

# EUROPAN 14 - HUY (BE)

## SITE BRIEF



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### SITE SPECIFICATIONS

SITE REPRESENTATIVE
Mrs V. LIBERT – Régie Communale - Huy
ACTOR(S) INVOLVED
City of Huy & Regional Huy Hospital Center (CHRH)

TEAM REPRESENTATIVE
Architect
EXPECTED SKILLS WITH REGARDS TO THE SITE'S ISSUES AND CHARACTERISTICS
Architect, urban planner or landscaper

COMMUNICATION
Exposition of national résultats – Architect'House Bruxelles
(date to be specified)

JURY – 1 <sup>ST</sup> EVALUATION
With the participation of the site representatives
JURY – PRIZE SELECTION
Ranked Selection: with Winner (€12,000), Runner-up (€6,000) and Special Mention or no prize : The final decision rests with the jury

POST-COMPETITION INTERMEDIATE PROCEDURE (in fonction of the relevance of the projects):
Meeting to present the rewarded teams to the site representative(s), followed by a discussion
Direct selection of one winning team for an implementation process
Workshop onsite with the rewarded teams –winner(s), runner(s)-up, special mention(s)– allowing the site representative(s) to choose a team for the implementation phase
In case the site falls under public market regulations, organisation of a 2 <sup>nd</sup> step as a negotiated procedure to allow the site representative(s) to choose one or more team(s) for the implementation phase

MISSION GIVEN TO THE SELECTED TEAM(S) FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION
Urban study to be carried out of partial realization of the project following the relevance of the proposals

## EUROPAN 14 : Sainte Catherine neighbourhood in Huy

### History of the town of Huy

Huy is one of the oldest towns in Belgium. The first documents referring to its existence date from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

In the Roman era, the early village grew up around the *castrum* (castle) on the right bank of the Meuse.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, it became part of the Frankish kingdom of Clovis and was evangelised in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century by Saint Domitien, bishop of Tongeren. It then fell under Carolingian control, a period in which the German Emperor Otton I reformed the administrative geography of his empire and made Huy a county town in 943.

In 985, the last Count of Huy handed the county over to the Prince-Bishop of Liège, Notger. Huy thus joined the principality of Liège and became the 2<sup>nd</sup> "bonne ville" (good town) of the principality, which had 19 in all.

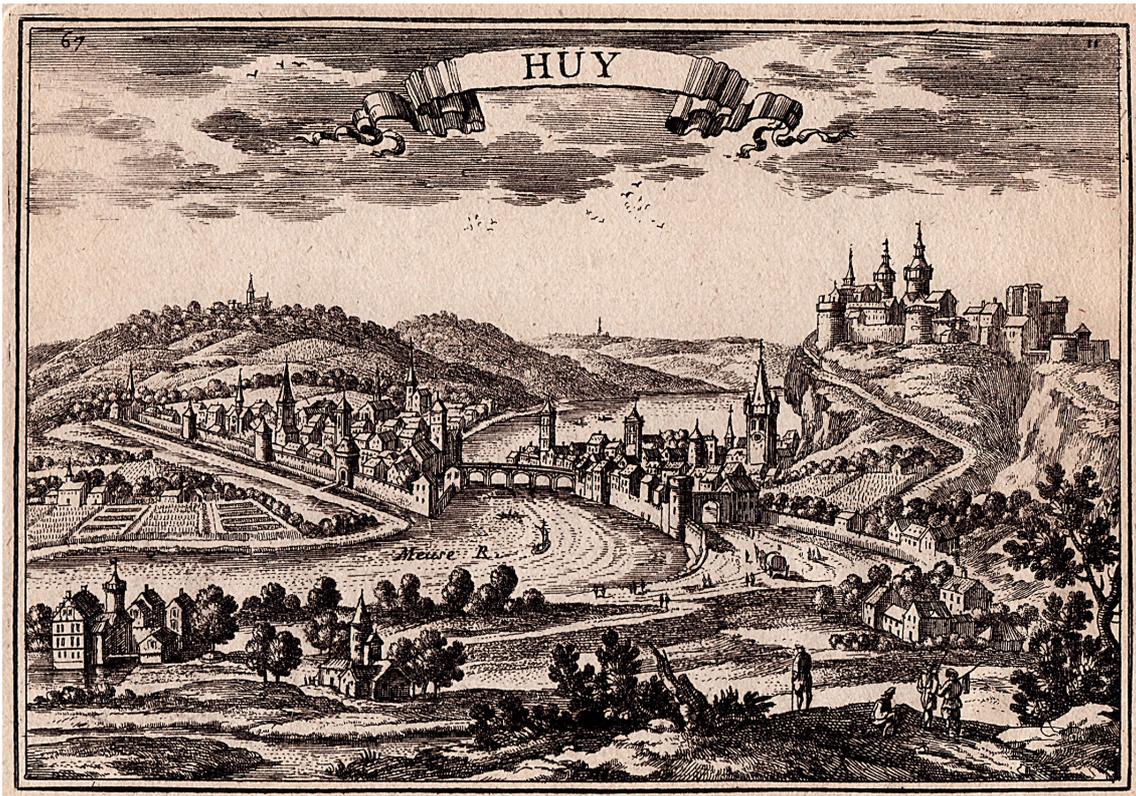
The geographical location of the town made it a centre of exchange and a market between the Hesbaye and Condroz regions.

As a regional market and an inland waterway stopover, Huy gave an image of a town with considerable economic activity. The existence of a particularly important mint, glasswork factories, the development of the first industries on the left bank of the river (bronze foundries and potteries) and the presence of good vineyards on the nearby slopes bear witness to its development in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, in a built-up area created between the river Meuse and two of its tributaries: the Hoyoux and the Méhaigne.

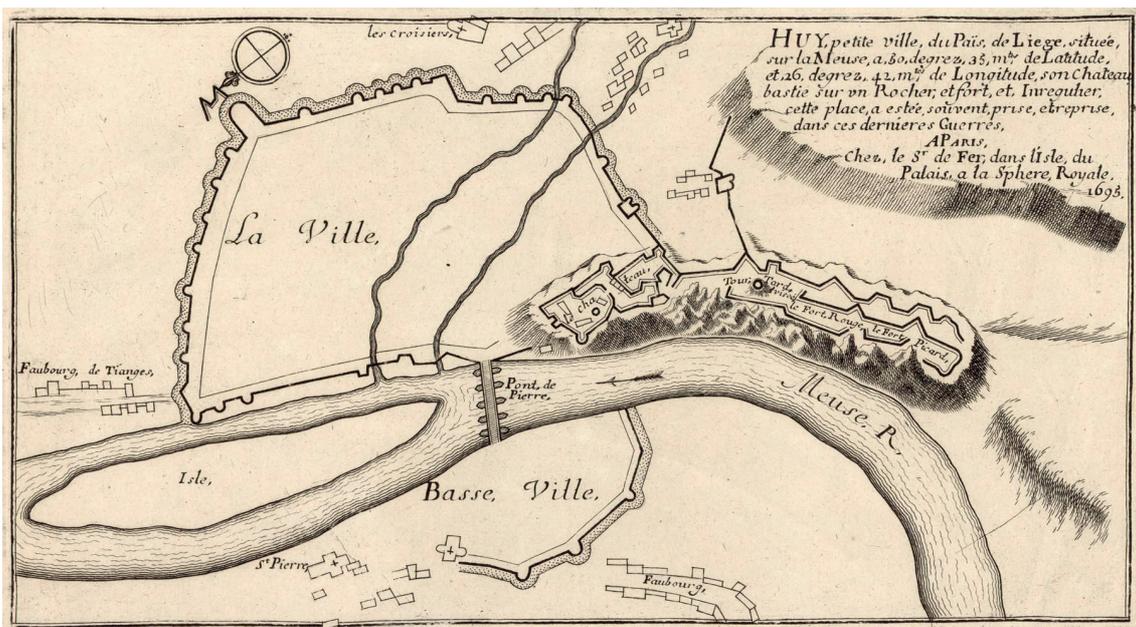
Urban prosperity, marked by the extension of habitat areas, soon created a collective awareness among the town's traders of their rights. On the banks of the Hoyoux several tanners, fullers, boilermakers, joiners, metalworkers (forge masters), etc. set up operations.

Metalworking in Huy goes back to the distant past. Boosted by the river Hoyoux (with its strong flow rate, ideal for water wheels), forges and furnaces enjoyed an unprecedented golden age in Huy from the Middle Ages onwards. The products of the copper industry were exported all over Europe from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The cloth trade was also one of the economic drivers of the town in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The rocky spur that overlooks the joining of the Meuse and the Hoyoux has always been an ideal site for a fortress controlling movements along the Meuse. The origins of the first fort on this spur overlooking the Meuse have been lost in the mists of time. An engraving dated 1595 (see Annexes) shows an imposing castle (Le Tchestia), which was the residence of the Prince-Bishops of Liège. The castle became a powerful fortress, allowing the Prince-Bishops to retreat there during times of conflict with their subjects. It was considerably enlarged, renovated and equipped with extra towers and walls, but its inner rooms were also embellished and enriched.



However, the brilliant destiny that Huy had enjoyed until then gradually faded away; it became a victim of its strategic position. The fortress suffered several sieges and fires, pillage and massacres, while frequent epidemics ravaged the fine town on the Meuse on several occasions, leading to many artisans leaving the town. For example, eight hundred houses were set on fire by the troops of Louis XIV during a siege in 1689.



The vineyard culture, so prosperous previously, went downhill after these invasions, and unfortunately there are not many winemakers from Huy nowadays.

In 1715, the Treaty of La Barrière ordered the destruction of the "Tchestia" and the town's ramparts. The townspeople then started to dismantle their castle, stone by stone, starting in 1717. The rock remained bare of any construction for a century.

It was only in April 1818 that the first stone of the present fort was laid by the Dutch, with the 9 provinces that make up modern-day Belgium coming under the jurisdiction of Holland after the Treaty of Versailles.

## Economic situation and development strategy of the town

If the crisis did not spare Huy and its old industries in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the production of tin was one of the jewels of local handicrafts; it was exported far and wide. Huy has adapted well and tourism has become one of the town's strong points. Historic monuments, natural sites of great beauty, religious and civil buildings and museums await visitors, who come to the town in ever greater numbers.

Another major activity that creates direct and indirect employment in the region is the Tihange nuclear power station, although it should - according to governmental decisions - close its doors and be dismantled in 2025.

This dismantling process will continue to provide several jobs for many years, although disproportionately to the present situation and with a clearly lower level of skill. Indeed, Huy will need to undertake a reconversion that could be based on a highly skilled labour force from the personnel currently employed in the power station.

In the 1960s the town centre was disfigured by the construction of the "grande percée" (big breakthrough), a motorway-wide road network crossing the town from north to south. This urban scar has now been healed, but it remains a direct and fast link between the bridge spanning the Meuse and the neighbourhood of Sainte Catherine, and consists of the strategic perimeter of this project.

While the town is now developing along the Meuse - and particularly between the new bridge (Pont de Wanze) to the west of the town and the nuclear power station to the east - the local authorities want to relaunch the north-south axis, particularly the neighbourhood of Sainte Catherine next to the town centre, which is the southern entry to Huy. The aim is to transform this old quarter in decline into an attractive centre of activity.

## Description of the strategic site.

Sainte Catherine stands at the end of the Hoyoux valley, whose slopes are still wooded, as can be seen from the photos of the site. To the north, Huy hospital has just been renovated and extended. The Place des Italiens square and the railway viaduct (in the south of the neighbourhood) make up the southern point of entry into the town.

Given the proximity of the hospital, the neighbourhood (and particularly the industrial wastelands next to it) has served (and still does) as a car park for hospital employees

and its many visitors.

In order to free up these spaces and give them a more attractive use, the hospital is currently finishing the construction of a two-storey car park just opposite it, to the west on the other side of the street (see photos).

## The project site and its issues.

The site, called "Thiry" is a disused former industrial site on which only the old foundry on Rue Sainte-Catherine still stands (see photos). The site, which bears the name of a company founded in 1888 by François Thiry (whose youngest son, Léon, invented 'silentbloc'), has been abandoned since 1998.

Stuck between two classified hills and the Hoyoux river, whose two arms 'embrace' it, the Thiry site is the southern entry into Huy. Right next to the hospital, this 1.7-hectare space - earmarked as an industrial estate in the Sector Plan - is the last vestige of the industrial heritage of Huy.

With regard to the EUROPAN 14 project, the "Thiry site" can be divided into 3 parts: (see orthophoto map):

- A first part to the west of Rue Sainte Catherine (on the left of the map) consisting of plot 61031 E020 in green (old foundry) and plot 61031 E020 in ochre; strictly speaking, this land constitutes the site of the project.
- A second part also includes plot 61031 E020, located to the west of Rue Sainte Catherine (on the right on the map), the location of a 121-bed rest home that was expected to receive a construction permit in 2016 for building work to start shortly. Apart from the rest home, the site will have a day centre and a residence with services of 20 units.
- A third part - 61031 E019, in green on the map - is the site of the old Porta workshops. It has been bought by a private company but no project for it is known at the present time.

## The issues at stake for the built-up area

On the town scale, the redevelopment of this site, apart from the reclassification of polluted former industrial land, will enhance the regional hospital of Huy and its future development. The rest home will allow many older people to live in the town centre in decent conditions, close to its amenities and facilities. As a reference, the site is 7 minutes' walk from the Grand Place (main square).

This new neighbourhood will include 'soft pathways', already present to a certain extent, that will allow residents to reach the town centre easily.

## The issues for the municipality as a whole

Huy has many old industrial sites with varying degrees of soil pollution. Indeed, industrial activity has always been located along the river Hoyoux and the railway line. The town is currently working on the reclassification of the neighbourhood around the railway station to the north of the Meuse, mainly thanks to European funding from the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund).

The adjacent municipality of Marchin (to the south of the site) has also reclassified the old industrial site of the Godin paper mill. It has recently been decontaminated and is now home to a number of companies.

The Felon-Lange site is one of emblematic industrial sites of the municipality. Whether it be Felon-Lange or the old Thiry factories, it is no longer possible to imagine or find heavy industrial activity there due to their proximity to the densely populated town centres. These two sites have been abandoned for many years. Felon-Lange is currently being redeveloped thanks to decontamination by the company Spaque (see Infra) and the introduction of an Urban Reparcelling Perimeter that will allow the site to constitute a mixed project combining housing, economic activity (offices), the extension of a school and the creation of public spaces.

The Thiry site, however, is still without a specific urban planning project.

The issue for the municipality is the revaluation of these old industrial sites in the town centre and their decontamination.

### Demographic issue

Huy is a municipality that has seen a major rise in its population over more than 20 years. Indeed, to assume the consequence of the demographic growth forecast by the Federal Planning Bureau, Huy needs to build 100 homes a year. At present, the town does not build enough homes to satisfy the ever growing demand.

This demographic growth is accompanied by the arrival of families of over 60 years of age who leave their homes, often too big after their children have left home, in neighbouring rural villages and come "into town" to apartments, especially those along the Meuse, which are in high demand. This demand leads to two phenomena: a massive production of two-bedroom flats and a high rise in property prices. In turn, this does not allow young families to stay in the town centre because the price of older single-family homes is usually too high, as is that of the new apartments.

This demographic phenomenon leads to a major demand for services, of which the hospital is an essential - and shaping - element for the maintenance and well-being of these populations.

### Economic issues

Huy has 3 main employers: the hospital (1,200 jobs), the nuclear power station (1,200 direct jobs) and the Town Council (700 jobs). As well as direct jobs, the nuclear power station creates many indirect jobs. However, it is destined to disappear, leading to a major decline in the local economy. Huy Town Council is working to create jobs in the area, particularly through the implementation of a tourism policy.

The hospital, a top-line health service, is certainly a structuring element for the Region as a whole. The site, which will shortly welcome a rest home, will enable its long-term development, particularly due to the size of the plots to be reclassified.

### Environmental issue

Huy aims to develop its 'green mesh' throughout the municipality. Many sites have considerable landscape and environmental value between the plateaux of Sarthe and Solières.

In parallel to this green mesh, Huy is a 'daughter' of the Meuse and is also crossed by the Hoyoux, the fastest-flowing water course in Belgium. Its 'blue mesh' is also a determining element, especially for the site surrounded by the Hoyoux.

These meshes will be integrated in a policy to promote public green spaces, involving the creation of new spaces throughout the municipality.

### The issues at the scale of the neighbourhood of Sainte-Catherine and the role of the site

The site is currently abandoned, and partially serves as a car park for Huy hospital (the owner of the site). Many buildings from the industrial era still survive, but they give a rather negative image of the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood of Sainte-Catherine is now undergoing a mutation. For about ten years now families have been buying up single-family former workers' homes and refurbishing them. This process is not enough for the neighbourhood to renew itself, because half of it (around 5 hectares) is still occupied by abandoned industrial buildings.

The isolation of the neighbourhood is mainly due to an arm of the Hoyoux, which prevents mobility across the neighbourhood. The only real connecting road is Rue Sainte Catherine. One of the issues for the neighbourhood is how to cross the two arms of the Hoyoux (partly covered), and its recovery by allowing the creation of a blue section and a green section for the municipality as a whole. Bridges should also be built to improve access to the site and the neighbourhood.

This project will also allow younger families who have experienced difficulty in finding affordable accommodation to remain in the town centre. The aim is to work on several kinds of housing units: terraced houses, 3-sided houses, apartments, residence with services, etc.

The site is classified as polluted, and very polluted in some places (see report by SPAQUE below)\*. Actually, Thiry produced machines for the former Godin paper mill and the batteries were stocked on the site. This decontamination is essential prior to the reclassification of the site. Huy Town Council aims to make a "SAR - site to be redeveloped" application for a subsidy to the Region of Wallonia.

A new urban fabric needs to be woven on this site, which has been abandoned for almost 30 years.

### The productive town

Coming down from the Condroz region, the Hoyoux flows into the Meuse. Since the Middle Ages the valley has been home to artisans who exploited the hydro power of the river. With industrialisation, metalworking and papermaking industries developed along the river, and they were later joined by a railway line and a main road.

Given its industrial nature, the neighbourhood now basically consists of industrial wastelands and workers' housing. The creation of an activity centre combining housing, shops, offices and productive activities and other services should give this forgotten area economic vitality again.

The programme therefore envisages the creation of a 'multi-functional area' combining housing, shops, offices and other business premises. Given the existing healthcare infrastructure (the hospital) and others already planned (rest home and residence with services), the option is for paramedical activities: specialised medical centres, analysis laboratories, manufacturing workshops and the sale of medical furniture/appliances, etc.

As a complement to the new activity centre, large-scale accommodation would be built to house and contribute to the social mix.

\*As an initial analysis, reading the conclusions (two last pages of the report) is more than sufficient. Here they are:

SPAQuE, s.a.

## 6. Conclusions

*Initially, it seemed essential to limit access to the site to avoid any risk of accident (the site has several pits and sharp objects, which could be a serious risk to children) and to avoid any unauthorised dumping (a common phenomenon on abandoned industrial sites).*

*Urgent measures should also be taken to remove any potential sources of soil and water pollution and of any elements that could pose a risk to the health of people who may visit the site (certain premises seem to be occupied by young people from the local area). Indeed, certain pits found in the old machine-tool shed still contain large quantities of oil, and several barrels, tanks and transformers are present all over the site. Dismantling all these potential sources of contamination should be undertaken by specialist companies, always observing the current legislation on removal of waste products.*

*Moreover, and bearing in mind the investigations made by the GEHAT/ISSeP in 2000 and Geológica in 2001 regarding the intervention values contained in the legislation of Wallonia (BGW = Biological limit value [AGW in French] of 04 March 1999 related to service stations) considered for a 'habitat'-type impact, it was seen that the site has contaminated soil in many places, i.e.:*

- *To the right of the old foundry halls where the soil is contaminated with lead and chrome, and where foundry sands have been detected up to 50 centimetres*
- *Near the oil recovery pit in the old machine-tool shed, where the soil is polluted by lead and certain polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs)*
- *To the right of the old assembly workshop, where the soil is contaminated by lead*
- *Near the old tube workshop, where the soil is contaminated with copper, lead, zinc and mineral oils*
- *To the right of the old engraving workshop, where the soil is contaminated with zinc.*

Furthermore, and based on the conclusions of the evaluation of the risk to human health, it is seen that, for a 'habitat'-type use with a market garden, the site has problematic levels of content of cadmium, chrome, copper, lead and several PAHs. For a 'habitat'-type use without a market garden, e.g. a residential park, we can still see problematic levels of lead, benzo-anthracene and benzo-pyrene.

In general, and bearing in mind the kind of risk linked to this soil pollution (ingestion and inhalation of soil particles), it is strongly recommended within the framework of site rehabilitation work to envisage the covering of all bare areas (not built on or not covered by a hydrocarbon coating, including the future residential park area) by a layer of healthy earth of a minimum thickness of 50 centimetres.

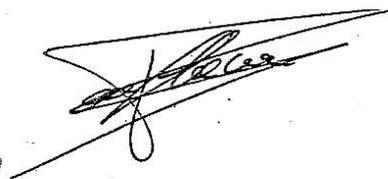
In addition, within the framework of the investigations carried out the Geological Studies Bureau, contamination of underground water with mineral oil (a floating layer of pure product 1.5 centimetres thick) has been observed close to the two semi-buried old tanks. The presence of a floating layer is considered as an urgent criterion for sanitation work. Further investigations were considered necessary to define the extent of this pollution, with a view to implementing sanitation measures to avoid its dispersion in a nearby water course located upstream. In this context, it would be advisable to carry out drillings around this point, measuring the thickness of the floating layer and analysing the samples of soil extracted from the drilling columns. The idea is to ensure that there are no more pockets of contamination in the soil that could release hydrocarbons.

Within the framework of rehabilitation work on the site, it would also be advisable to carry out a selective sorting of materials to separate the rubble that requires a higher level of landfilling, bearing in mind one-off contamination points of the soil (concrete) – mainly by hydrocarbons – from the rubble that can be considered inert (analyses made to support this) and that could be recovered for formwork, always observing the legislation on waste products.



**Gilles GOSSELET**

*File manager*



**ir. Philippe SCAUFLAIRE**

*Deputy Director*

Huy – “Celli” Site – Lg4002-2  
Summary of contaminating materials detected on the site – “Human risk” approach  
Land characterisation/cadaster department  
October 2003