

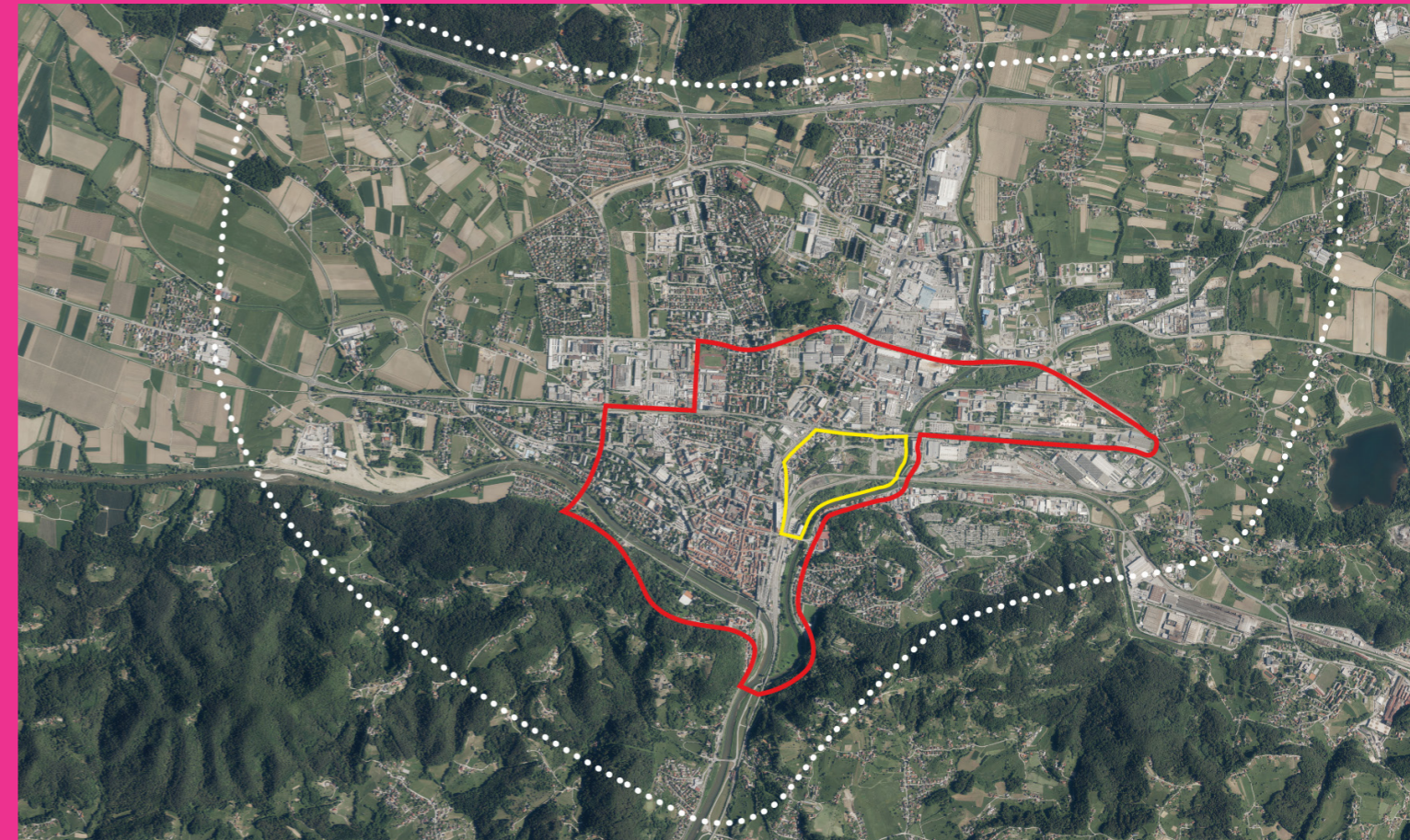
The Promise of Inhospitable Lands

Scale

XL
L

Team representative: architect/urbanist/landscape architect
 Location: Celje, City Municipality of Celje, Slovenian Styria region
 Population: 49,007 inhabitants
 Reflection site: 350 ha
 Project site: 31 ha
 Site proposed by: City Municipality of Celje
 Actors involved: City Municipality of Celje

Owner(s) of the site: City Municipality of Celje
 Commission after competition: preparing the further development of the idea and research as well as preparing the technical studies as a basis for the urban development plan



INHABITED MILIEU'S CHALLENGES

The "Stara Cinkarna" (Old Zinc Smelting Plant) site in Celje is marked by a history of industrial production that has influenced the economic, cultural, natural and health conditions of the city and its surroundings. The metallurgical and chemical industry activities that took place on the site for 120 years still have a major impact on the condition and use of the area today, as the soil is heavily contaminated with heavy metals and, in places, mineral oils. Over the last thirty years, the city has been trying to find a solution to prevent the spread of pollution, to reduce its extent or impact, and to manage the pollution. The pollution, the past activities and the associated negative impacts have excluded the site from the mental and actual space of the city, even though it is located in the very centre with excellent connections to the transport network. The site is a place of collective memory and a monument to the development of the city, but the burden of pollution has turned it into an alienated and undesirable place.

Celje wants to reverse the fortunes of a city with some of the worst air quality in the country and a city that is losing citizens to relocation, so targeted development of strategic locations is key. One of these is the "Stara Cinkarna" site, which on the surface has exceptional advantages: proximity to the city centre, multi-modal connectivity, regional accessibility, good insolation, large surface area. The challenge of developing the site lies not only in the figurative sense of approaching the burden of history, but also in the literal sense of allowing development on contaminated land that only conditionally can be encroached upon or removed. The challenge is to encourage sustainable development of the site that will at the same time prevent further negative impacts of contamination on the immediate and wider surroundings, and to design development that sees the openness and connectedness of the site, rooted in its history, as an essential asset. **The burden of space must therefore become its strength.**



HOW TO FACE THE BURDENS OF THE PAST AND USE THEM AS THE BENEFIT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AREA?

WHAT APPROACH SHOULD BE TAKEN TOWARDS THE VEGETATION THAT HAS ESTABLISHED REGARDLESS OF THESE INHOSPITABLE SOILS?



QUESTIONS TO THE COMPETITORS

The character of the "Stara Cinkarna" site is distinctly twofold: on the one hand it is open, well-connected, and green, while on the other hand it is almost untouchable, closed to development and polluted. The soil is just a thin layer over the industrial waste, the greenery is potentially hazardous, the water is polluted. It represents the future and the past of the city, both desirable and undesirable. It all depends on the next steps, which will see the development of the site as part of the development of the city as a whole. Steps that will confront the burden of pollution as the factor that has enabled the city to have the opportunity to set a different development path today, and that are able to tackle and overcome the limits of pollution.

Detailed site investigations show the complexity and intensity of the pollution, whose heterogeneity makes it impossible to choose only one approach for the development of the area. Due to the volatility of the pollutants, interventions in the area must be as unobtrusive as possible, otherwise they would spread the pollution further into the wider area. Already widespread pollution means that the benefits of the site - greenery and water-courses - can be detrimental.

The main issues for the development of the site are how to take advantage of the openness, connectivity and centrality of the site as a strategic location for the development of the whole city and to re-evaluate its role in the region, the country and internationally. The answer to this question cannot be offered unless there are clear answers on how to contain, stabilise and nullify the impact of pollution on plants, animals and people in the immediate and wider surroundings. How to cope with more than 10 times the levels of heavy metals in the soil and what attitude should be established towards the vegetation that has grown on these inhospitable soils? All these answers will offer an opportunity to reflect on the creation of a new identity for the site and the city itself, based on the heritage of the past in all its multifacetedness and stimulating the orientation of society towards a future of solidarity and sustainability.

