



June 5, 2023

Québec Roadmap: Towards a New Urban Project (2022-2024)

PRIORITY THEMATIC (4): Protecting and strengthening the residential function of the city's historic centers.

Pilot City: BRUSSELS

Synthesis of the Thematic Worksheet (Step 3.1.2)

In line with the Quebec Roadmap Strategic Axis 2 – “Resilient cities boosted by the enhancement of their heritage resources”, the *Priority Thematic* presented by the city of Brussels aims to find alternative solutions to ensure the protection and strengthen the residential function within the historic area.

Nearly 30% of the buildings in the World Heritage site buffer zone surrounding the Grand-Place of Brussels were affected by the issue of derelict floors, due to strong tourist, commercial pressure, and significant changes in the new ways of living. Most buildings are rented out in their entirety on commercial leases; given that merchants no longer inhabit the floors above, and due to the lack of independent staircases, the upper floors are often empty, unused and neglected. Several incentive and corrective measures have been carried out in the past few years within an ambitious urban revitalization program. The city has established guidelines to stimulate the renovation of empty housing, the enhancement of architectural heritage, the requalification of roadways, as well as the greening of public spaces in order to encourage residents to return to the city center.

These recent initiatives to reclaim "an inhabited city center" have had positive demographic impact, with approximately 1000 new residents, confirming the value and interest of such approach. Considering the number of still vacant spaces, it is important to pursue and further develop actions, especially by extending the scale of intervention in order to consider opportunities for greater impact on greening interior of block, for example, and to act through social housing programs to minimis the nuisance of tourism when most rehabilitated apartments are currently hosting temporary tourists' accommodations.

Associated matters

The city of Brussels proposes to form a Collaborative Network gathering experiences and collective research efforts on different interrelated issues, *inter alia* the following:

- Establishment of intervention methodologies in historic structures at an individual and a block scale;
- Analyses of the technical potential of buildings and studies of their adaptability to new living requirements and/or new uses;
- Identification of new tools and actions that can be implemented to support homeowners;
- Awareness-raising and information campaigns between municipalities and homeowners regarding their role in improving the living environment.