Sustainable Summer School

recentre
centre for sustainable design

August 2011

Contents

SUSTAINABLE SUMMER SCHOOL

During the summer of 2011, the Sustainable Summer School focused on sustainability in design practice, and brought together REcentre's goal on supporting and promoting sustainable design education in the Meuse-Rhine Euregion with the Institute without Boundaries' unique global approach to design thinking and sustainable design principles that reflect resiliency.

The curriculum of this summer school incorporated interdisciplinary design practices that include design research and synthesis, brainstorming and ideation techniques, feasibility evaluation, risks/threats analysis, sustainable design practice and effective design communication of concepts.

The Sustainable Summer School explored the historical region known as the Meuse-Rhine Euregion that is home to almost four million residents of Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands including the four study sites of the summer school: Maastricht (NL), Liège (BE), Genk (BE) and Hasselt (BE).

Recent projects in the Meuse-Rhine Euregion have focused on transborder collaboration to develop and enhance the unique identity shared by the residents of these three countries.
REcentre seeks to support the cultural development and transborder collaboration goals for the Euregion while at the same time highlighting the importance of sustainable design.
In collaboration with the Institute without Boundaries, the purpose of the Sustainable Summer School was to leverage existing expertise in sustainability in the region and bring together partners that are pioneering in their fields.

17 - 18/8 EDUCATOR'S WORKSHOP

Two days for faculty involved focusing on sustainability and the methodologies of the Institute without Boundaries, as well as how to conduct a charrette, design research techniques and synthesis methods. The faculty exchanged their experience, knowledge and expertise.
This discussion-based workshop had an emphasis on practical application and how to engage students in the actual charrette that followed.

19/8 INTRODUCTION

Introduction day: lectures on the Worldhouse Matrix, Systems Theory, Integrated Design Practice and Design Research techniques as well as introductions to the four different case studies and the team selections.

20 - 21/8 FIELD STUDY

Research days: the teams visited the four cities, conducted interviews with experts, and participated in community engagement such as field ethnography and on-the-street interviews with residents or other stakeholders.

22 - 23 - 24/8 DEVELOPMENT

Working days with different research techniques and methods including guest lectures by international experts, breakfast meetings, lunch seminars and evening talks with expert advisors. Through the process of research and analysis the teams worked together to develop innovative, sustainable and resilient design solutions for each of the case study challenges.

25/8 CONCLUSION

Presentation day: each team presented a single unified design concept to a panel of experts, faculty and stakeholders from the Meuse-Rhine Euregion.

Ten days in 'Heerlijckyt'

by Luigi Ferrara, director of the Institute without Boundaries, Toronto, Canada

"People from around the world coming together to learn about sustainability and with their joint knowledge and experience provide creative solutions for communities in need; this was the vision behind the Sustainable Summer School organised by REcentre in partnership with the Institute without Boundaries (IwB). In August of 2011 it became a reality.

The Meuse-Rhine Euregion, famous for its agriculture, coal deposits and Hanseatic history, is a region in transition economically, socially and environmentally. The cities of Hasselt, Genk, Liège and Maastricht, once part of the Hanseatic League and subsequently industrious areas of Belgium and the Netherlands, are now mobile, modernised and evolving European Union.

REcentre was tasked with bringing the latest knowledge and innovative ideas from around the world on sustainable design to the Euregion and to encourage students and practitioners to experiment and innovate. They reached out to the IwB to share our interdisciplinary design strategy, our systems thinking and community engagement practices. Immediately a strong working partnership was formed between the organisations where both parties contributed ideas and were learning and understanding in a co-operative manner.

After a visit to this region, we toured and met academic institutions, organisations and stakeholders within the cities. Through discussions with Jan Boelen, director of REcentre's partner Z33 and executive director of REcentre Natascha Rommens, we settled in on the idea for a summer school that focused on sustainability. This idea was something that the IwB had identified as a dream project for itself and reflected Jan's dream of a European IwB pilot project. Within a year, our two teams had detailed four exciting projects for teams consisting of students, professionals, advisors and facilitators.

The summer school started with a two-day educator's workshop to share learning strategies, followed by two days of field research in the respective cities, five days of intense work on the projects, and finally a day of presentations to stakeholders and community members. We were excited and pleased to find people who had come from as far away as Australia, Mexico, Canada, Iran, Jordan, Italy, Turkey, Ireland and Portugal, as well as people from nearby in France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. They gathered for ten days in the idyllic setting of the castle 'Heerlijckyt van Elsmeren' (Geetbets, BE), which was locally operated in a sustainable manner. The mix of ages, genders and professions was remarkable with mingling among economists, industrial design students, professional social workers, financiers, architects etc. From the start of the educator's workshop the principles of sharing, central to design and critical to collaboration and co-operation, were evident. Educators from around the world shared best practices and insights while learning IwB systems and opening up to the challenge of an IwB interdisciplinary charrette - an intensive collaborative design project.

The field research sessions had teams biking through a village that had sunken 30 feet over 30 years, climbing coal heaps, visiting ethnically diverse at risk neighbourhoods and viewing a closed down urban farm. A remarkable set of relationships developed between people of goodwill from the Meuse-Rhine Euregion with those from around the world. The locals were seeking ideas and giving input to the challenges they face.
The process began of coming together, listening, researching, knowing, understanding, imagining, testing, creating and finally sharing. Teams then started the dynamics of working together, which unfolded with its highs and lows, its insights and opportunities.

Leading a team myself, I was able to personally experience the renewal that comes with creative work through activities such as sketching and writing, which I hardly have time to do as a director of a design school. Highlights of my particular team experience included listening to six talented women, having the pleasure of daily visits from advisors from Germany, Belgium and Dutch Limburg, touring with Genk's committed neighbourhood manager Dirk Habils, and meeting with the town's economic development office and other representatives.

I also had the pleasure to visit other working teams, to advise them on their group dynamics and to see the creative sparks flying as charrette participants tackled the issues. It was a privilege to watch the teams form and storm, followed by the flourish of knowledge, insight and proposal development. It was not surprising to see the reactions that stakeholders and community members had toward the results of the work generated by this summer school.

They were overwhelmed at the specific solutions that could potentially resolve problems that have existed for decades. The result was deeper insights about how in the process of sharing their problems the necessary solutions would not come from a person, but from the community working together.

The last day of the Sustainable Summer School perfectly summarised how this experience had catalysed the people involved. The work of the summer school is in reality just beginning, including a meeting with the Mayor of the city of Genk, to the follow-up meetings with the delegates from Ireland and the IwB, and to the phone calls between schools. Like the tornado that blew through this region, tumultuous times lie ahead for our planet economically, environmentally and socially. How we as people respond to the challenges that are on the horizon will say everything about whether we can overcome them.

Will we work together and innovate to create the economies of tomorrow? Can we move beyond a coal based past to a creative new future? Can we get along and accept the new cultural diversity caused by migration and interdependence? Can we change our patterns and create new ones that keep our fragile planet in balance? For me the experience of the Sustainable Summer School in the Meuse-Rhine Euregion began to answer all of these questions. I found myself experiencing and living the future we need today."

"The result was deeper insights about how in the process of sharing their problems the necessary solutions would not come from a person, but from the community working together."

RECENTRE

REcentre, centre for sustainable design, is a knowledge and promotion centre propelling the development of sustainable design in the Meuse-Rhine Euregion, consisting of Belgian and Dutch Limburg, the region Aachen (D), Liège (BE) and the German speaking community of Belgium. The organisation gives the Euregion a head start in sustainability so as to ensure that our young, creative enterprises are ready to face the increasingly more demanding consumers, saturated market and the global competition. REcentre also aims to attract the opinion of the authorities and the general public to the importance of sustainability and the role of design therein.

REcentre makes its network and know-how accessible to designers and companies, and sets up projects with a social agenda, in which designers, companies, schools and the authorities work together to develop sustainable products or services.

REcentre is an Interreg IVa project supported by Wallonie Design (Liège, BE), Z33/Design Platform Limburg (Hasselt, BE), NAiM/Bureau Europa (Maastricht, NL), Flanders District of Creativity (Leuven, BE) and Dutch Design Week (Eindhoven, NL).

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REcentre and sustainable design

What can sustainability become? Where do I find support? How do I get started? What is sustainable and what is not is a debate which will go on for quite some time. But we cannot wait for the outcome of that debate to start working and living more sustainable now. Sustainability bridges culture and economy. Companies present increasingly more socially valid alternatives for products and services. Designers have an important task in such an approach. By combining aesthetics with practicality they have the perfect DNA to make us distance ourselves from our current way of thinking and acting and inspire us at the same time. Design can help us to give attention to products that are sustainable. Many examples of companies in the Meuse-Rhine Euregion show us that this approach works. It is REcentre's mission to promote this bridge and to draw our attention to it. The organisation has shown us that it pays well to invest in sustainable design.

REcentre in practice

REcentre develops products, services and projects that are accessible to designers and companies, the general public and students.

Companies

REcentre has published sustainable success stories from diverse companies in the Meuse-Rhine Euregion. This publication, 'Beyond the Hype-Sustainable Success Stories', showcases good examples of embedding sustainability in the companies' strategy. Recently the organisation conducted a large scale market survey on sustainability and sustainable design within the group of products with a longer lifetime and a visible design aspect like interior products and appliances. Based on the results of the market survey, REcentre invited four companies that wanted to launch a sustainable product or service on the market but needed help in the correct interpretation and positioning of their product. Their product ideas are evaluated by experts in design, marketing, communication or management, resulting in a value proposition and action plan.

General Public

REcentre supports bottom-up sustainable initiatives focusing on several themes: water, food and public space. In 2010, REcentre launched a competition to design a water carafe for the campaign 'drinKraantjeswater' (drinkTapwater). This campaign wants to stimulate the inhabitants and government of Belgian Limburg to drink tap water instead of bottled water.
In the summer of 2011, REcentre opened a pop-up restaurant called 'Local Food, Local Homes' in the centre of Maastricht that let people discover what 'eating local' means. Chef Nora Rödner travelled around the Meuse-Rhine Euregion to visit local producers and select an array of local products to prepare a three-course menu each day for three weeks.

Education

With the annual project Sustainability at School, REcentre propels a variety of projects in collaboration with teachers and students from different schools in the Meuse-Rhine Euregion. In the academic year 2009-2010 the sustainable themes 'water', 'local 80km' and 'multifunctionality' were treated by designers and design students. During the following edition sustainable and economically viable real life business cases were tackled. Sustainability at School 2011-2012, focuses on one specific case: the neighbourhood of Saint-Gilles in the city of Liège. Students will collaborate with the inhabitants of Saint-Gilles in a participatory way, strengthening the social cohesion of the neighbourhood, enhancing the responsibility of the citizens and facilitate the creation of a shared and positive sense of community, in order to create new social sustainable initiatives.

REcentre supports bottom-up sustainable initiatives focusing on several themes: water, food and public space.

INSTITUTE WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

The Institute without Boundaries is a unique academic and research program in the School of Design at George Brown College in Toronto, Canada.

The IwB seeks to achieve social, ecological and economic innovation through collaborative design work. Founded in 2003, the Institute offers an innovative postgraduate programme in interdisciplinary design strategy. The IwB is both a school and a design studio. Professionals and students from a wide variety of backgrounds come together to collaborate on projects. The Institute pulls from an extensive group of designers, architects, engineers, educators and experts in social innovation and sustainability in order to form skilled teams that deliver projects such as charrettes, new designs for housing, cities and community engagement programmes.

At the IwB, they believe that sustainable design is the practice of considering the wider impact of every design decision made, and the design of objects, systems and environments that improve on existing unsustainable solutions. Sustainable designs improve the world for the better and ensure that future generations have the same access to resources and quality of life that we currently enjoy.

Holistic design

The IwB believes that an interdisciplinary, holistic approach is essential to successful sustainable design. Many of the unsustainable systems and solutions we see in the world today are the result of decisions and designs undertaken in isolation and without considering the wider impact. Mutually beneficial solutions that cross traditional disciplinary boundaries can bring about effective sustainable transformations that are often low-cost and simple to implement.

Design for resilience

Societies face constant challenges, whether they are the result of human or natural actions. These can impact individuals, communities and countries and create a cycle of non-sustainable solutions. Design for resilience is the practice of anticipating these inevitable challenges, and designing tools that give people and communities the ability to face and overcome them. Sustainable design must incorporate resiliency as an important objective if it is truly to be a sustainable solution.

10 challenges for design

1. Responding to the needs of our world's aging population so that people can continue to contribute to society and lead healthy, engaging and vital lives.
2. Providing coordinated assistance and reconstruction in cases of emergency, natural disaster, severe weather and man made disasters.
3. Developing shelter for all people that balances the utilisation of resources and the distribution of opportunity between the developed and developing world.
4. Creating new means of sustainable transportation for goods and services both physical and virtual without damaging the environment.
5. Preserving and enhancing diverse identities and cultures while maintaining social cohesion and allowing for global migration flows.
6. Feeding the planet equitably while maintaining and enhancing soil quality and providing for respect and dignity to all species.
7. Bringing access, knowledge and understanding to peoples of the planet so that there is powerful and positive communication between them.
8. Imagining and developing clothing that extends our life and health while providing beauty, identity and personal self expression.
9. Designing a world economic system where you receive greater rewards the more good you do for people and communities.
10. Creating systems that regenerate soil, water and air, conserve and optimise their use and provide for the energy required to sustain our lives.

Prepared by Luigi Ferrara, director of the Institute without Boundaries

THE MEUSE-RHINE EUREGION

The Meuse-Rhine Euregion consists of five regions in three countries:

- the middle and southern part of the province of Limburg (NL)
- the Aachen region (D)
- the province of Limburg (BE)
- the province of Liège (BE)
- the German speaking community of Belgium (BE)

The Meuse-Rhine Euregion also consists of four nearby regions:

- the arrondissement of Huy (BE)
- the arrondissement of Waremme (BE)
- the arrondissement of Leuven (BE)
- the arrondissement of Southeast-North Brabant (NL)

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"With this project, forty international participants had the unique opportunity to work seven days on proposing sustainable solutions for four cities in our Euregion. The partnership with the Institute without Boundaries gave new insights in sustainability and design. Furthermore, the experts and educators that guided the different teams were an example of professionalism.
I'm convinced that projects, such as the Sustainable Summer School, give the Meuse-Rhine Euregion a head start in terms of sustainability. Because it creates an excellent climate for sustainable companies who want to settle here."

Noël Lebens - Deputy of culture of the Province of Limburg (NL)

"When I visited the beautiful location of this summer school, I saw people from all around the world working together and searching solutions for our ecological and social issues. What I found interesting to see were the yellow, blue, orange and other coloured post-its everywhere on the walls. This means that people were actually thinking 'out of the blue' and brainstorming about all the possible solutions. I was really impressed by the final results of the Sustainable Summer School. I believe that our Euregion needs more of these kind of projects to come to a sustainable future."

Gilbert Van Baelen - Deputy of culture of the Province of Limburg (BE)

"This initiative shows us that design is not just the realm of designers. It actually involves a lot of social actors: sociologists, engineers, architects,… Also the different ages of the participants were an advantage to come to insights that are suitable for everyone. And that was exactly the strength of the Sustainable Summer School: a multidisciplinary and mixed age group collaborating together on different cases in our Euregion. The final concepts are also examples for other regions who want to invest in sustainability."

Paul-Emile Mottard - Deputy of culture of the Province of Liège (BE)

Four case studies

by Michelle Hotchin, program coordinator & project manager of the Institute without Boundaries, Toronto, Canada

More than fifty-four participants from eighteen countries came together in the Belgian countryside to tackle sustainability issues on three different themes: food, water and public space. They were supported by a team of over fifty educators, facilitators, expert advisors, guest lecturers and stakeholders who brought their skills and knowledge about techniques and the issues faced by these communities to each of the teams. Four cities in this region were selected as case study sites and a real-life issue facing each city was addressed by the teams during the Sustainable Summer School.

In Maastricht, two teams took on the theme of food as they addressed the issue of urban farming in the city centre. One team proposed a three-part approach to enhance local food culture through a system of scalable hubs, a smart phone application connecting people and an educational campaign. Another team suggested leveraging the local waterway system by using a food-barge to collect and distribute food, as well as to engage and educate people about local food issues.

In Hasselt, teams explored issues around the theme of water as they considered the issue of surplus clean water in an area affected by subsidence due to past coal mining 800 metres below the surface. They proposed a new regional master plan with sustainable agriculture, business and recreational water features to raise the local visibility of the issue while also providing valuable uses for the surplus water in the area.

In Liège and Genk, two teams addressed the theme of public space with proposals for two very different neighbourhoods, each of which was facing unique but related issues in the post-coal mining economy. The Liège team proposed artfully reclaiming the street through a cleverly funded community project that would engage residents and encourage community connections.

The Genk team proposed utilising student art projects as part of a community revitalisation project that would convert local terrils or slag heaps into mountains of flowers, purifying the landscape both figuratively and literally.

The process that created these creative yet feasible results is called a charrette; an intensely creative, interdisciplinary practice that saw each team undertaking field research in their communities, brainstorming and ideation around the issues they uncovered, evaluation and concept development, and finally comprehensive communication of the results.

This event brought together people from different disciplines, cultures and countries from around the world, all of whom shared a commitment to sustainability and a thirst for collaborative learning. Together they learned, designed and innovated, making the Sustainable Summer School a success and generating valuable new ideas around sustainability for four different cities in the Meuse-Rhine Euregion."

"...a charrette; an intensely creative, interdisciplinary practice that saw each team undertaking field research in their communities, brainstorming and ideation around the issues they uncovered, evaluation and concept development, and finally comprehensive communication of the results."

For the case study WATER, the team was challenged to find solutions for excess water in a former mining area nearby Hasselt (Eisden Dorp, Leut and Meeswijk).

The surplus water is pumped from former mining areas into nearby canals and the river Meuse. The team took a holistic approach to sustainable design and looked at the challenges and opportunities in the region that could be solved by this water.

WATER

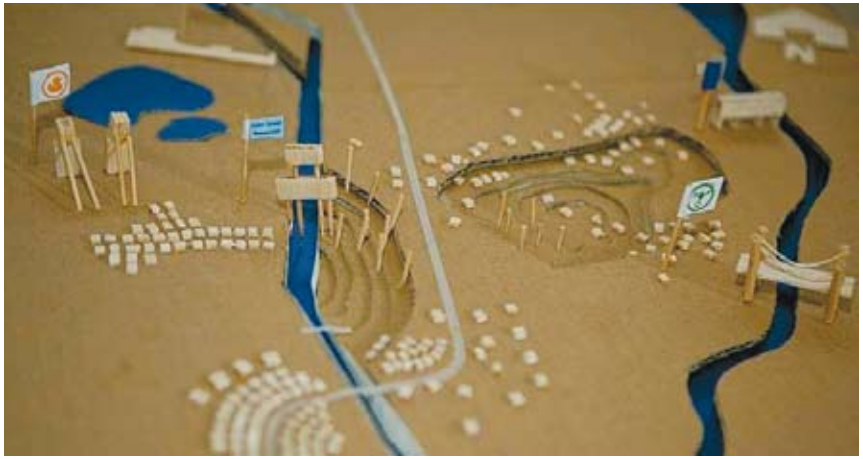
"The water team, so-called WET (Water Ecology Transition team), focused on the water issue currently facing Belgian Limburg. Decades of coal mining has caused massive subsidence and now without continually pumping the groundwater into the nearby river and canal, immediate flooding of local towns would occur.

The team proposed a phased regional strategy which addressed both the surplus high-quality water and also leveraged many of the regions strengths. Our proposal recommended the development of three distinct but connected hubs:

1. Watergate - a tourism focused aqua park and entrance to the Limburg national park,
2. CleanTech - a business hub focusing on green technology businesses and
3. Living Labs - a sustainable agriculture and water science centre of research.

These three areas could be linked by an expanded and enhanced cycle and walking network that would build on the existing regional bike network and position Limburg as a unique eco-tourism destination."

- by Barry Mac Devitt, CEO Design 21C - Ireland



"The water project dealt with the mining subsidences that caused the collapse of the underground tunnels which made the ground level sunk - at some places even up to fifteen meters. The result of this sinking is that the groundwater level is currently above the ground level, so continuous pumping of the area is required to prevent it from flooding. If the pumping would come to a halt, it would flood three villages and make ten thousand people homeless. To keep this from happening, enough water to fill thirteen Olympic-size pools is flushed away every day into the nearby river Meuse and the canal.

During our two-day trip to Eisden-Dorp, Leut, Meeswijk and Hasselt, we discovered this region's strenghts: high-quality groundwater, biking tourism, wonderful landscapes and a rich history of coal mining. We visited the pumping stations, the dikes, the villages and the garden city; and learned that there would be no simple solution to our problem.

During our brainstorming sessions we decided that our solution could not just focus on the water problem: the two extremes were pumping forever or not even pumping at all. Pumping forever is not economically feasible, nor sustainable. Not pumping at all is sustainable - since it is the natural thing to happen - but not socially manageable. The solution we provide must aim to enhance economy, social life and natural development. Our proposal is a phased strategy where three distinct areas are created which are connected with a bicycle and walking path network. This network can build on the infrastructure that is currenlty available.

The 'Watergate' area focuses on tourism and is a gate to the national park of Belgian Limburg. It connects the garden city with Maasmechelen Village, which is an outdoor shopping mall that attracts a lot of tourists. The area will provide a community park and a recreational site and will have some features that make the water problem in the region visible.

A second area is an area for sustainable business called 'CleanTech'. The current industrial site should be expanded for new sustainable businesses, preferably those who work with the excess water from the region or focus on green technology.

The third area is an area called 'Living Labs'. Parts of this area will be controllably flooded so researchers can explore the benefits of green agriculture and sustainable aquaculture, biomass (e.g. algae farms), and other nature research activities. This area would also promote eco-tourism as people can visit these labs and even help in the research.

Besides these three areas, there is an opportunity for smaller, complementary projects. Creating a landmark could enhance the region's identity. A sustainable drive-in bike hotel can promote tourism and enhance economy. A waterfall bridge emphasises the excess of water and could be a new shopping centre for local stores. There could be floating picnic areas or pumping stations for drinking water."

- by Sara Vanderheyden, student XIOS Hogeschool - Belgium

Team members

Educators:
Katja Craeghs, Greenpoint - Belgium
Michelle Hotchin, Institute without Boundaries - Canada
Dimitri Papatheodorou, Institute without Boundaries - Canada

Participants:
Sahar Abgarmyan, Politecnico di Milano - Iran
Denis A. Coelho, University of Beira Interior - Portugal
Fedrik Degrauwe, Artesis Hogeschool Antwerpen - Belgium
Daniel R. Garnier, George Brown College - Canada
Petro Karanxha, George Brown College - Canada
Ayca Kinik Altuner, Umea Institute of Design - Turkey
Fabio Lorefice, MAD-faculty - Belgium
Barry Mac Devitt, Design 21C - Ireland
Giacomo Piovan, Design Academy Eindhoven - Italy
Pauline Riordan, Dublin City Council - Ireland
Elvira de Rooij, Goodget - The Netherlands
Sara Vanderheyden, XIOS Hogeschool - Belgium

Expert advisors:
Arlene Birt, Backgroundstories - USA
Kristel Dewulf, HOWEST/TUDelft/UGent - Belgium
Leen Van Aken, Lessius Mechelen - Belgium

For the case study FOOD in Maastricht, two teams examined alternative systems for the distribution of products from an urban farm in Maastricht that was recently forced to close. In a region where the land is so fertile that production is almost a given, distribution has proven to be a problem.

The emphasis is on the development of various distribution scenarios that can be run on a small scale within Maastricht. The goal is to engage local residents not only in the demand end of the distribution process but also in the running of these scenarios.

FOOD

"The food group of the Sustainable Summer School was a composed mix of people from various backgrounds ranging from design, to business and agriculture. We focused a week long on food and the city of Maastricht. Our case started by meeting Stefan Muijtjens, an organic farmer, and his local farm 'De Tuin van Sint Pieter'. For several years he was able to produce a variety of quality crops. Due to distribution problems, Stefan had a hard time reaching out to the inhabitants of Maastricht. Therefore he was forced to quit his farm.

When we talked to locals of Maastricht about his initiative, we discovered that most of them were eager to buy locally grown crops. But availability, time and price were major obstacles for them. People that were working during the daytime couldn't access the local farm before its closing time. Elderly people found it more convenient to buy their food in the supermarket. The experience of the farm wasn't compelling enough to persuade students to pay a bit extra for organic and local produce. So the team had to find a way to bridge this gap between the farmer and the people by overcoming these issues.

Looking at the historical context of the city, we found that the river Meuse played a key role in the development of this old Roman city. Architectural elements from the past like the bridge over the river provide a cultural experience that attracts a large number of tourists every year. This is a huge opportunity for local farmers, like Stefan Muijtjens, to promote and sell local food products.

Out of the observations and the context mapping we created a new brief for our food case: create a sustainable, organic and locally sourced food system that is resilient and engages citizens of Maastricht in rewarding experiences.

"Through brainstorming, sketching and prototyping we developed a conceptual food system based on the idea of a floating farmers market."

Through brainstorming, sketching and prototyping, we developed a conceptual food system based on the idea of a floating farmers market. This would be located on the river Meuse and near the old bridge, the cultural hub of the city. The system could develop in three different stages: short-, medium- and long term. In the short term the floating market would start out as a Sunday event. This could attract locals and tourists on their free time by providing them a cultural food experience. In the medium term the event could become a Sunday ritual. Side projects like an educational boat 'Noah's ark' and a medicinal boat 'Farmacy' could pop up. By connecting the farmers and the city through the river, the food market could become part of the Maastricht identity. In the long term the food system could expand from the bridge hub on the river to the local bus network. In this way the distribution of the locally and organically grown products could become more convenient for the farmers and for the people of Maastricht.

This food system has economic and sustainable potential. It could enable awareness about the quality and environmental benefits of organic and local produce. It could reconnect farmers with the city and it has the potential to attract locals and tourists by providing them a compelling riverside food experience."

- by Ben Hagenaars, MAD-faculty PhD - Belgium

"Within the location specific study of Maastricht, the designated case study was food and urban farming. Situated in the Netherlands, Maastricht is a city which is lively and noted as an international hub for professionals, students and families. Within the city's published 'Vision 2030', Maastricht aims to be recognised as a leading centre of innovation and knowledge.
However, when confronted with the question of urban farming, Maastricht faces challenges in means of offering a supportive distribution system. In the past, such lack of support has resulted in farms being forced to close operation. 'De Tuin van Sint Pieter', an organic farm on the heights above Maastricht, just beyond the city limits, was the focus of the food team during the Sustainable Summer School. The team had to try and understand why the farm had failed economically and to develop a strategy and design concept.

The structure of the week was very good: two days in Maastricht hearing great lectures from experts in the food area, listening to the farmer of 'De Tuin van Sint Pieter' telling his frank and honest story and also interviewing people on the street about their attitude towards food. The rest of the week involved long days on project work which was very analytical at first but became more design focused and applied as the week progressed. It was really interesting to see the multidisciplinary nature of the team expresses itself with different personalities coming to the fore in different phases.

It became clear that one of the key problems was the disconnect between the producer/farmer and the consumer/citizen. The farmer was passionate about organic food and its quality, but could not connect with a huge market of citizens and visitors on his doorstep. The citizens wanted access to good food at the right price but due to modern life pressures had become a bit lazy and got sucked into convenience. It was decided that it was essential to crack this relationship between the producer and the consumer. But how?

"It became clear that one of the key problems was the disconnect between the producer/farmer and the consumer/citizen."

The final concept proposed for Maastricht was the 'Hub'; a system of micro-activities which aims to better connect the urban farmer to the urban consumer: connecting the 'makers' and 'takers'. By tapping into local acupuncture points such as public spaces, private homes, restaurants, supermarkets and farms, the Hub aims to inform, promote and reconnect the entire community with the importance of local, organic and fresh produce.

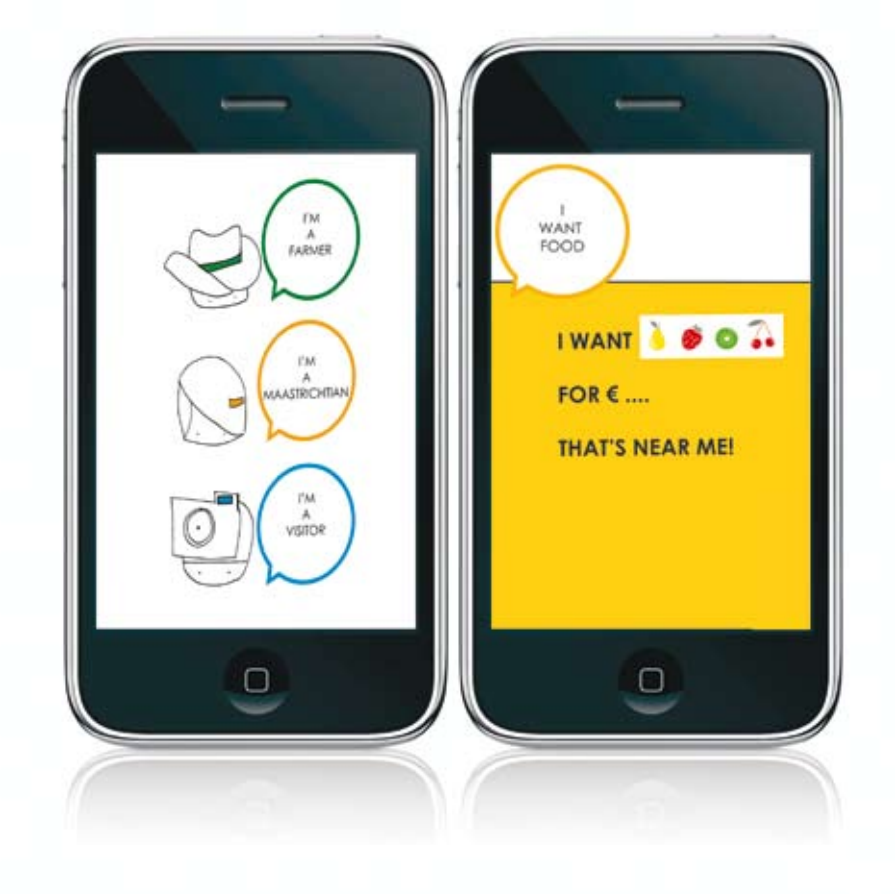
Creating an embedded connection between the farmer and his customers, the citizens, would have to be achieved on a number of levels and through different mediums. We developed a strategy around three main areas; changing the mindset, using the internet, and exploiting the physical city and its public space. To assist with communication we created a cartoon character called 'Gus', as in aspara-'gus', who would personify living food and help breach the mindset of the customer.

Changing the mindset: the team became increasingly aware of the complexity of food production and distribution in the world and its relationship to sustainability issues, at both the local and planetary level.

Gus, the asparagus

In order to shift mindsets, food must be seen as a critical pillar of both healthy life and cultural identity. The slogan 'Food is life, Food is culture' would help to build this connection and would also form a key part of Maastricht's platform for European City of Culture in 2018. A logo was designed, 'Hoi – Enjoy local food' which would be seen on billboards, t-shirts and bicycles.

Optimising the virtual: the lack of information about food availability and price was tackled through a phone application, geared to bring together the producer, the citizen and the visitor in Maastricht. This allowed the farmer to put out basic information on food type, price and farm location, while the consumer could search for what food is available in their area and what price they are willing to pay. The same phone application would provide rich food experiences for the visitor, outlining food cycle trails, food markets and farmers encouraging farm visits. The phone graphics would expand on the city food logo and resonate with the style of the cartoon character 'Gus'.



Exploiting the physical: In order to give traction to a more dynamic relationship between the producer/farmer and the consumer/citizen, it would be necessary to make the production of food culture much more visible in the public life of the city. The concept of the 'Food Hub' would be the means to do this. Eventually the Hub might be housed in some significant building, possibly adapted from a previous use, and would be the best and most interesting place to go in Maastricht to find out more about food production, food distribution and food consumption. The team did not assume that a budget would be available for this 'mature' Hub and so developed a versatile suite of hubs ranging from simple market stalls to mobile bike stalls configured in the shape of various vegetables and fruits. This mobile infrastructure, constantly inhabiting the public space of the city, would combine information, marketing and retailing and remind citizens of the value of fresh good food and the fact that its source was their own hinterland. Entrepreneurial ideas associated with the Hub included a bike cargo company, to run fresh produce from the farms to the city markets, which might have an initial pilot phase involving students seeking summer work.

With the execution and growth of these three areas over a multi-phased installation period, the Maastricht community would establish and prosper stronger relationships between the urban farmer and urban consumer. The Hub is a scalable platform which would allow Maastricht to grow and furthermore to be recognised as one of Europe's food and cultural capitals.

- by Dick Gleeson, Dublin City Council - Ireland and Sophie Tobin, Politecnico di Milano - Australia

Team members

Educators:
Evelyne Au-Navioz, Institute without Boundaries - Canada
Marc Stevens, IwB Alumni - Denmark
Kar Yan Cheung, Bruce Mau Design/IwB Alumni - Canada

Participants:
Jean-Gilles Cahn, Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry - France
Eimear Fitzsimons, Design 21C - Ireland
John Geoghegan, National Digital Research Centre - Ireland
Ben Hagenaars, MAD-faculty PhD - Belgium
Allan Legaspi, Istituto Europeo di Design - Mexico
Una McGrath, Dublin Bus/Designing Dublin - Ireland
Darrin Woodcock, Action Lighting - Canada

Sandra Moutinho, Brave New - Portugal
Dick Gleeson, Dublin City Council - Ireland
Jos Laugs, ABKMaastricht - The Netherlands
Christine Lieu, George Brown College - Canada
Sophie Tobin, Politecnico di Milano - Australia
Myrtha Zierock, Free University of Bulzano - Italy

Expert advisors:
Nik Baerten, Pantopicon - Belgium
Marc Maurer, Maurer United - The Netherlands
Alok b. Nandi, Architempo - Belgium

For the case study PUBLIC SPACE Genk, the team was challenged to develop solutions that promote social cohesion in a former multicultural mining neighbourhood. The population in the area is highly diverse, has a low level of education, high unemployment, weak social cohesion and its commercial activities are under pressure.

The design brief given by the city of Genk was to come up with socially sustainable solutions for the Vennestraat, a former economically flourishing street. The team had to keep the historical identity in mind when reinventing the street into a vibrant (multi)cultural hotspot engaging with the recently opened cultural and design site C-mine.

PUBLIC SPACE Genk

"Over the course of a week our team came up with some tangible opportunities for the city of Genk to re-imagine the Winterslag neighbourhood. Once a vibrant commercial district and uniquely small business oriented in an area where the mines formerly dictated business, this area of Genk needed fresh eyes and new ideas or it would stagnate beyond repair.

Our team spent two days in the streets of Winterslag. Meetings with community leaders were arranged and touring was facilitated over those two days. Very quickly it was apparent that those in charge were perhaps too far removed from the situation to see the shortcomings of the existing condition of the neighbourhood. It was time to hit the street and engage with the active users to understand the place more holistically.

We focused our proposals on the Vennestraat. This street was a string of both open and closed small storefronts but what really stood out was the established multiculturalism. People whose families had formerly worked for the coal mine. Super friendly and eager to share their ideas, these citizens' contributions were instrumental in our process. The Vennestraat is capped off at one end by what is now the C-Mine. Though this centre is a stunning repurposed mine in the form of a cultural institution, the population in closest proximity felt displaced and underused the facility. The cohesion between the mine and the former neighbourhood of the miner population was lost and needed to be revisited. One advantage of the location of the C-Mine in relation to the Vennestraat was that C-Mine could easily become a bookend to the neighbourhood as it was located at the top of the street. C-Mine had undergone a branding strategy and had established logos. We drew out that strategy and elaborated on it by extruding the shape of the logos and proposing it as urban furniture. These 3D logos could then become surfaces for gathering, resting, planting and maintaining cohesion between the street and the C-mine. We also imagined the slagheap, a mountain that local youth had branded with their own Winterslag campaign as a landmark for annual community celebration. Planting the surface of the heap as a neighbourhood effort makes for a beautiful and harmonious landmark that uses the pre-existing slagheap and addresses the collective memory of the former mining community.

Beyond establishing landmarking and brand cohesiveness, we structured a wayfinding system for visitors and residents of other parts of Genk to manoeuvre the area. Set back from a major road, the value of the Vennestraat and its array of shops and sights is easily passed by. By establishing parking areas alongside the highway and having the visitors enter the neighbourhood in a new way, the existing parking system on the Vennestraat is relieved and the street becomes an ideal pedestrian marketplace.

Finally, the value we deduced from engaging the active population of the street was something that needed to be communicated to the municipality. Hindered by bureaucracy and linguistic differences the municipality was not including the residents in the transformation of the street. We designed a citizen engagement system through cards that uses the four primary languages of the street as well as icons to provide a communication tool whereby feedback, preferences, needs and wants could be exchanged.

In conclusion, our proposal for Genk/Winterslag/the Vennestraat was less about product implementation and imposing more planning on the area but rather looking at what the existing strengths were and elaborating on them with the engaged street user as the primary resource."

- by Dana Seguin, University of Toronto - Canada

"I was pleased to work as an educator on a public space challenge in Genk along with Luigi Ferrara. Our team was comprised of dynamic, creative students from different countries, which helped to provide the background and skill sets required for our case study challenge. Our assignment was to develop a public space which promotes social cohesion between an existing multicultural mining neighbourhood and a new cultural centre (C-mine) and design school on the site of the former mine.

After a day of orientation, the team spent two days in Genk studying the area and meeting the people affected by the area. We had the assistance of the neighbourhood manager named Dirk Habils, who facilitated the local tours and meetings with key stakeholders. The next four days were spent brainstorming, researching ideas and solutions, and putting together a presentation with our recommendations. Throughout the week, we attended lectures from sustainability experts who inspired us with their presentations.

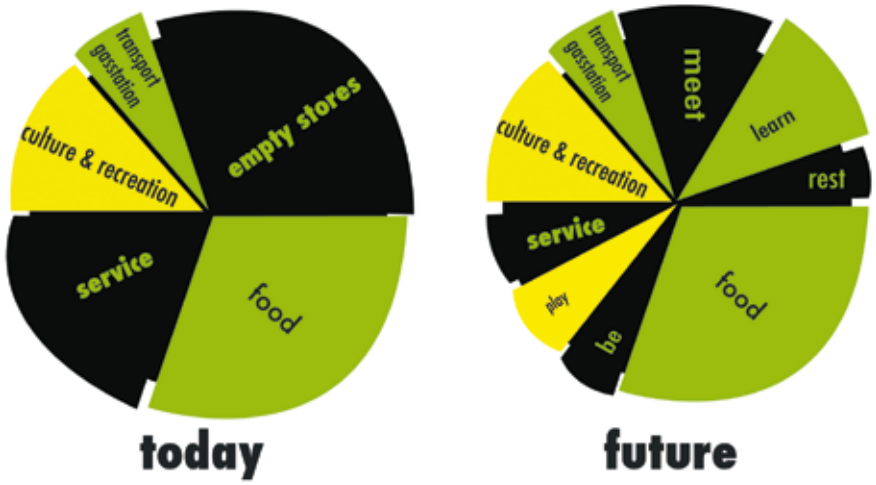
Our team's recommendations went beyond the realm of public space and covered all aspects of sustainability: social, economic, environmental and cultural. Genk had many of the ingredients for social cohesion already in place, they just needed to be enhanced to address the needs of the wider community. A successful initiative that Genk had undertaken involving local children designing flags for the main street was highlighted as an example of good work. As a result, the overarching theme was 'We Transform Space', based on the acronym 'WTS' for the area called Winterslag. The idea of involving the people in the area in projects around the community change would create better social cohesion. To further involve the diverse communities, the team suggested utilising artwork and pictograms to enhance any form of public outreach.

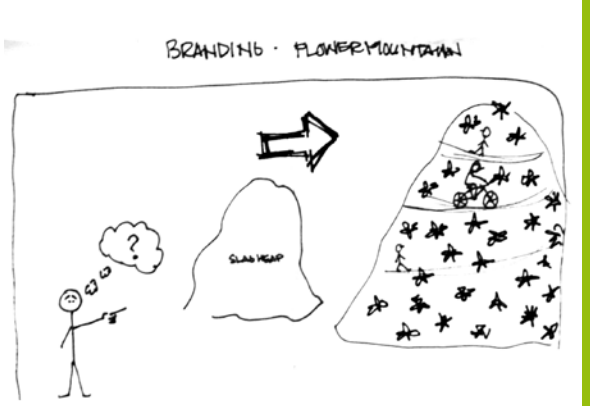
"The idea of involving the people in the area in projects around the community change would create better social cohesion."

By bringing aspects of the multicultural neighbourhood to the cultural centre and aspects of the cultural centre to the multicultural neighbourhood, the two communities could start to integrate. A key project to start this integration would be to build up the land between the neighbourhood and the cultural centre into a public space area that could be utilised by both communities for community and cultural events.

Another recommendation was to change the retail mix on the Vennestraat in the existing neighbourhood to incorporate stores and amenities that would attract people from the cultural centre and the design school to come to the area. A former slag hill beside the cultural centre would be opened up for the community to hike. Once a year, residents in the area would be invited to plant flowers on the hill using a postcard mailed to their residences on paper infused with seeds. Finally, by adding wayfinding features both inside and outside of the areas, people could be directed to the cultural centre and the Vennestraat when visiting the area."

- by Arlene Etchen, senior research consultant, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation - Canada





Team members

Educators:
Arlene Etchen, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation - Canada
Luigi Ferrara, Institute without Boundaries - Canada

Participants:
Johanna Blin, Entity Green - Jordan
Sanna Möller, Linnaéus University - Sweden
Dana Seguin, University of Toronto - Canada
Anne Smits, Tourism Flanders - Belgium
Marije van der Park, Bureau Marije Van der Park - The Netherlands

Expert advisors:
Bernd Draser, Ecosign - Germany
Veroniek Hermans, MaterialSource - Belgium

For the case study PUBLIC SPACE Liége, the team was asked to develop socially sustainable solutions for the area Saint-Gilles in the historical centre of Liège. The area is experiencing economic decline with a lot of vacancy and poorly maintained buildings. However, the area is rich in population, with lots of student housing and engaging project ideas and initiatives.

The designs for Liège had to be build upon the historical identity of Saint-Gilles and create fresh and playful initiaves.

PUBLIC SPACE Liège

"As a group we went through a very brief but fruitful two-day design research field trip. Inspired by our findings we developed some ideas and recontextualised them in a common vision and action plan.

In the city of Liège, where we were overwhelmed by the warmth of its inhabitants and were able to discover, under an apparent indifference towards social life of the neighbourhoud, true hope and willingness to come to a positive social twist, to move from the experience of a (perceived) difficult neighbourhood towards a situation of rediscovered shared identity and sense of pride. This was what provided the metaphorical key to the more general vision of our project: small seeds to seed the city, micro-interventions involving various stakeholders - students, inhabitants, shop owners - that would help reshape social life in the neighbourhood. Social innovation as such plays on human needs, desires and aspirations.

"Once again, we were reminded of a simple wisdom: the most interesting things always come in an unexpected way at an unexpected moment. All one has to do is to let things emerge and create the best possible conditions for it to grow."

In our project we started from a series of images, metaphors that stuck to our minds during our observations in the field, and played - initially unconsciously - a central role in the further development of the project. Somehow, in Liège we sensed an atmosphere of enjoyment. We tried to translate this fun lightness and surrealism that we experienced in the streets also in the way we communicated our project. It had to be simple, as the simplicity of small gestures that allows people to come together, to start a conversation, to find joy in sharing common life, and also in the sense of making our solutions easily accessible and easily implementable. We tried to communicate a certain sense of beauty; beauty itself being intrinsically oriented towards the good and the ethical.

One of our team members, a business PhD student helped to make this story a success by adding an innovative business plan to the project during the last hours of the design charrette. As such, we were suddenly able to move it beyond just being beautiful and oriented it towards the good, and to also be viable and able to survive in the real world. Once again, we were reminded of a simple wisdom: the most interesting things always come in an unexpected way at an unexpected moment. All one has to do is to let things emerge and create the best possible conditions for it to grow."

- by Virginia Tassinari, philosopher and lecturer at MAD-faculty - Belgium

"Together with designer Patrick Reuvis and architect Tim Prins, I was asked as one of the experts in a group that was developing a public space project in Liège. The group received a handbook that describes a series of methods to deal with the public space project. The project which addressed the lack of identity in the neighbourhood Saint-Gilles in Liège. The neighbourhood was a lively area in the past, because of a small-scale artisanal industry that was situated there. Since a few years this artisanal activity disappeared, together with a lot of inhabitants. Therefore the team wanted to put the local citizens in the picture and create a community feeling in this heterogenous neighbourhood.

The team started with an ethnographic observation of Saint-Gilles. They observed many houses that did not reveal any personality, with filthy facades, closed windows and curtains. Also they noticed that in the streets electricity cables were used to communicate via hanging shoes on them. The rumour was that this was a way for drug addicts to communicate with each other.
To trigger people to express why they like this neighbourhood, the team hung large banners in the main street of Saint-Gilles with the sentence "I love Saint-Gilles, because....".

The observations and gathered material were translated in a collage of impressions, in the form of a mix of pictures and words. Later the team mapped the area and linked their impressions to the map.

One of the proposals was to start an organisation that would plant 'interventionists seeds' in the area in order to stimulate people to engage and make their presence in the area explicit. Clearly inspired by the rainy summer in Belgium, the team defined one of these 'seeds' as a set of umbrellas. These umbrellas would be manufactured in the area and imprinted with pictures and quotes of the locals. The umbrellas would be collectively owned by the neighbourhood and installed in front of every inhabitant's door. Every time a person needs an umbrella he or she collects it from the doorstep and puts it back when it is not necessary anymore. Once a year, people would hang their umbrellas in the electrical wires - that were already used as a communication channel - to create a shelter under which the locals would eat and drink together. This constructive social exchange of identities via the umbrellas aims for more social cohesion between the locals and hopes that new creative initiatives will flourish as a result."

- by Liesbeth Huybrechts, vice dean research of the faculty of Arts & Architecture KU Leuven and researcher Social Spaces, MAD-faculty - Belgium

"Start an organisation that would plant 'interventionists seeds' in the area in order to stimulate people to engage and make their presence in the area explicit."

Team members

Educators:
Nathalie Crutzen, HEC-ID-Campus - Belgium
Giovanna Massoni, DesignStreams - Belgium
Virginia Tassinari, MAD-faculty - Belgium

Participants:
Sander Claessen, ABKMaastricht - The Netherlands
Cyrielle Doutrewe, Wallonie Design - Belgium
Zoe Eardley, University of Cambridge - UK
Nuala Flood, Trinity College - Ireland
Anita Morandini, Candalepas Associates Architects - Australia
Jiska Stoot, ABKMaastricht - The Netherlands
Hamed Tajali Zadehkhoob, HEC Liège University - Iran

Expert advisors:
Liesbeth Huybrechts, University Leuven/MAD-faculty - Belgium
Patrick Reuvis, b-ALLROOM/hetlabo/Lessius Mechelen - Belgium

REcentre thanks

Circulating educators:
Luigi Ferrara, Institute without Boundaries - Canada
Michelle Hotchin, Institute without Boundaries - Canada
Thomas Lommée, Openstructures/IwB Alumni - Belgium
Priscilla Machils, REcentre/FOLDit - The Netherlands
Natascha Rommens, REcentre - Belgium

Lecturers:
Philippe Claeys, VUB Brussels - Belgium
François Jegou, Solutioning Design - France

Partners of Sustainable Summer School:
Institute without Boundaries
NAiM/Bureau Europa
Wallonie Design
Z33
City of Genk
LRM
ID-Campus
HEC-ULg
Tuin van Sint Pieter
Heerlijckyt van Elsmeren
MAD-faculty
VMW
Cumulus Association
Architectuur Depot

COLOPHON

The Sustainable Summer School is initiated by REcentre and Institute without Boundaries

Text
Evelyne Au-Navioz, Arlene Etchen, Liesje Dessers, Luigi Ferrara, Dick Gleeson,
Ben Hagenaars, Michelle Hotchin, Liesbeth Huybrechts, Priscilla Machils, Barry Mac Devitt,
Natascha Rommens, Dana Seguin, Sophie Tobin, Virginia Tassinari, Sara Vanderheyden,
Veerle Verbakel

Content
Evelyne Au-Navioz, Michelle Hotchin, Priscilla Machils, Natascha Rommens, Veerle Verbakel

Organisation
Liesje Dessers, Priscilla Machils, Natascha Rommens, Simona Sandu

Contact info
www.recentre.org
www.institutewithoutboundaries.com

Photography
Bert Sohl

Graphic Design
Groenergras.com

Printer
Agora Media

The Sustainable Summer School has been realised thanks to the support of:

recentre centre for sustainable design

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LRM Oxygen for growth

REcentre is an Interreg IVa project supported by:

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