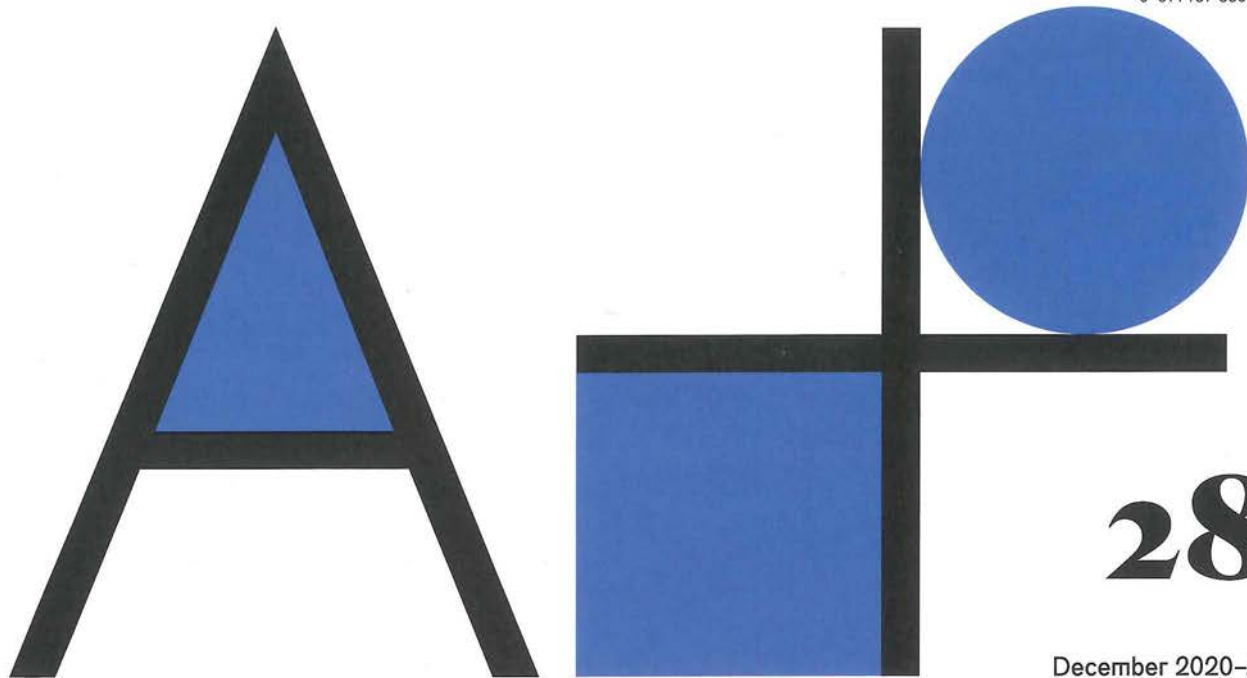




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Special Edition: Practices of Change



A timely change on the waterfront

Chloë Raemdonck

De Nieuwe Dokken, a multifunctional district in Ghent's old harbour, is currently being completely refurbished. The city's urban development agency Sogent is going all out for innovation: renewable energy, green and slow mobility, reduced water usage, and waste management. It is also taking a district-wide approach to sustainability. 'Integrating technical innovations in architecture is relatively easy, but designing affordable dwellings and new forms of collectivity is the true innovation', according to the architects of BLAF and DENC!-STUDIO.

'Live by the water. Bathe in the light.' This is the slogan which the project developer is using to attract buyers for the new apartments on the Schipperskaai in Ghent's old docks. Since last year, the Faar tower designed by Stéphane Beel architects and the Dek project by BLAF architecten have been completed and are occupied. But that is only the beginning of the large-scale development of this new, sustainable district, with no fewer than 400 new apartments and houses, shops and offices, a crèche, a primary school and a local sports hall on the northern dock.

The project took root 20 years ago, when the port industries moved further north. The city saw an opportunity to redevelop this area located near the Dampoort station and a stone's throw from the historical city centre. It was to become a new part of Ghent. In 2011 Ghent's urban development agency Sogent issued a call for the development of the grounds along the Schipperskaai. At that moment, the finishing touches were being put to the spatial implementation plan, based on the 'brochette' model of OMA Office of Metropolitan Architecture, in which buildings alternate with green public spaces along the waterfront. The tender documents gave a clear signal to tenderers: adopt a strong stance on sustainability. It appears from the attached urban sustainability metre, developed in 2009 by evr-Architecten

among others, that the agency was after solid proposals not only in terms of energy, but also in terms of mobility as well as water and waste management.

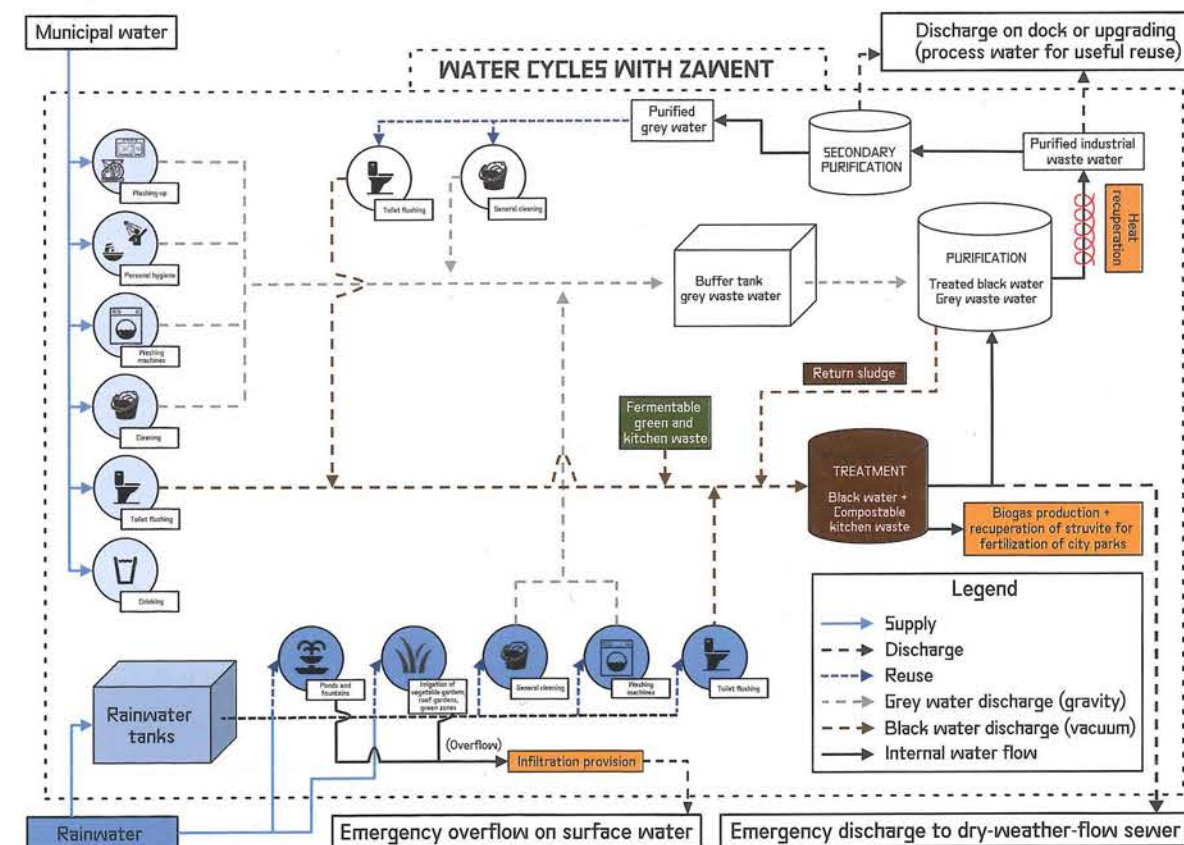
Among the tenderers, the proposal of Van Roey-Van haerents and Re-Vive, later associated in Schipperskaai Development, stood out. Not only did the famous names of the participating architects catch the eye (Stéphane Beel, DENC!-STUDIO, BLAF architecten, Maat ontwerpers, Onix International), but the design told a sound story about sustainability that went hand in hand with architectural quality.

The Zawent system (Zero waste, recovery of water and nutrients) provides an (almost) closed cycle of water, warmth and waste flows, and aims at first-rate communal spaces. The system is being laid under a bike and foot path that stretches along the entire development. The waste, which feeds the system, is collected centrally per building field. In this way, no garbage trucks need to drive through the neighbourhood and traffic can be reduced. Because there are no real streets, the housing blocks can accommodate large reception areas that give onto greens and front yards. In addition, this project is financed cooperatively: the residents are the shareholders. This type of model generates communal interests and residents are made more aware of their heat and water use.



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↓ The Zawent system (Zero waste, recovery of water and nutrients) provides an (almost) closed cycle of water, warmth and waste flows, and aims at first-rate communal spaces. The system is being laid under a bike and foot path that stretches along the entire development.



↓
BLAF architecten,
Het Dek, 2020



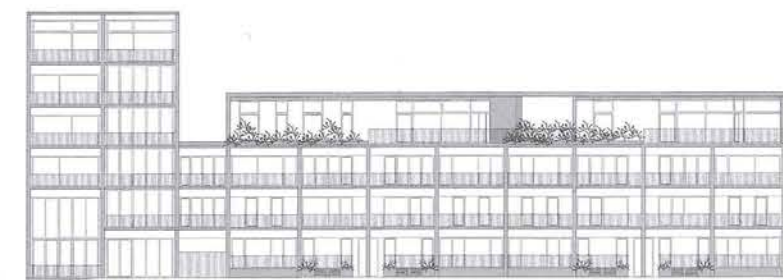
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But the choice for this sustainable system is not without risk. It has never been applied on such a large scale before in Belgium. The hazy distinction between private and public water and waste flows has no legal foundation. But Sogent and the Environment Department of the City of Ghent have been won over and are negotiating with the developer about, among other things, guarantees for a market-compliant energy price.

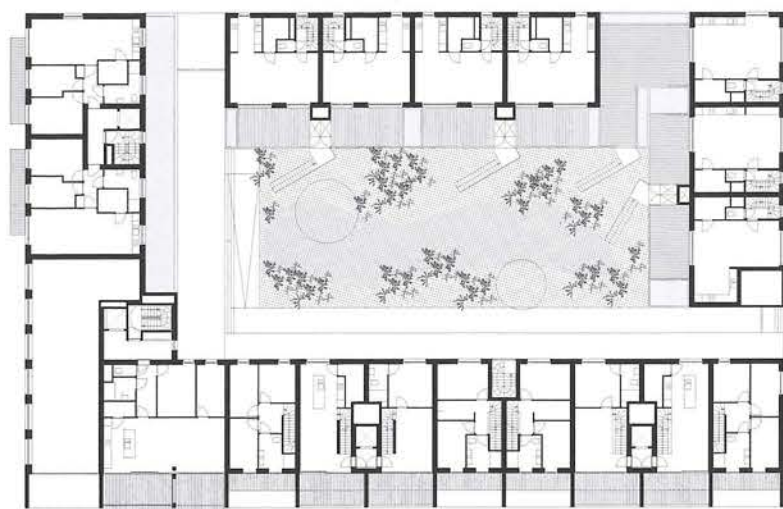
The designers are less worried about the Zawent system. Lieven Nijs of BLAF looks back on the early building steps: 'During the design phase and the execution, there was some groping in the dark, but ultimately technical innovation is only a question of getting the right people with the right knowledge to sit down together at the table. The water and heating system didn't have that much of an influence on our architecture. In fact, all the architects on our team were familiar with low-temperature heating. Whether this is done

by means of a heat net, a BEO field [borehole thermal energy storage] or a bio reactor doesn't really matter.'

Since then, six years have passed. After the dry summers of 2018 and 2020, reality has caught up with the project. Zawent is no longer innovative, but timely. And most of the development still needs to be built. For instance, DENC!-STUDIO is currently building a cohousing project next to the new Batavia bridge. 'The actual innovation isn't to be found in the building itself. We are driven by a sustainable ideology and tune the architecture and techniques to that ideology, regardless of whether they are "innovative" or not. For me, genuine innovation lies with the authorities and the project developers. It is in new forms of landownership – such as communal land trusts and cooperations – that I really see a key to sustainable building', says Bart Cobbaert of DENC!-STUDIO. →



Elevation



Floor 1

0 2 5 10m

Architect
BLAF architecten

Website
blaf.be

Official project name
Dek, Portier, Kade

Location
Koopvaardijlaan, Ghent

Execution architect
ELD

Programme
6 social housing units, 7 budget housing units (bel-étage), 8 quay-side units (ground- and upper-floor dwellings), 7 retail spaces (e.g. family physician, bicycle repair shop and coffee bar)

Procedure
PPP project with competition

Client
Schipperskaai Development

Lead contractor
Artes

Landscape architect
Ontwerpbureau Pauwels

Public realm
Antea

Structural engineering
ELD

Building physics
Ingenium

Sustainability
Ingenium

Acoustics
Daidalos

Completion
2020

Total floor area
4,600 m² (7,800 m² with terraces)

Budget
€ 7,000,000 (excl. VAT and fees)

The area is sometimes criticized in the public opinion for being built for the well-to-do, but 20 per cent of housing units are budget dwellings and another 20 per cent are social housing units. After all, innovative projects require a balance to be preserved between affordable housing and the techniques used. The role of the local authorities and project managers — such as Sogent, which also owns the land — is crucial in this respect. In most projects where developers build on public land, the offer on the ground is a defining award criterion. By setting a limit on the maximum number of points you can receive for your offer, as an authority you can impose genuine demands in terms of sustainability and architectural quality. Without that limit, you could fill up a

plot with cheap little dwellings, as long as you pay enough for the land. In addition, an authority can include guarantees for quality in the initial contracts.

A case such as De Nieuwe Dokken makes clear that innovation is not only a question of properly applying new techniques. The spatial context — the proximity of industry and water — must lend itself to the use of innovative systems. An attitude of good will among local authorities is essential, because solutions must often be found for legal and administrative issues. The design team must show itself willing to engage in a process where not all the elements are known. That is precisely what makes it interesting. ▲ ■ ●



→ DENC!-STUDIO is currently building the cohousing project Dubbeltuue.

Architect
DENC!-STUDIO
Website
denc-studio.be
Official project name
Dubbeltuue
Location
Ghent

Execution architect
ELD
Programme
Cohousing project with 16 housing units and collective spaces. The building will be connected to a heat network that provides 100% green heat.

Procedure
Competition
Client
Schipperskaai Development
Landscape architect
Ontwerpbureau Pauwels
Structural engineering
ELD

Sustainability
DENC!-STUDIO
Completion
Under construction
Product / Supplier
Desta (bricks)