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June/July 2019

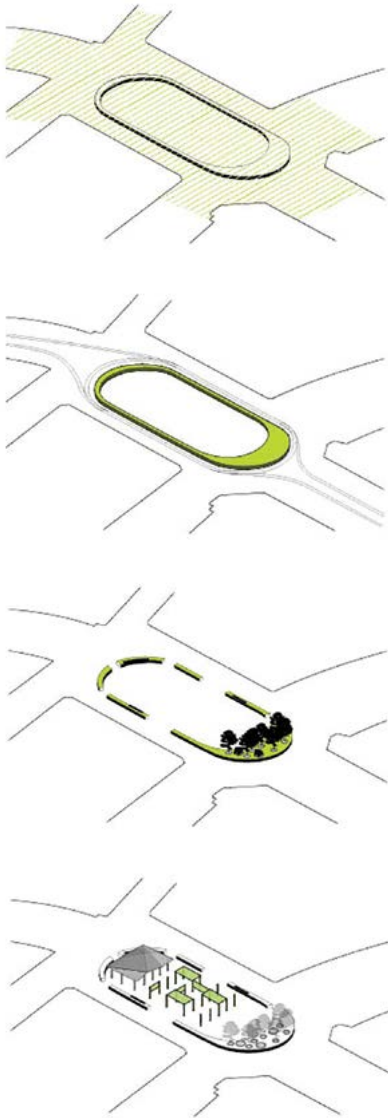
Special Edition: Brussels



Place Dumon

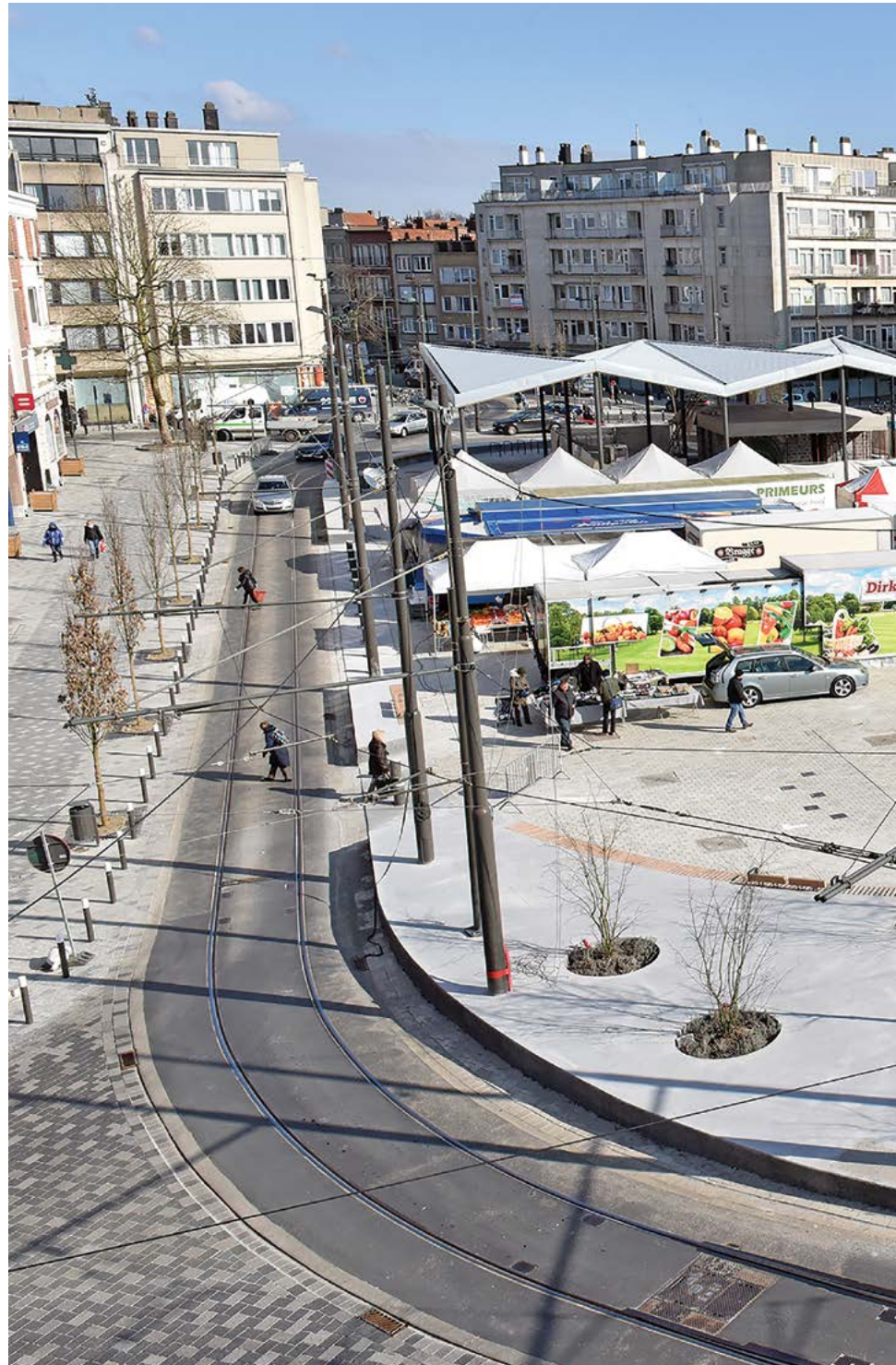
Eline Dehullu

The redesign by Artgeengineering and H+N+S of the area between the Place Dumon and the Stokkel metro station was completed in 2018. After a long process and much resistance, the square that previously served only as a car park was finally transformed into a meeting place for residents. A truly shared space, open to pedestrians, cyclists, trams, buses and cars.



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By demarcating the inner zone of the square with a concrete bench around the perimeter, the architects create a place in which to linger, relax, meet people.

At the southern end, a green space with trees, benches and a fountain. At the northern end, a canopy with a pavilion that houses a chip shop and a café.



The reconstruction of Place Dumon did not go without a hitch. And that is an understatement. In 2013 the municipality of Woluwe-Saint-Pierre launched an architectural competition. The aim was to bring a new dynamic to the area and to make the square more appealing. Pascal Smet, the Brussels minister for mobility and public works, wholeheartedly supported the plans and made them even more ambitious. In order to improve the quality of city life, he wanted to divide the public space in a radically different manner: cars would no longer have absolute priority, and more space would be given to public transport, cyclists and pedestrians.

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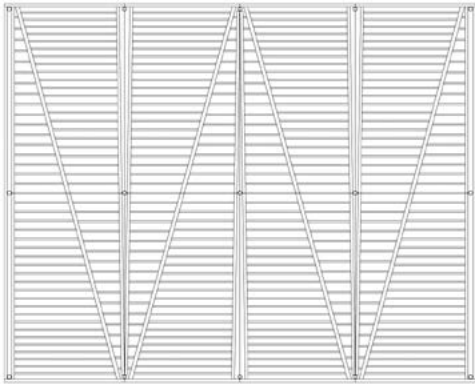
used to be a turning point for the tram.

Place Dumon was built at the start of the twentieth century as a turning point for the tram. The *genius loci* of the square is its oval shape. The local residents used it like a typical English village green: a shared open space in a densely populated neighbourhood. In the design for the reconstruction drawn up in 2015, Artgineering evoked these features, the *raison d'être* of the square. The urban-planning office decided to retain the typical oval shape and to emphasize it with a concrete bench around the perimeter. By demarcating the inner zone, they create a place in which to linger, relax, meet people. At the southern end of the square is a green space with trees, benches and a fountain. At the northern end, a canopy with a pavilion that houses the old Friture Charles chip shop, a new café and an ice-cream stand.



Architects Els Claessens and Tania Vandenbussche drew the architecture of the pavilion and the wooden canopy in collaboration with Util and covered it with white zinc. On the side of the square, the canopy resembles a pair of saddle roofs; on the street side, it looks like two interlinked butterfly roofs. The primary structure consists of ridge and gutter beams that form triangles. In-between are identically sized beams, although the distance between them varies depending on the span: the longer the span, the narrower the gap. The top and bottom of the canopy follow the same pure, simple logic. The canopy marks out a place on the square and lends it a homely feel.

The outer zone, on the other side of the uninterrupted oval bench, is dedicated to commerce and traffic. All traffic is condensed into a single lane, making manoeuvres and double parking impossible. Cars, buses and trams share the only available lane not only among themselves, but also with pedestrians and cyclists. There is no space for long-stay parking, there is no open tram verge, there is no separate bicycle path, there is no pavement with raised curbs and there are no pedestrian crossings. This is one space, stretching from façade to façade, and executed in one and the same material. It is also a 20 km/h zone, in which traffic is reduced to the same level. Here, all types of users are included. This is a shared public space, where everyone has to adapt their speed and behaviour to one another. The tram and the pedestrian determine the scale.



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The plans for redevelopment of the square generated a great deal of controversy. The STIB/MIVB (Brussels Intercommunal Transport Company) was unhappy because there was no separate bedding for the tram. Cyclists grumbled because there was no 'safe' cycle path. Local residents and shopkeepers were downright furious. The square was an important intermodal hub for tram, metro and bus. However, many of the families in this rich municipality own, not one, but often two cars, which they tend to use for short trips. The retailers feared that the loss of parking spaces would cause their turnover from the local middle-class residents to plummet. In 2016 they launched a petition that collected 5,000 signatures and they lodged an appeal with the Council of State: they asked for the design for the reconstruction of the square to be destroyed. The 'residents of the square' were opposed to the 'square for the residents'.

After an independent study (conducted by Atrium) showed that only 24 per cent of visitors arrived by car, and following much consultation, the municipality and the merchants reached a compromise. During a transitional phase – which will last until the underground car park at the nearby Stockel Square shopping centre gains an additional 200 parking spaces – the municipality will also allow short-term

parking within the oval of the square. The municipality does not mark out parking spaces or use barriers and is gradually increasing the number of concerts and festivals held in the space. You could call it a sweetener, but it's one that allows the inhabitants to swallow a bitter pill. In the meantime, they have noticed what such a collective, sheltered place for meeting and relaxation gives back to the neighbourhood. Seeing comes before believing.

'This is Brussels. We've accepted the dominance of the car in the public space for far too long', says Stefan Bendiks of Artgineering. He can draw comparisons with other European capitals as he works in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. In the latter country, he is a member of the Dutch Cycling Embassy. He continues: 'This is not a preliminary master plan or mobility scheme with multimodal traffic, as seen in the Netherlands and other European countries. In Brussels – and by extension in Belgium – things are the other way around. Small projects are meant to bring about a greater revolution.' The transformation of a small car park into a collective public space needs to lead to a broader outlook in terms of mobility in this city and the wider country. In this sense, Place Dumon is a pioneering project. ▲ ■ ●



Plan

0 10 20m

Architect

**Artgineering –
H+N+S – ectv**

Website

artgineering.eu

Official project name

Place Dumon

Location

**Place Dumon,
Woluwe-Saint-Pierre**

Programme

**Refurbishment of a
square and its adjacent
streets, construction of a
canopy and pavilion for
a café, ice-cream stand
and chip shopProcedure
Invited competition**

Client

**Commune de Woluwe-
Saint-Pierre**

Lead contractor

Krinkels

Landscape architect

H+N+S

landschapsarchitecten

Public realm

Artgineering

Consultancy public space

**Atelier voor Ruimtelijk
Advies (ARA)**

Structural engineering

Util

Completion

June 2018

Total floor area

11,000 m²

Budget

**€ 4,300,000
(excl. VAT and fees)**