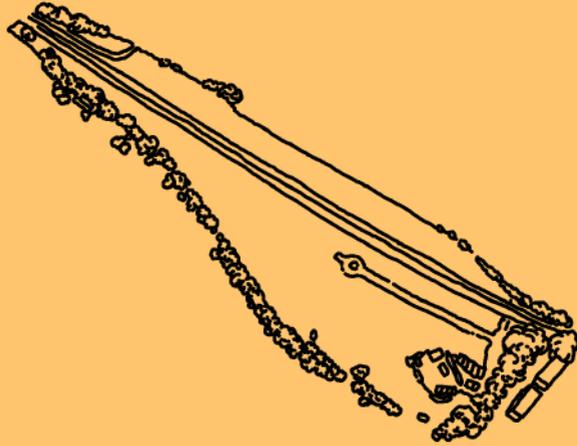


Josaph'Aire

A urban brownfield as a natural common
from 2011



Rue Arthur Roland 3,
1030 Schaerbeek
Belgium

 josaphaire.wordpress.com

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The Josaphat site is located on the border between Schaerbeek and Evere, north of Brussels. These 24 hectares of land, owned by the Brussels government, are the subject of a big housing project, which has recently come under criticism due to its excessive density.

In 2012, the group Commons Josaphat - an independent collective of neighborhood residents, activists and associations - occupied this space and started to work with the community on different workshops, with the purpose of developing the site as a common good by designing a realistic proposal regarding the organization of housing, work and life in this neighborhood.

A constantly growing number of associations, together with the inhabitants of the district, are asking the authorities to rethink the project in light of the environmental heritage of the site, taking into consideration that this former marshalling yard gradually transformed into a large reservoir of biodiversity, one of the most important in the Brussels region.

WHERE

The Schaarbeek-Josaphat freight station is located along line 26, which connects the Meiser station to the Evere station and was active between 1926 and 1994. First owned by SNCB, then by Infrabel, the brownfield site covers about 24 hectares of land and was purchased by the Brussels-Capital Regional administration in 2005 through its Urban Development Corporation (SAU-MSI). Over time the area has become one of the main biodiversity hotspots in the capital and more than 1,175 plant and animal species have been identified there. The richness of biodiversity is due to the absence of human activity and the fact that it is on the trajectory of important migratory bird routes.

LOCATION

Urban

TYPE OF SPACE

Building

Open space (green area)

ORIGINAL FUNCTION

Infrastructure (freight station)

YEAR OF CONSTRUCTION

1926

SURFACE AREA

12 sqm (temporary building)

24 hectares (green area)

OWNERSHIP

Public

CONCESSION

Free cession

CONDITION BEFORE ACTIVATION

Vacant

COMPOSITION OF THE SPACE

Temporary building for meetings

Vegetable garden

Unrecognized ecological reserve

WHEN

TIME OF DAY USED

Morning 7am - 1pm 10%

Afternoon ... 1pm - 7pm 40%

Evening 7pm - 1am 50%

Night 1am - 7am 0%

Workdays 10%

Weekends 90%

OPENING HOURS

Open only during specific events

AVERAGE USERS PER DAY

40

WHAT

Josaph'Aire is a "Living Lab at large", a collection of different projects that come together to explore and practice alternative ways of living in the city: local food production, close relationship to nature and biodiversity, sustainable water management, solidarity economy, auto-construction laboratories for minimal housing, circular economy, renewable energy. More concretely this is reflected in the realization of a community kitchen, several meeting spaces, vegetable gardens, permaculture exploration, and rainwater recuperation systems.

SURFACE IN USE

12 sqm (temporary building)

1,5 ha (open space)

THEMATIC AREAS

Activism and politics

Culture and arts

Design, crafts and production

Ecology and environment

Food and drink

Sport and leisure

Welfare

USER DEMOGRAPHIC

Children

Families

Local community
 Young people
 Senior citizens

COLLABORATIONS

Artists and creatives
 Associations and collectives
 Citizens and local community
 Companies
 Professionals and freelancers
 Public administrations and public authorities
 Universities and schools

NETWORK

Local

Josaph'Aire is part of the platform "Plan B Josaphat" for the protection and valorization of the green area, together with BasLesPad, Bruxelles Nature, BRAL, Natagora Bruxelles, Natuurpunt Brussel, Team Léopold III, Comité Médiapark, Save the Park Avenue des Jardins, Sauvons la Friche Josaphat.

WHO

The Brussels-Capital Region asked the informal group Commons Josaphat to develop a legal status which led to the birth of Josaph'Aire in 2017, a non-profit organization that brings together a network of associations. Now Josaph'Aire that manages a small part of this site thanks to a legal agreement with the public property owner SAU/MSI signed in 2018.

MANAGING ORGANIZATION(S)

1. Josaph'Aire (association, 2017)

PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE MANAGEMENT

4 people
 Around 15 volunteers

HOW

NATURE OF THE INITIATIVE

Bottom-up

TYPE OF MANAGEMENT

Horizontal

ECONOMIC RESOURCES

2% Donations
 98% Public grants

TYPE OF ACTIVITIES

100% Free

Did you know?

#PlanBJosaphat

Over the past few years, citizens, associations and civil society have joined forces to raise awareness about the risks to the area due to rapid urbanization and the consequent loss of biodiversity. Following the campaign #PlanBJosaphat - which calls for the suspension of the urban development plan for the area - several civic associations, architects, and naturalists have proposed alternative plans to preserve the natural heritage of the area summarized in a manifesto. An online petition that reached over 15,000 signatures was also promoted, as well as numerous outreach initiatives that fueled debate about the future of the area.





How did your story begin?

We are a diverse collective of citizens who have taken interest in the area with the idea to provide an alternative development plan. Our goal is to be recognized in the future of the regional project and show that there were many other possibilities for that place than to become a simple residential project. In order to reach this goal and to share knowledge about commons, we felt the urge to mobilize bottom-up activities. Surely the main idea was to reclaim nature and the maintenance of green areas in the city, which is already full of buildings.

Is there a practice or value that represents you and you think may be an inspiration to others?

In order to help people use the space and perceive it as a place of experimentation, we put together a big event around the concept of commons. We also hosted a festival, where we experimented with the different uses of the place and the many activities going on. We currently organize walks, picnics, and open-air courses as a way of getting to know each other, networking and discovering the area surrounding us. An important moment in the life of the community is the "Jour de commons" - an intimate day when we organize activities and stuff. This is the glue, the anchor point to include communities and make them come together in the same space, for the same space. We encouraged them to think about that space but also about the idea of taking care of something, and what it means to have such a space in the neighborhood, close to your home.

"The goal when we started was to show that there were many other possibilities to the way the government envisioned the development of the Josaphat site. Therefore we see Joseph'Aire as a place of experimentation and "La Maison des Possibles" is the symbol of what we wanted to do".

What is the secret ingredient that makes your story unique?

In the beginning, we had to meet in the neighborhood, as we didn't have a space to gather and to organize activities, so we built a small wooden house ourselves. Now that we have a place to meet, we could say that the house is our secret tool. A physical place made of wood where people can come and be together. It is the symbol of what we wanted to do. It helped us to identify the project we were carrying on. "La maison de possible".

Interview with: Toha De Brant



Watch the video showing the evolution of the area from 1930 until today



Discover the flora and fauna of the area

