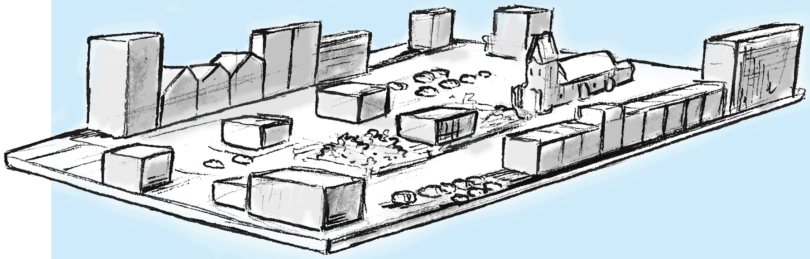
CO-NATURE SCI-FI WORKSHOP : BRUSSELS COOPCITY +

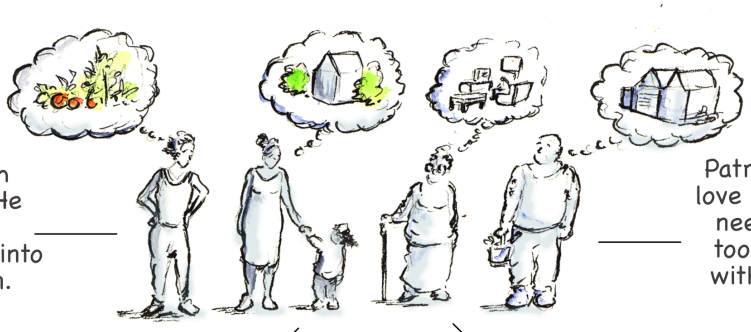
DUSTIN JACOBUS



THE START SITUATION

We are in the year 2030, Brussels has invested a lot in the city. They designed new parks and they turned many streets into green walking zones. Despite that the city has become greener many people have a desperate need for access to land. This rather poor neighborhood in Brussels has some potential. People with different motivations feel attracted to go to this place and start something here.

THE DREAMS



Brian wants to help with urban farming projects. He wants to turn every forgotten spot in Brussels into a food-producing garden.

Patrick is a welder and he would love to start his own workshop. He needs some space to set up his tools. He would love to help out with repurposing and up-cycling practices.

Erica and her daughter Louise want a decent house to live in. Erica has an interest in alternative housing techniques.

Antoinette wants a small service-flat with a balcony. She has green fingers and wants to keep a small balcony garden.

VACANT LAND

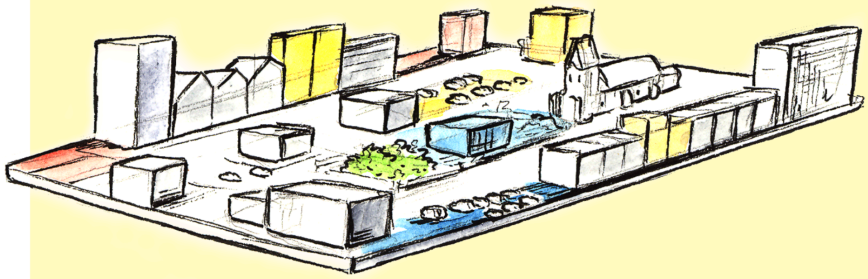
Brian takes his chances, he takes a look in the neighborhood and found a perfect vacant lot to start a cool urban farming project. There would be enough space for some small houses and a workshop. Now he just needs to figure out who the owner is.





MEET ALBERT

He figured out that Monsieur Albert is the owner of the vacant lot. With a pretty solid business proposal he meets Albert. Despite his idealistic ideas Monsieur Albert had no intentions to sell the ground. He had other plans he said. Brian left empty-handed.



WHAT WENT WRONG?

Brian tried different other suited pieces of land and even old buildings but he got no luck. Eventually he left his dreams behind and moved on. Three years later he noticed that the same lot was still there, untouched. He could not understand what happened and why his reasonable proposal did not convince Albert.

MEET THE LANDOWNERS



Wolters Invest:

A family owned business possesses several buildings and parking lots in the neighborhood.



Recturos NV

A private real estate company owns several large apartment blocks. They rent out apartments, offices, parking lots and construct new buildings.



Aldum Sprl

The property development business from Albert. He owns several vacant lots in this and other neighborhoods.

2035: THE CITY KEEPS INVESTING

In the meanwhile the city has invested in several projects to make this neighborhood more attractive. By doing so they hope to boost the neighborhood.

Cultural center

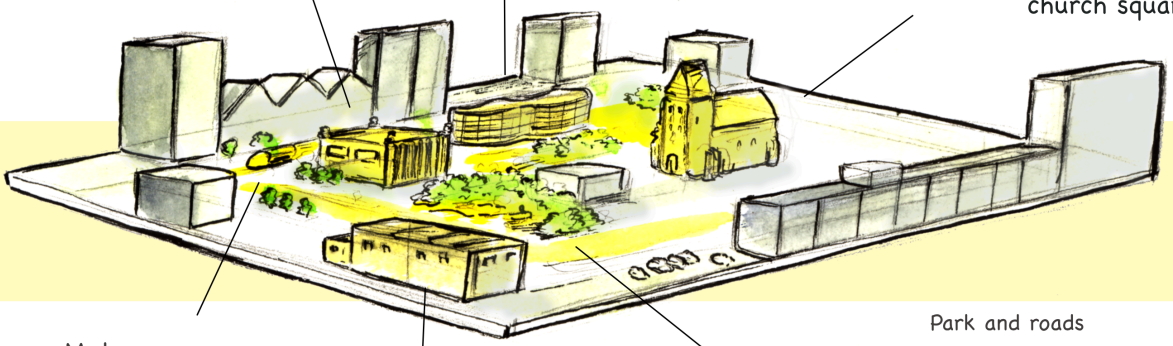
Next to the museum the city has invested in a new cultural center that houses several cultural and social organizations. They partnered with landscape architects who designed nice green public spaces.

Museum

An old building has been renovated and repurposed to become a new art museum

Church

The old church was in a bad condition but is considered a historical landmark so the city spent a large budget to renovate it and rebuilt the church square.



Metro

The city established a brand new metro line and new infrastructure.

Park and roads

A new park has been created and the surrounding roads are now bicycle and pedestrian friendly.

School and sport center

The city renovated the secondary school and opened a new swimming pool.



THE DEAL IS DONE

Albert meets François from Solvest group, a major project developer, specialized in urban development. In their portfolio they have many modern and spectacular buildings in Europe's largest cities. Albert receives a huge amount of money for his vacant lot and the old apartment block next to it.

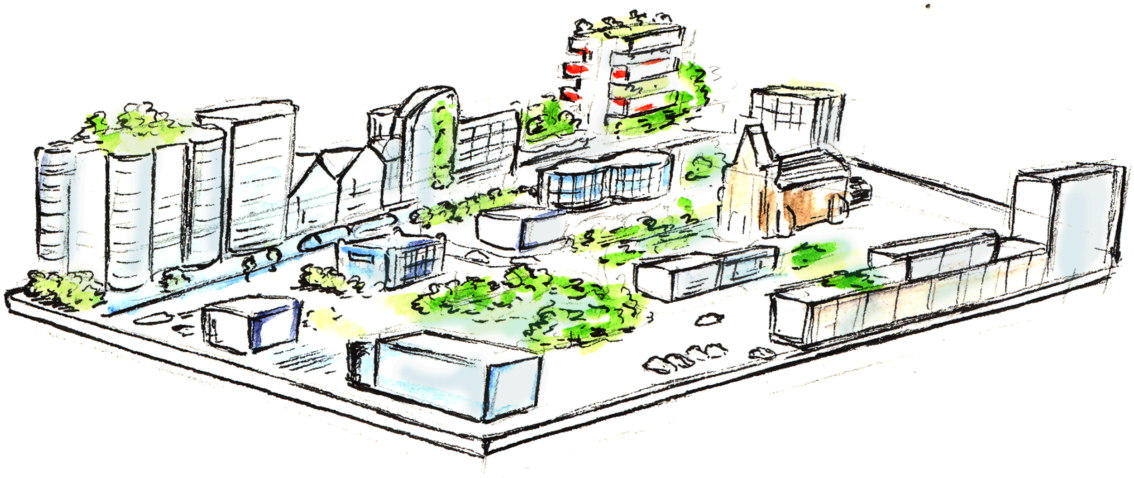
TAXES

In the earlier years Albert rented out the apartment block and the open land and in the meanwhile he paid an amount of taxes for his properties. He could earn more than enough to pay taxes for his undervalued and underused properties. He externalized the costs on the people renting his properties and did not invest much in renovation projects while the city invested lots of public money in the neighborhood.



STATE OF THE ART ECO-BUILDING

The team of Francois has done a nice job. They have built a passive building with a green roof and vertical gardens. they turned part of the vacant lot into a beautiful, though private park. There is less space needed for cars due to a new subterranean parking, with a built-in electric recharge station.

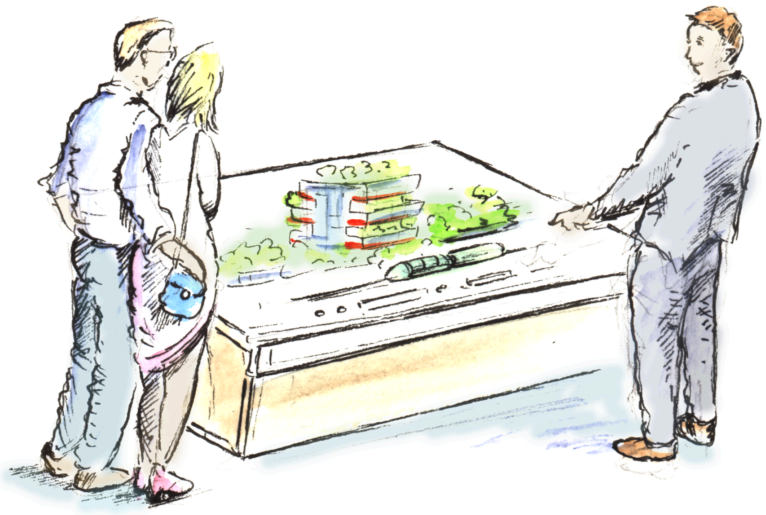


A NEW GREEN NEIGHBORHOOD

The neighborhood has done well, new sustainable buildings replaced the old buildings. The new neighborhood has become a postcard example of green sustainable city development.

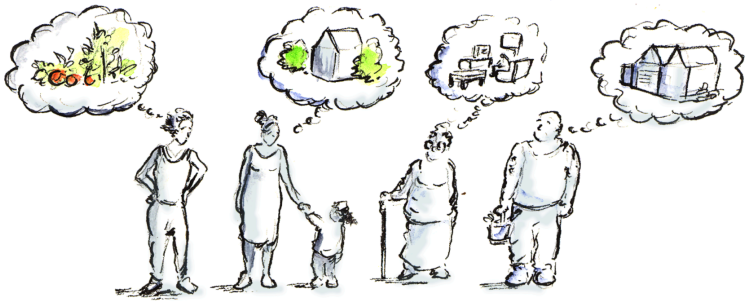
AN OLD DREAM

When Brian comes back to his old neighborhood he too is charmed by what he sees. He decides to look for one of those nice green apartments. His dream to move here is smacked in pieces once again. The prices to live here are just way too expensive. For Brian, Erica, Antoinette and Patrick this part of the city will remain a dream.



MEET SARA AND SIMON

Sara and Simon are a couple from the Flemish countryside, both earning a good wage and both have families supporting them financially. They have the budget to come live in this green city part not far away from their offices here in Brussels. The ideal customers for François.



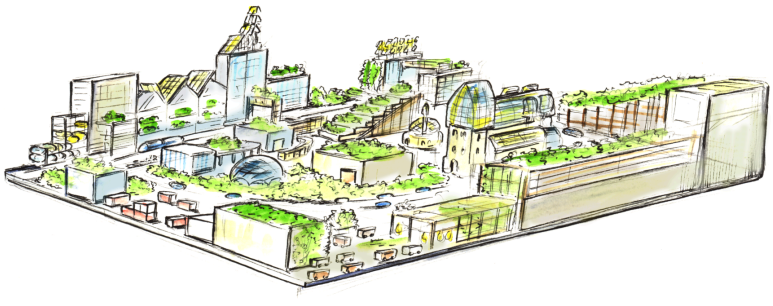
TURNING POINT

Several years ago the city of Brussels missed an opportunity for a turning point. The outcry from a large group of people could have resulted into a set of new laws and policies. Other taxation schemes such as the Georgist tax could have been applied. Land could be valued on its best use. If speculators such as Albert underused the land they could have paid much more taxes. New laws on property ownership and renting laws could prohibit owners of making lots of money without investing it into the neighborhood.

OTHER LAND-USE RULES

Imagine if a better taxation and use-of-land policy would be implemented. This would be the turning point for Brussels. Speculative landowners that just wait till neighborhoods become more developed with public money would be forced to develop their grounds and buildings or pay lots of, lots of taxes. Albert would not have an incentive to keep his land undervalued. He would sell it, rent it out at a fair price to people who want to optimize the value of the land or he would develop it himself. The incentive to do this would be much bigger and people would once more have access to land.



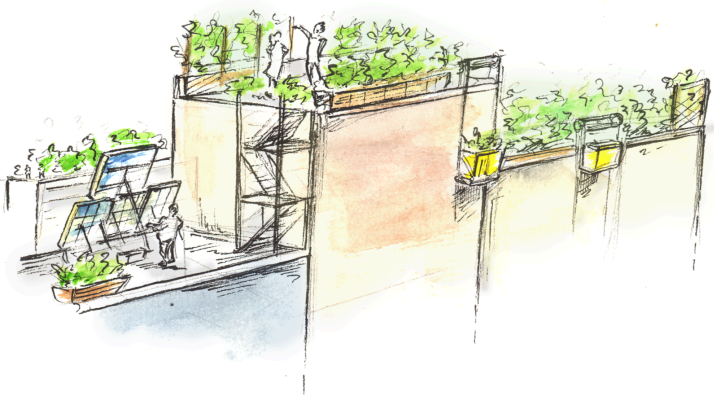


THE RISE OF THE COOPERATIVE

Though François his private Solvest group did a decent job, it would be nothing compared to the different cooperatives that would engage to make this neighborhood green and sustainable. Cooperatives from the people for the people. Unlike François they have no incentives to make lots of money with urban development. The area covered with green would rise, there would be much more creative solutions to house people. New commons would be created and the public space would be reinvented.

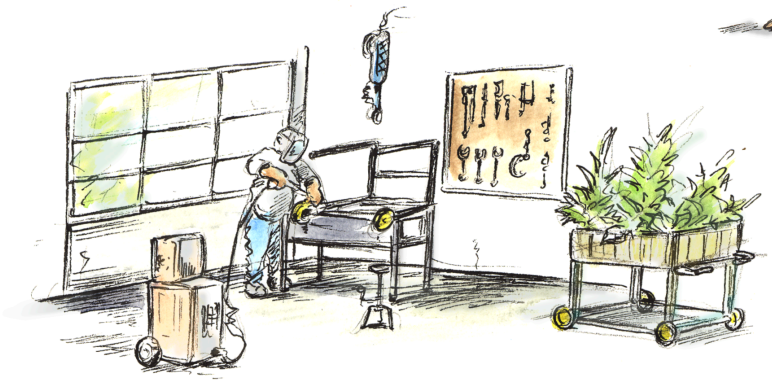
Renewables - urban farming

Brian is part of a cooperative that develops rooftop gardens, vertical farming and many other projects that help to turn the city and the public space into a green oasis.



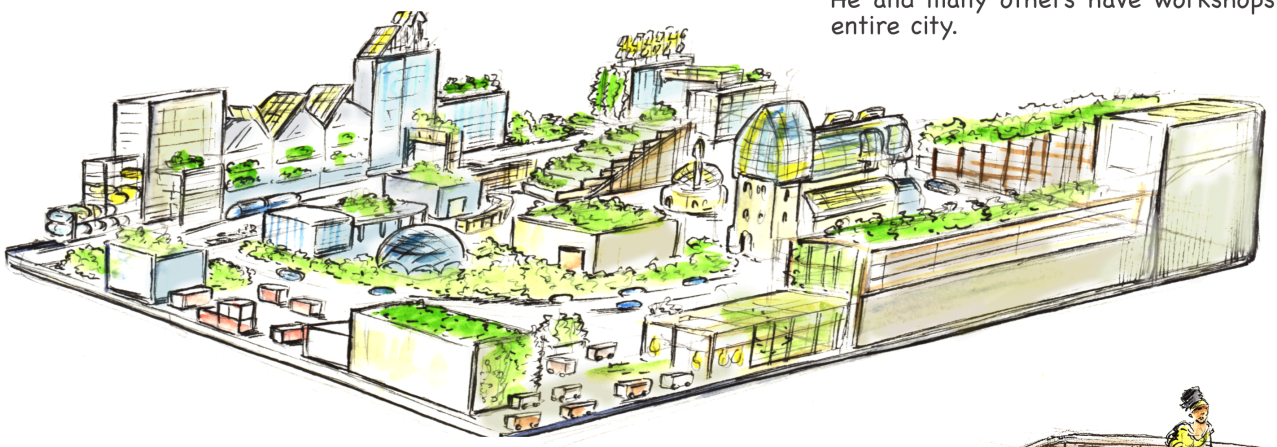


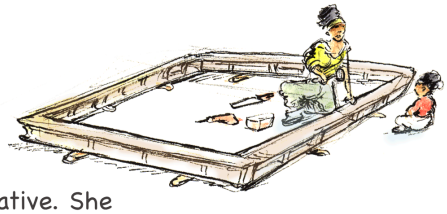




Maker culture

Patrick works within a makers cooperative. He and many others have workshops in the entire city.

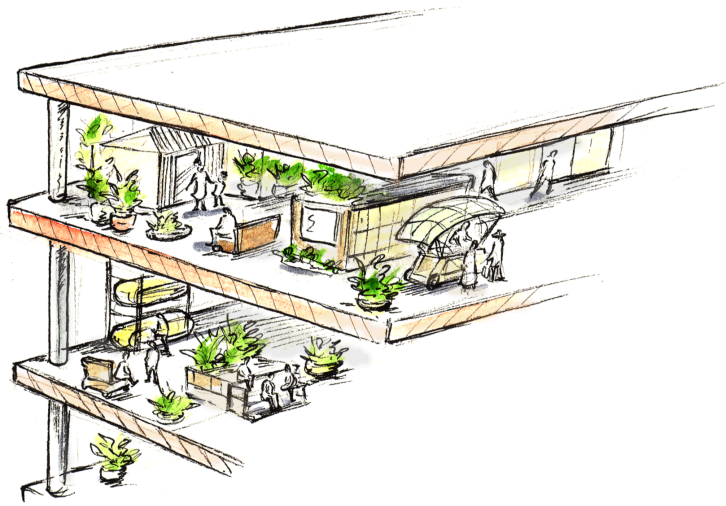




Housing

Erica is part of a housing cooperative. She has designed her own digitally fabricated wiki-house. She helps repurposing and retrofitting old commercial buildings.

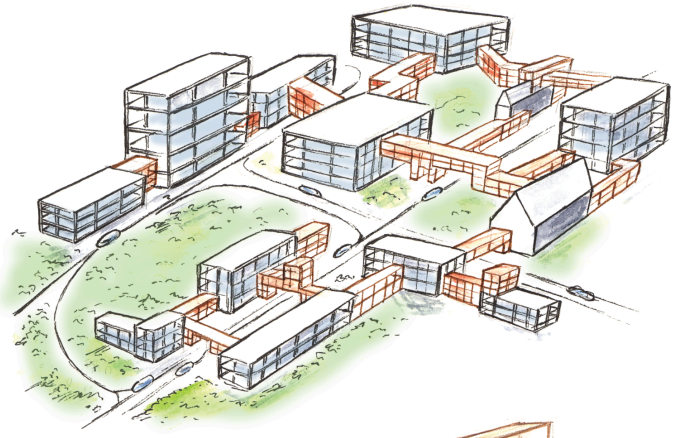




Living

Antoinette owns a small flat and she is part of a large social community. She helps taking care of the many plants on the hundreds of (public) balconies.



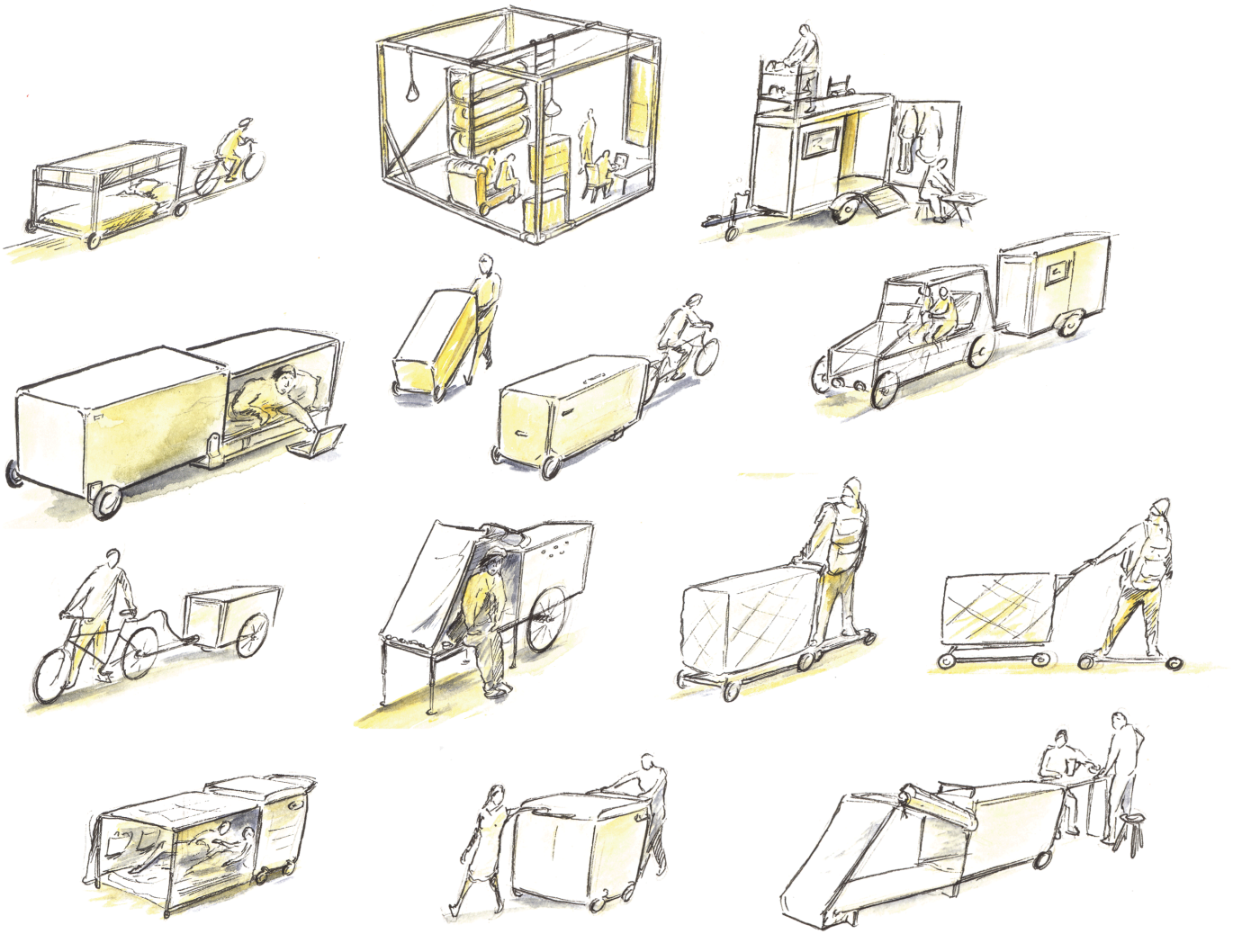


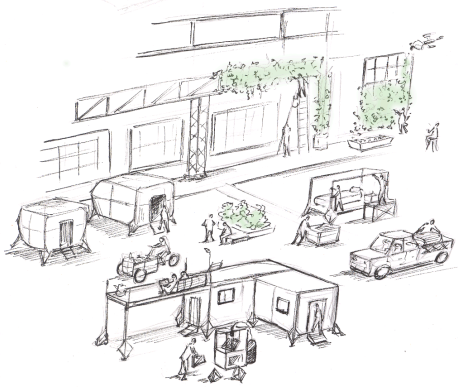
Turning the city into a superstructure

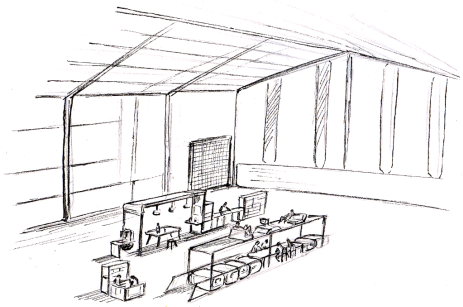
Louise opened her eyes quite well when she was a little girl. She saw her mother making and designing many houses. She saw people stripping down many old buildings and repurposing and retrofitting them to help Brussels become an adaptive green superstructure. The line between property and public space vanished.
People connected buildings with each other and new more mobile ways of living emerged.

Maker cooperatives invented enormous series of designs. They were something in between architectural designs and furniture and they called them 'furnitecture'. People created spaces within the large spaces of the old commercial buildings. Eventually Brussels became a large superstructure that could offer all the functions that the residents need.













THE OUTQUISITION

Eventually Louise and her friends wondered how it would be if they left their comfy bright green Brussels. They had gathered lots of skills and knowledge they wanted to share. They decided to travel to dead mall suburban slums, forgotten and abandoned cities, climate-smacked farm communities. There they started to help the locals get the tools and built the houses they needed. This almost missionary task would be something like the Inquisition (which largely destroyed knowledge) in reverse, a crusade of open sharing, the Outquistion.
('Outquisition concept' Coined by Alex Steffen and Cory Doctorow)

