-spatial practices have emerged. Nevertheless, without being able to present at the moment hard evidence of ARA for post war housing estates, some concluding remarks could be given from the current insights and already evolved broad and enthusiastic buzz of the process.

The shift from physical masterplanning with an underlying social engineering strategy within the administration and the Housing Company of the municipality of Antwerp towards an embedded strategy within evolving and possibly extended actor-networks of the community itself, is a major achievement on its own. As Christiaens, Moulaert and Bosmans have argued in their analysis of recent urban policies in Antwerp, these policies reflect a “physicalist” and “new economist” approach that favors top-down, City-Hall-controlled territorial division of labor, rather than a real partnership with civil society organizations (Christiaens et al, 2007). Urban planning or urban regeneration within the government in practice is too often still a technocratic top-down enterprise, seeking to control according to a prefixed ideal world, rather than to enable an open-ended resilient and robust spatial development. Government planners work too much accordingly to their own problem definition and their own set of predefined solutions, leading to one-dimensional and one-sided planning proposals, such as the masterplan for Luchtbal, rather than being sensitive to the multifaceted socio-spatial relations that unfold before them. Also during the round tables and brainstroms in the Luchtbal it became clear that traditional bureaucratic, political ideas about predefined, restrictive planning concepts blocked some of these discussions. These internal public path dependencies, or better still ‘lock-ins’, have and still are frustrating a real open and innovative actor-relational progress.

Certainly for post war housing estates, such an inside-out approach could be detrimental to the multifaceted opportunities that are hidden behind the surface. As Doug Saunders (2010) recently stipulated again, amongst and on top of a vast and ever growing group of scholars studying transnational communities (Andersen 1983, Appadurai 1996, Blokland 2008), to conceive migration areas as just areas of problem concentration doesn't do any justice to the diverse opportunities and self-organizing dynamism these show below the apparent surface accordingly. The same goes for formalistic, high rise postwar housing estates, which seem to be very mono-functionalistic at first glance, but over time hide a tremendous diversity, (non-) human capital and range of possibilities when examined in more detail. The range of (partly self-organized) activities, ambitions and programs described above proofs all that. It is more than ever our duty as planners to look them up, trying to engage them within and through more institutional modes of planning vice versa, in order to deliver more resilient urban assemblages in our times of an ever-growing complexity, volatility and cross-bordering challenges. The ARA approach holds significant advantages on this respect. It tries to capitalize on the diversity of and within transitory communities, by activating and forging heterogenic alliances between different social groups, aimed at the collective remaking and governance of space. It seeks to bridge the cleavages between government, market and society to set up self-governing assemblages between social networks and spatial configurations. And it seeks to restore a new, relational civism, rather than a preconceived static and passive citizenship. Time will learn in the very near future, if we are able to connect the upcoming fruits of this and these kinds of embedded, organic approaches with the more traditionalistic and path dependent planning programs of the current Antwerp municipality. Not only high rise post-war housing estates in general or Luchtbal in particular, but also the new generation of evolutionary, relational and actor-oriented planning of a complex future are in need of that.

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Figure 1

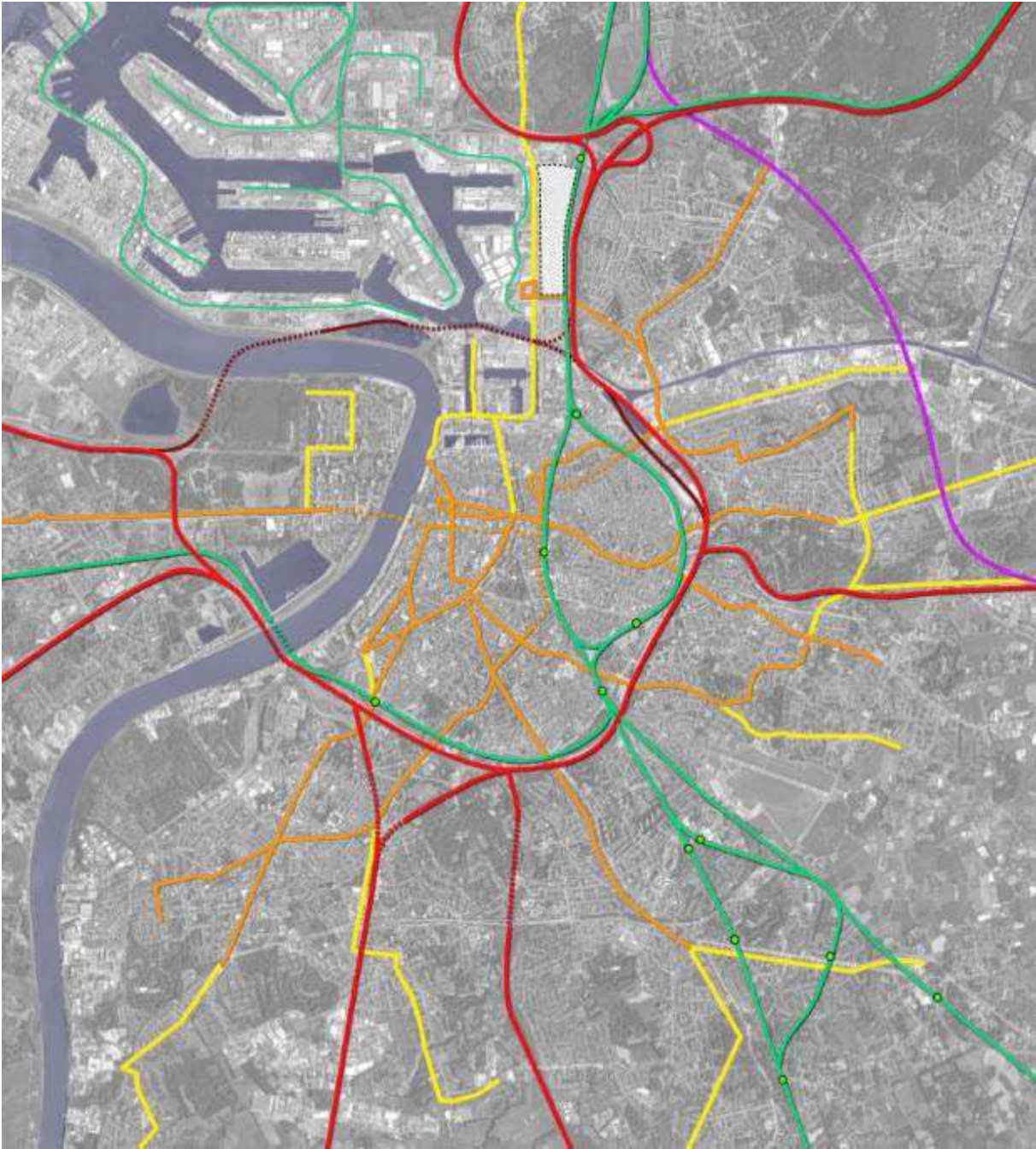


Figure 2

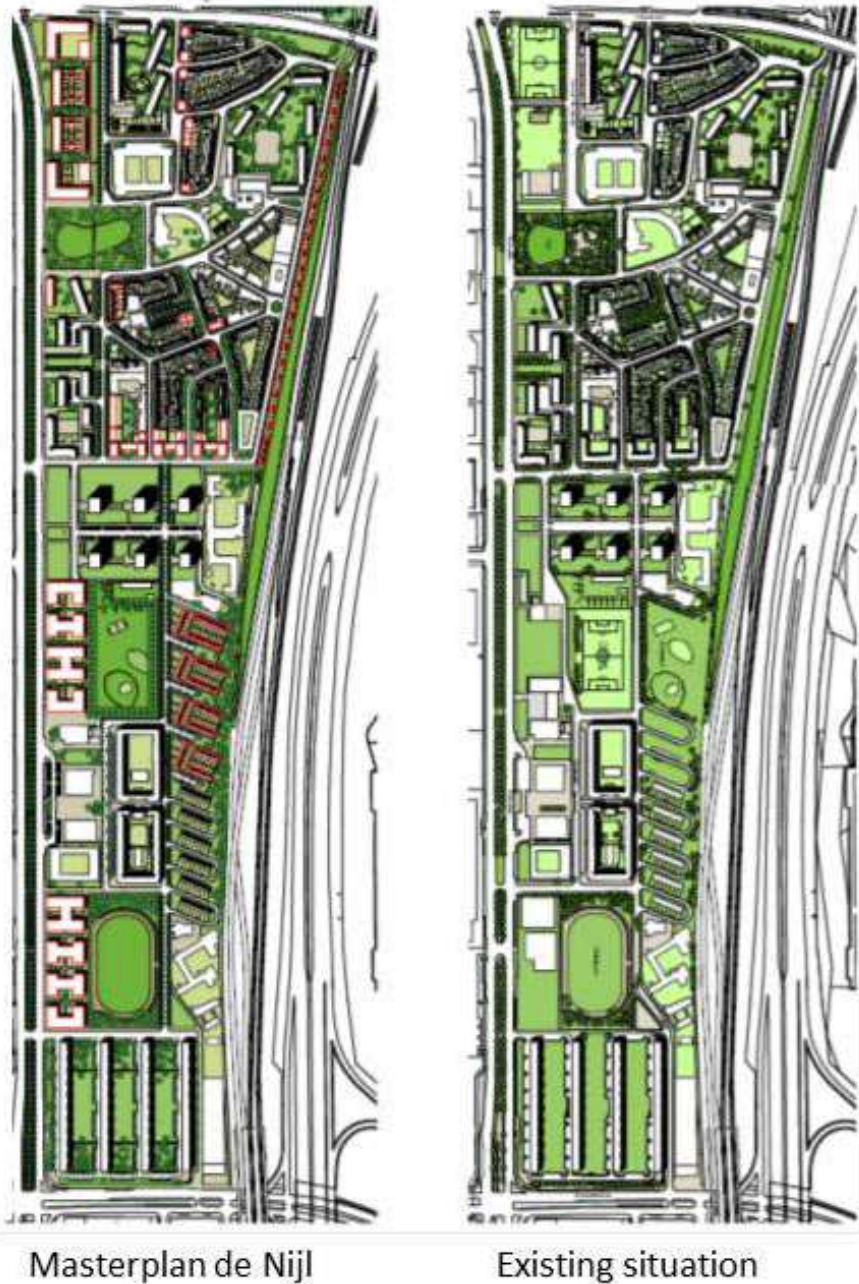


Figure 2: Masterplan Proposal 2007, source: city of Antwerp

Figure 3

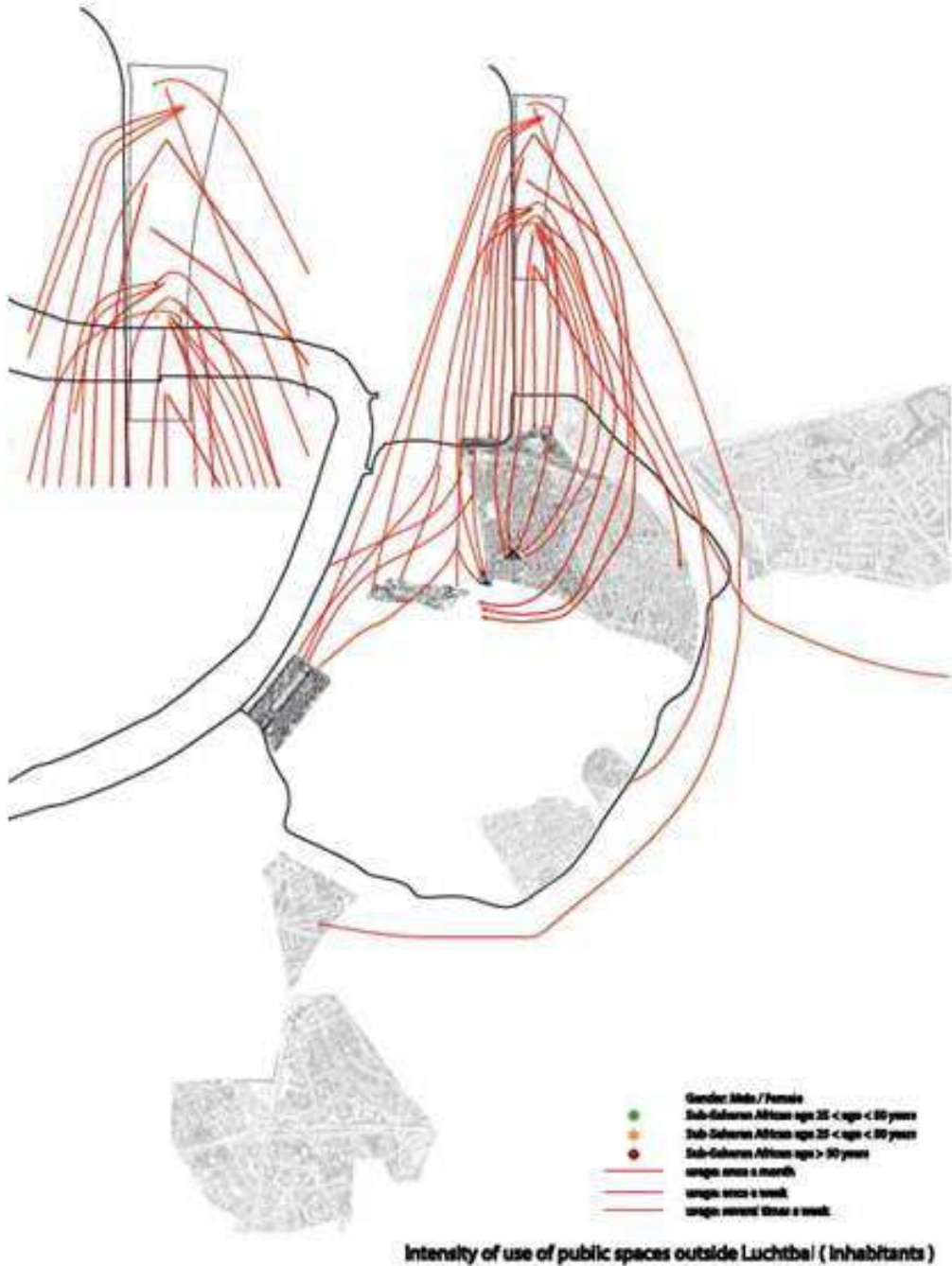


Figure 3: Intensity of use of public spaces, source: Schouwers, 2012

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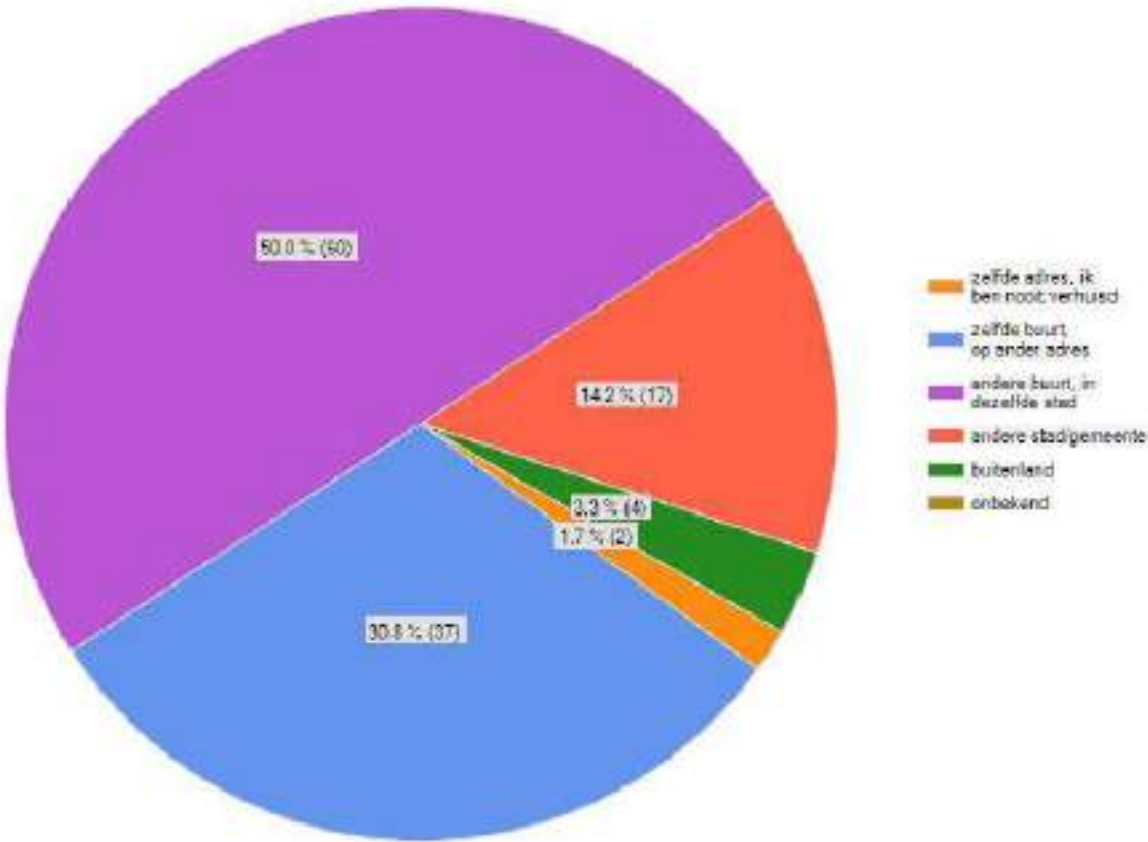


Figure 5: response to 6 statements

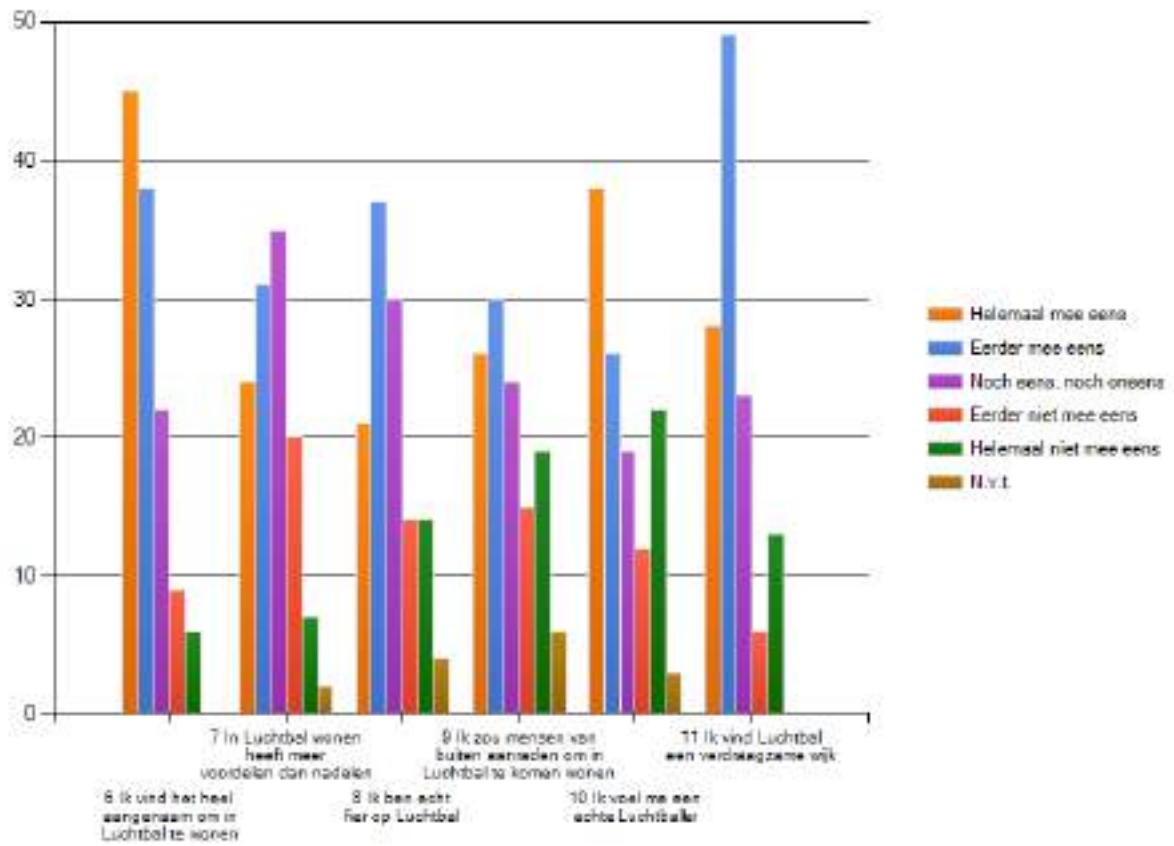


Figure 6: Orientation of the Luchtbal residents for daily facilities

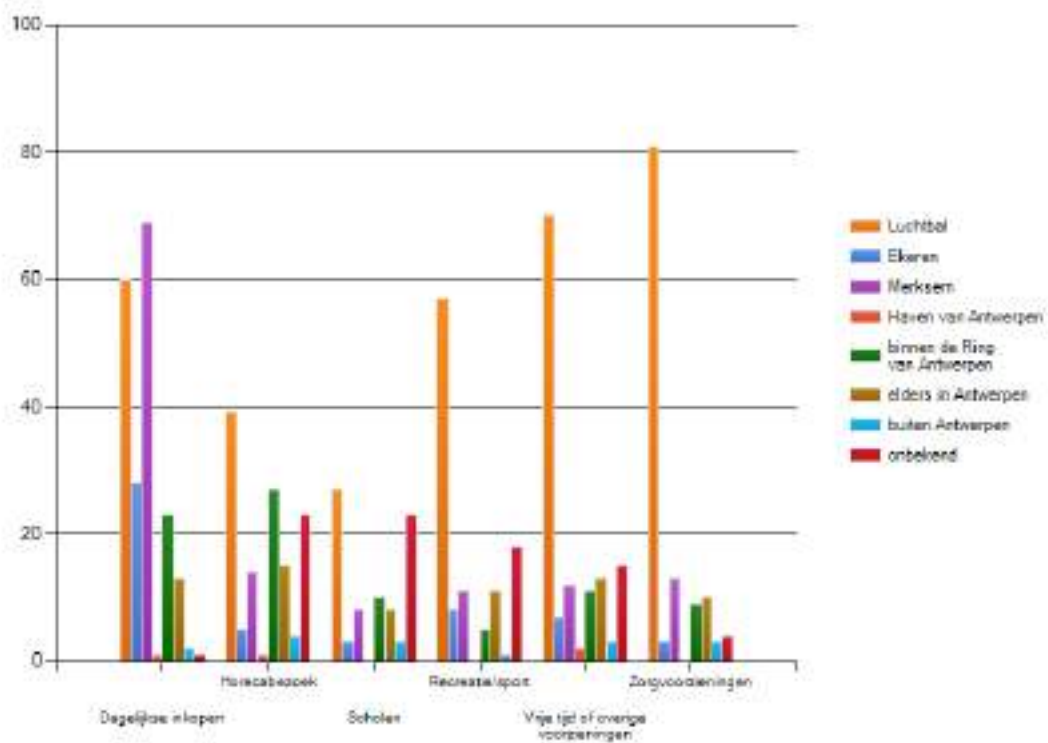


Figure 7: Investment wish list Luchtbal residents

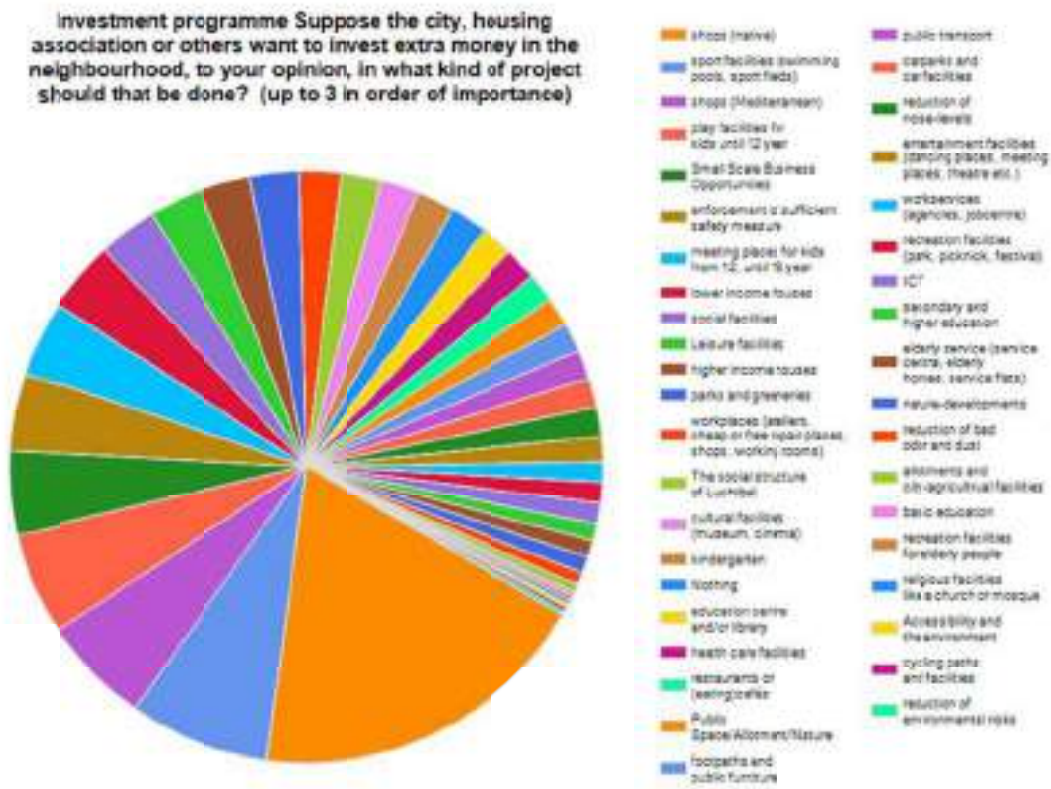


Figure 8: Overall view leading business actors around Luchtbal

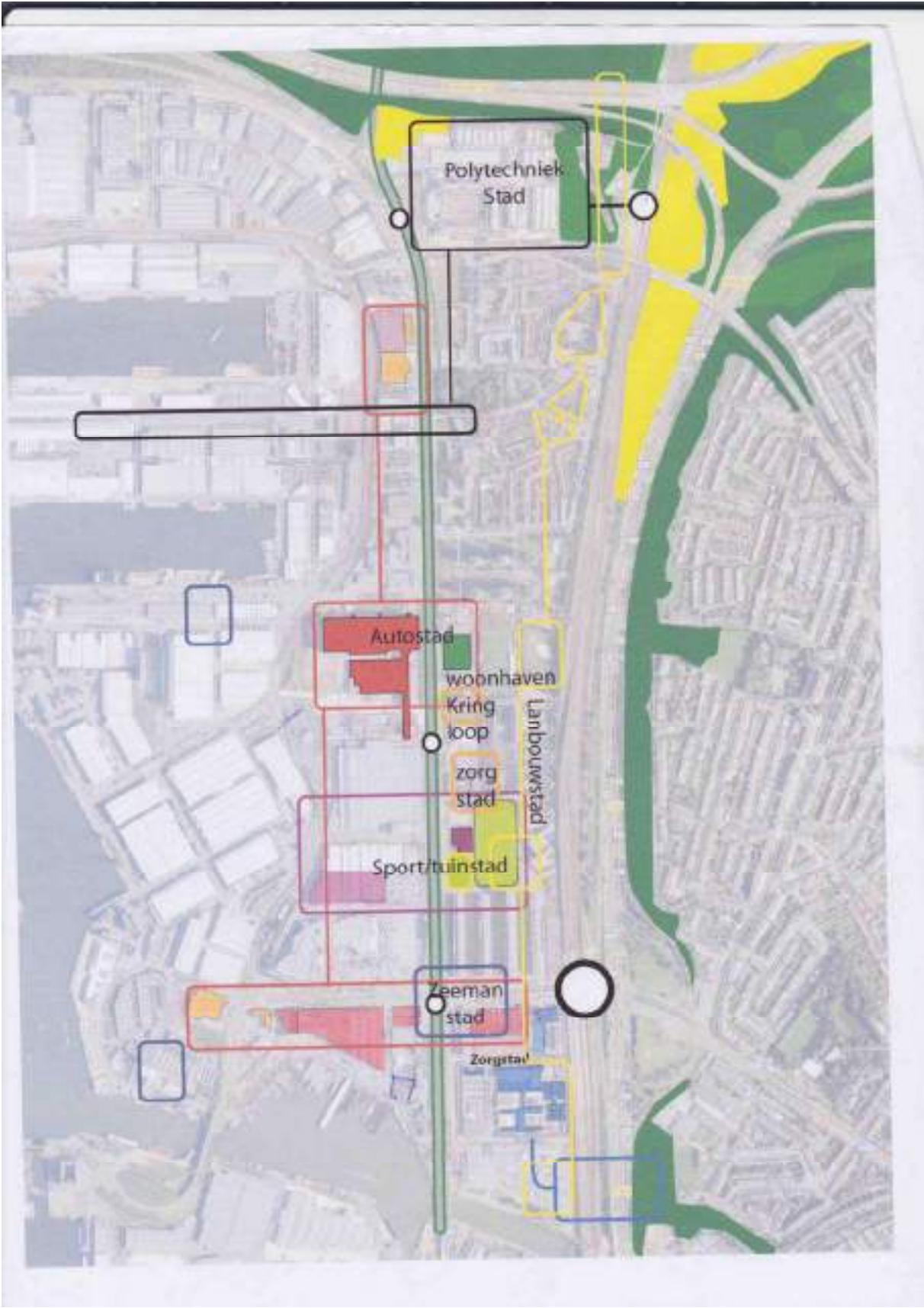


Figure 9: Opportunity Map Sport/Leisure Cluster



Figure 10: Opportunity Map Green Carpet Luchtbal

