

GRAND-PLACE OF BRUSSELS - WORLD HERITAGE SITE-1998

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Abstract

Declared part of World Heritage in 1998, the Grand-Place of Brussels is now the subject of great attention from the City of Brussels. Since then, the City has been elaborating new strategies for the Grand-Place and its surroundings to preserve its heritage, to enhance the quality of its built environment, and to reinforce its residential use and animation role. A management plan was established in 2012 for a three-year period.

Key words: *Grand-place, buffer zone, world heritage.*

Introduction

The Grand-Place in Brussels is an ensemble of monumental architecture consisting of a Gothic town hall surrounded by Baroque-style houses, which owes its external appearance to profound modifications at the end of the 18th century and major restoration work during the 19th century. Today it is a major tourist attraction and an important heritage and cultural site requiring appropriate management.



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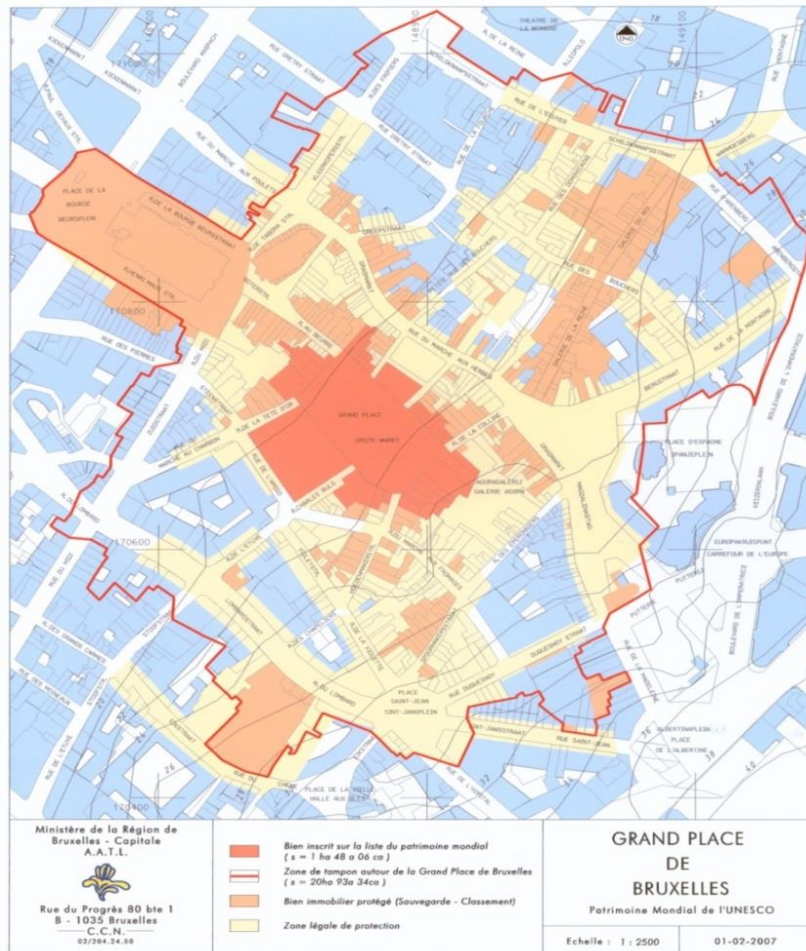
The site was listed on the World Heritage List by UNESCO on 2 December 1998 according to the following criterion:

ii: "The Grand-Place is an outstanding example of the eclectic and highly successful blending of architectural and artistic styles that characterizes the culture and society of this region."

iv: "Through the nature and quality of its architecture and of its outstanding quality as a public open space, the Grand-Place illustrates in an exceptional way the evolution and achievements of a highly successful mercantile city of northern Europe at the height of its prosperity."

The " ÎLOT SACRÉ" or the delimitation of a buffer zone

The inclusion of the Grand-Place on the World Heritage List required the delimitation of a buffer zone. It corresponds to the old core known as "Ilot sacré", buildings dating from the 17th and 18th century. This area is crossed by one of the oldest merchant streets, *rue du Marché aux Herbes* and still maintains the old network of small winding streets. The interior of the city blocks are old and particularly dense.



Inscription on the World Heritage List UNESCO – 1998

Protected area designated as a "Buffer Zone"

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Historical Overview

The origins of the site of the Grand-Place in Brussels go back to around the 12th century, when the first houses were built near marshy ground. A market was established on the drained marsh and covered with paving. The economic and political activities of the city gradually developed around it. Destroyed in 1695 by the bombardment of Brussels ordered by Louis XIV, the buildings of the Grand-Place were immediately rebuilt afterwards. Reconstruction took only a few years.

The condition of the Grand-Place at the end of the 19th century is the result of two hundred years of tumultuous history.

In 1793 the French sans-culottes removed practically all decorative elements from the façades and from the interior of the houses.

The buildings were sold as national property and they continued to deteriorate as the new owners cared little about preserving the decorations of the façades. Significant modifications like the suppression of the gables and the changing of the level of the floors were carried out.

The state of conservation of the façades was alarming. Pieces in danger of falling were repaired in a bad way or simply removed.

Although the City authorities called the attention of several owners to the bad condition of their property and the need to start a restoration, only a few repainted their façade or renovated decorative elements.

Under the mandate of the mayor Charles Buls, the City services undertook the first systematic restoration campaign on the façades of the Grand-Place. Negotiations with the owners were started in this direction, and a convention (servitude of view in favor of the City Hall) was signed between the city and the owners.

The city funds and supervises the restoration of the façades. A tax was levied on the house owners, based on the surface area of the façade. From then on it was decided that any changes to the façades would require the agreement of the city authorities.

From the end of the 19th century until beginning of the 20th century, Brussels embarked on a campaign to restore the houses fronting the square.

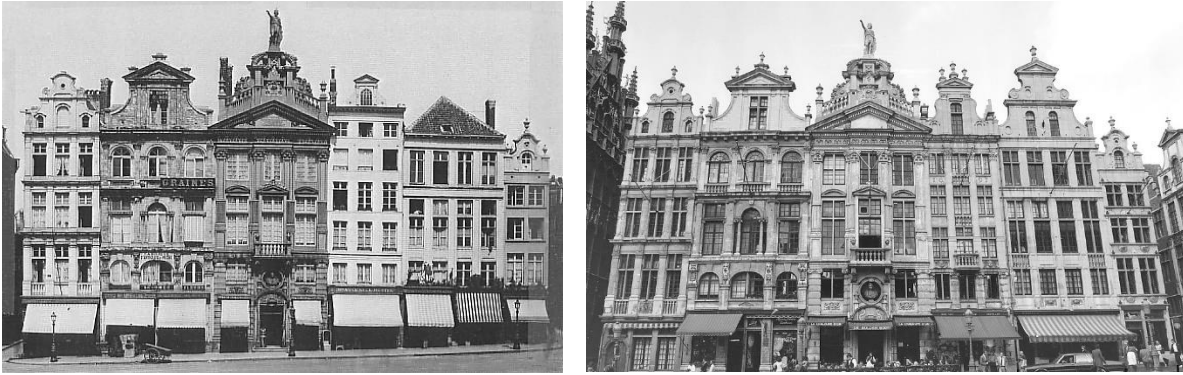
In order to restore the original appearance of the façades different types of works were carried out on the façades, from simple restoration to total reconstruction. The works were carried out between 1885 and 1923.

The reference period for the restoration is the 17th century, based on the of F.-J. Derons' drawings made after the reconstruction done due to the bombardment in 1695.



Drawing of F.-J. Derons, View of the west side, Grand-Place ns 1 to 7, 1737

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Grand-Place ns 20 to 28
View before and after de restoration champagne of the 19th century
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Heritage Preservation

Aware of the importance of this major architectural heritage and its fast degradation, in 1998 the City authorities commissioned the Historical Heritage Unit to conduct a historical and architectural study of the houses on the square, with the aim to presenting an objective assessment of their state of conservation and of managing them better in the future.

The goal was to understand the existing heritage.

Thanks to the archives dating back to the end of the 19th century and the observation in situ of the buildings, the interventions indoors and on the façades were inventoried for each house and reported in plan and elevation view. The study took 1 year to be carried out by team of 3 art historians and 1 architect.



Historical and architectural study of the houses on the "Grand-Place"
Diagrams representing the main phases of evolution undergone by the façades in the course of three centuries

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Monitoring, Conservation and Maintenance

The historical and architectural study was then completed by a survey of materials and pathologies of all the façades. As part of the evaluation of the latter state of preservation, inspections were conducted in 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004 and 2007 from a lifting platform. These inspections represent a preliminary diagnostic phase. This approach allowed the identification of the types of materials used in building facades, their alteration statements quality rejointoiements and disorders such as cracking, stone chips, biological growth, corrosion of elements metal, etc. The results were transcribed on the façades drawings.

These façades were built with very different kinds of stones, the *Balegam*, the *Euville*, the *Gobertange*, the *Avesne*, the *Savonnière*, the *Pierre bleue* and some were partially coated.

The analysis in situ, combined with the archives' study, allowed the understanding of the restoration methodology of the 19th century.



Survey of materiel and pathologies from a lifting platform
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In October 2001, the Cell Historical Heritage had to perform tests and research for the restoration of number 39, Grand Place, property of the City.

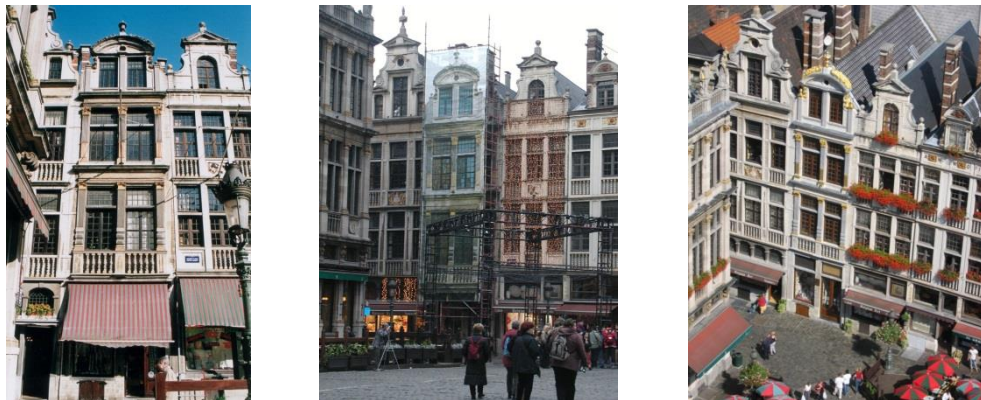
Scientific and technical analysis were made to identify the type of stone, mortars and coatings used in the construction, as well as the gilded, the polychrome of the decorations, and the original painting. These elements were integrated on the restoration project.

The type of intervention on the façades was the conservation of the maximum of the existing elements, as well as of all the records that document the history of the façades. This method supports a long-term strategy.

Main aspect of the works: façade cleaning, stone restoration (consolidation, repair mortar, new stones if necessary), removal of joints and treatment of metallic elements, façade protections (consolidation and water-repellent), windows restoration, and re-establishment of the gilding and polychrome of the decorated elements, etc.

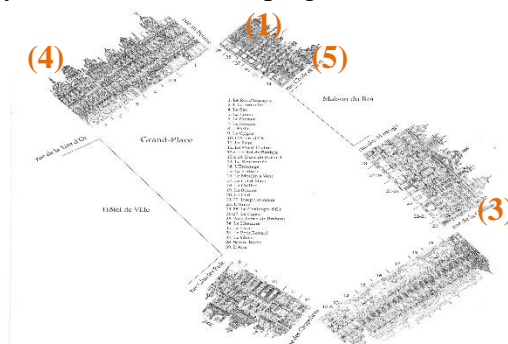


Façade cleaning, stone and windows restorations, guiding elements
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 These works were made in 2003-2004 (1).



Grand-Place nr 39, before (1999), during (2003) and after de works (2004)
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This first restoration was carried out by way of example and testing techniques to be implemented during the restoration of the other facades of the Grand Place. Since then, a new restoration program for the all square has been established by the City that follows the same methodology. A restoration campaign was then initiated by block:



Plan of the square

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- In 2007-2008, restoration of the façades, Grand-Place nr 8 to 12 (2). As in the previous project, a series of scientific and technical analyses were conducted on the houses, which gave guidance to the choice of the type of interventions to be made.



Grand-Place ns 8 to 12, view before and after de restoration.

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- In 2011-2012, restoration of the façades, Grand-Place nr 20 to 28 (3).



Grand-Place ns 20 to 28, view before and after de restoration.

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- In 2014-2015, restoration of the façades, Grand-Place nr 1 to 7 (4).



Grand-Place ns 1 to 7, view before and after de restoration.

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- In 2015, restoration of the façades, Grand-Place nr 34 to 38 (5). Works in progress.



Grand-Place ns 34 to 38, view before and during de restoration.

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Buffer Zone - Studies

The topographic and symbolic position of the Grand-Place in the city has always prompted real-estate speculation and, in the absence of adequate legal protection of the site, it led to the progressive transformation of the interiors of the houses and to dense concentration of blocks. Studies were made by the municipal authorities highlighting the authenticity of the architectural form and the original arrangement of the buildings of the square and the buffer zone.

In 2002, the City of Brussels has commissioned a study on the urban evolution of the blocks and buildings in the perimeter of the buffer zone called *Ilot Sacré*, to be able to evaluate more precisely the historical value of the buildings. The study area consists of a set of 23 blocks.



Buffer zone - Urban evolution study of the buffer zone, 2002-2007 (± 700 buildings studied)

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Realized block by block, the study shows for each house its integration into the urban tissue of the city and within the block concerned. Through a stylistic analysis of the various elements visible on the front and an inventory of the transformations operated in the building, a built volume analysis as well as a view of the occupation was carried out.

The urban evolution study of the buffer zone frame and compiles several angles of approach:

- exhaustive researches in the archives of the City of Brussels (public fund works, urban plans, and occasionally other funds) with reproduction plans and individual processing steps.
- visits in situ allowed to understand the buildings typology, narrow parcels with a front building, courtyard and a back building, inaccessible or invisible from the street.

The lecture of each building is provided in the form of a sheet. These pages are articulated in four parts:

- façade photos and a summary description of the façade;
- inventory of all the transformations since the 19th century (listing of all the planning permits conserved at the City archives);
- graphic documentation (copy of the archive plan showing the most important interventions);
- photos of the interior of the blocks and a synthesis of the evolution of the parcel in time.

In conclusion of the study the buildings were classified according to a logical order by historical factors.

The crossing of all the information allows the identification of 3 phases of construction in the buffer zone:

Phase 1. de reconstruction after the bombardment de 1695

Phase 2. de 19th century

Phase 3. the 20th century

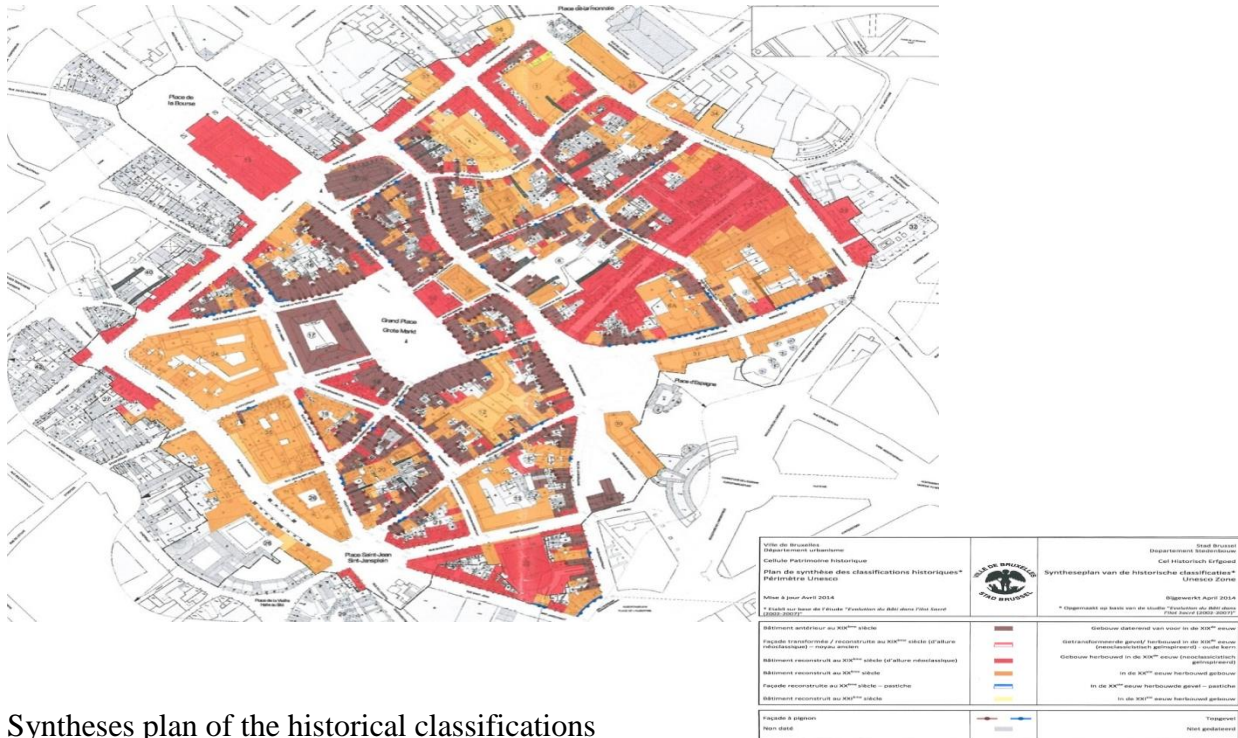
In the phase 2, we can distinguish:

- façade changed in the 19th century (neoclassic inspiration) with an old core (interior built before de 19th century, back façade is gable façade);
- building rebuilt in the 19th century from neoclassic inspiration.

In the Phase 3:

- building rebuilt in the 20th century
- façade rebuilt in the 20th century (pastiche)

A color code and a legend make the correspondence with the historical classifications.



Syntheses plan of the historical classifications
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Management Plan

The development of the Grand Place management plan and its buffer zone was made possible by a precise knowledge of the site. Historical and architectural studies have been made on the buildings of Grand-Place since 1999, as well as urban studies for the buffer zone. The inscription at world level implies a specific management of the site and their buffer zone against the requirements of the World Heritage Convention.

In 1998, upon registration of the Grand Place on the World Heritage List, the requirement for a management plan was not implemented. To comply with the requirements of the 2011 World Heritage Guidelines, the City of Brussels took the initiative in collaboration with the Directorate of Monuments and Sites of the Brussels-Capital Region to undertake the establishment of such a plan.

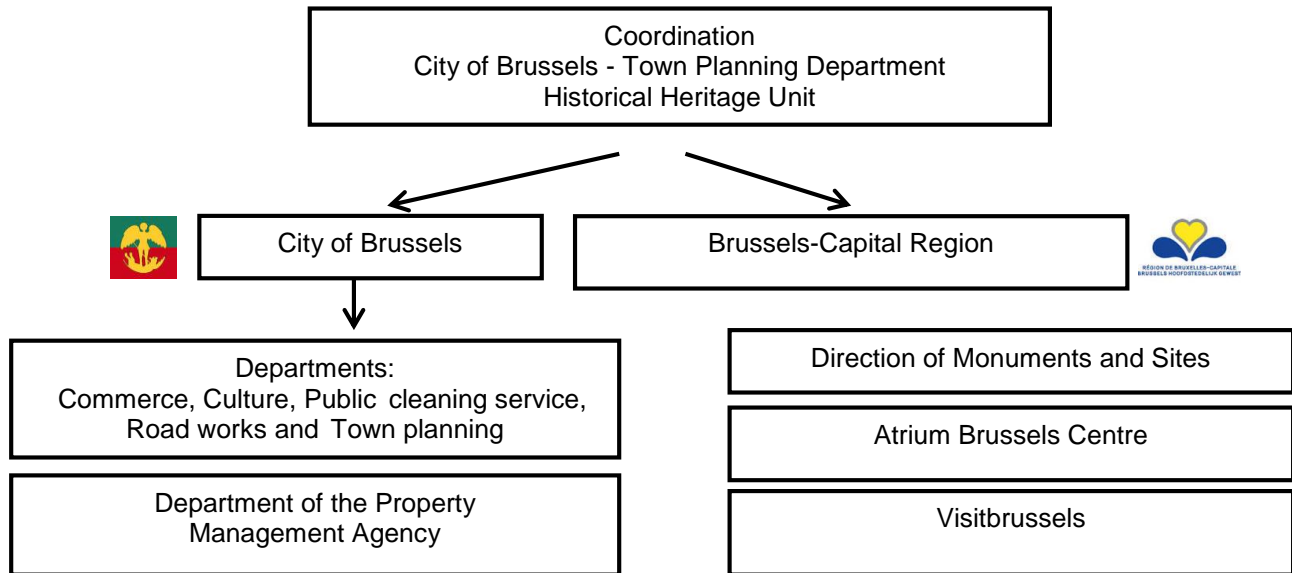
Its development has allowed to put into perspective all the actions and projects developed for 14 years as the City of Brussels and the Brussels-Capital Region, the two institutions guaranteeing the values that have enabled these goods receive global recognition. The document will allow to better plan the management of the site, will introduce a transversal work between the various stakeholders and will provide an orientation tool for further developing strategies.

The management plan is the result of internal reflection and drafting of the text. It was developed and approved its contents into 4 stages:

1. From the City, identification of administrative and technical structures that followed the conception and management plan that will ensure the future management of the site.
2. Historical Heritage Unit of the city of Brussels was charged of the coordination. Several meetings were organized with various departments of the City of Brussels concerned. Ongoing actions have been coordinated and new proposals have emerged. Action plans are the

engine of the management strategy. Each department was involved in the drafting of the management plan

3. At the Brussels-Capital Region, coordination meetings with the City of Brussels on all outstanding shares and new proposals for listed buildings. Regional services were also involved in drafting the management plan.
4. First approval by the Board of Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Brussels, prior to consultation with the various institutions and organizations active in the area: Royal Commission for Monuments and Sites, Icomos Belgium, neighborhood committees
5. Approval of the final document by the College of Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Brussels.

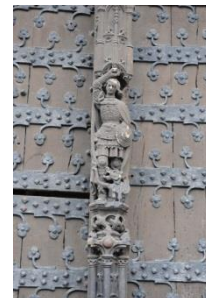


Operational structuring for the management plan

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The gathering of all the shares and ongoing projects helped structure the management plan around five strategic objectives. These stem from a political will developed in recent years, and more directly from the general policy program of the City of Brussels for the 2006-2012 parliamentary term:

1. Good Governance
2. Heritage conservation by ensuring integrity and authenticity
3. Development of functional diversity in particular trade and habitat
4. Improving quality of life
5. Public awareness, promotion and exchange, tourism development



These five strategic objectives are divided into 18 specific objectives which are themselves broken down into 46 action plans. These were defined in collaboration with the various municipal services and partners. They include actions already underway today and new actions to be launched.

Given the innovative nature and complexity of such a document, it was designed for a short period: three years from 2012 to 2015. This period will allow administrations to test this first

reflection and can acquire and improve the overall vision. A review of current strategies can then be made. The relevance of developing new strategies will be evaluated. The following management plan is being developed and it will be valid for 6 years (2016-2021).

Overview of some action plans:

Workings groups were created:

- *Monitoring committee "Grand Place, Unesco heritage"* was established in 1999 to monitor the whole area, to examine the utility of existing tools and consider creating new tools if necessary. The working group includes representatives of all regional and communal services directly involved in the issue. This committee generally meets one or two times per year.
- *Coordination committee and monitoring of permits in the area Unesco*, was established in 2010 by the representatives of the City of Brussels, Town Planning Department, to analyze the applications for an urban planning license, to established common draft opinions on the projects. This committee meets six times per year.

Brussels legislation allows municipalities to develop additional planning regulations to the Regional Planning Regulations. These tools can be "zoned", that is to say, limited to part of the territory. The City has adopted in 2009 a communal Planning Regulations Zoned Unesco on the buffer zone to the aspects related to the commercial image (signs, commercial furniture, display, lighting, ...).

The challenge of this new regulation is to be able:

- to increase the visibility and attractiveness of the trade,
- to enhancement of the heritage quality of buildings
- to conciliate the harmonious coexistence of functions: trade, tourism and habitat

In addition, the City created in 2009 a new position for the coordination and implementation of this new regulation. This "coordinator Unesco" is the reference person for contacts between the administration and the owners and traders of the buffer zone, general information and relay to the appropriate services.

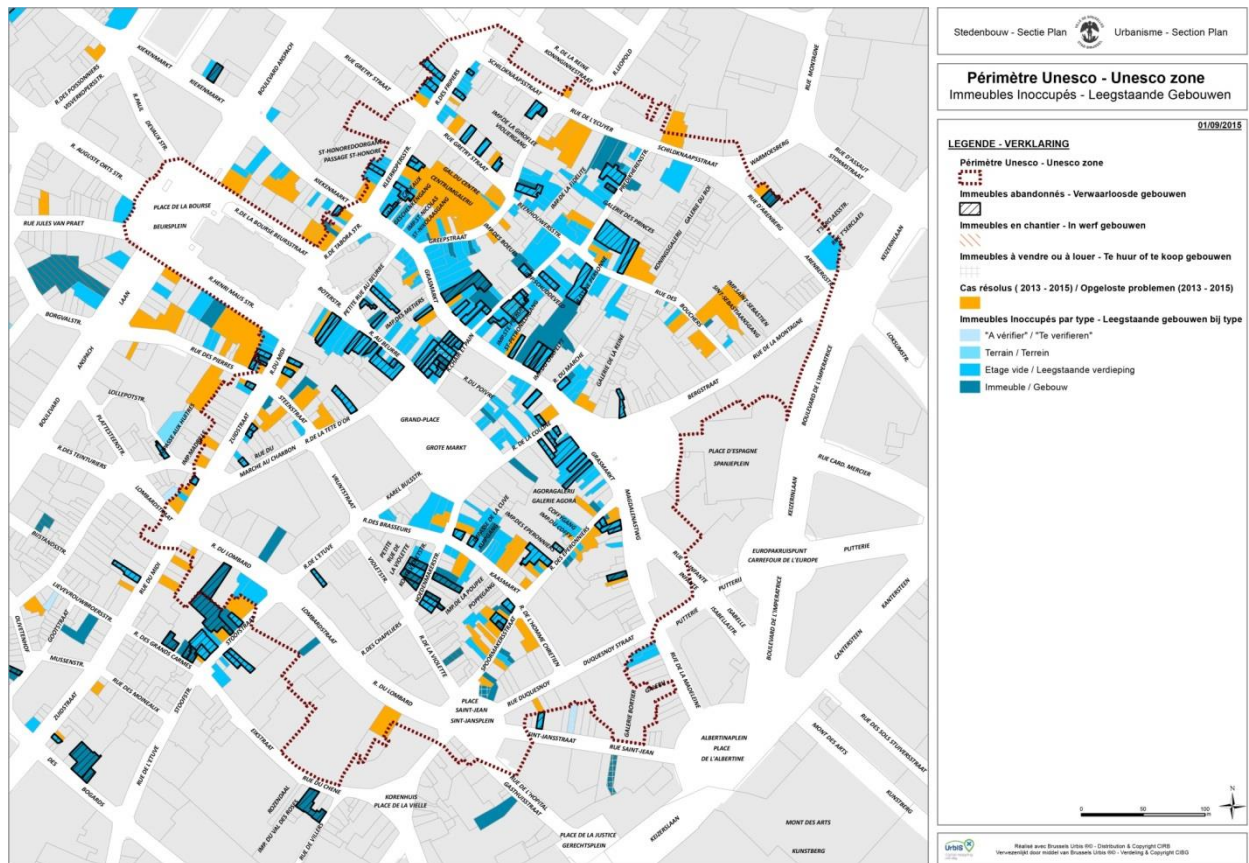
The different city departments are making a special effort for Unesco area as regards the sharing of data, monitoring of projects, promotion of quality projects, rankings, monitoring of offenses, public awareness.

One of the main actions relates to the reallocation of empty floors above shops. This phenomenon is particularly marked in Brussels. It follows from the rental of the whole of a building in trade, leading to the abandonment of the upper parts. Traders prefer indeed often condemn the access to the floors in order to have a larger retail space and more developed showcase. The City has implemented in 2010 a bonus for recreating separate access to housing to encourage owners and traders who wish to carry out work to make housing accessible to floors.

The number of inhabitant's on the buffer zone was been increasing:

- number of inhabitants in 2003 : 1964
- number of inhabitants in 2013 : 2128¹

¹ Source for the statistics: Demography department.



Rehabilitation of empty houses (upper floors)
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Conclusion

The series of studies and projects developed or being developed for the site of the Grand-Place is part of an awareness of the importance of this major heritage and are part of a conservation and recovery policy for long-term site.

The Grand-Place, a prestigious and symbolic framework of communal life, with its buffer zone, is at once the most valuable part of the historical center and at the same time the most fragile of the city's fabric. Home to many events, it is subject to a major commercial and tourist pressure. Beyond the traditional measures of protection of heritage and restoration of monuments, the city has embarked on a path of active planning and attempted to develop new tools to move towards a better development.

The inscription on the World Heritage List can be seen has a:

- a recognition that honors and obliges;
- an awareness and an opportunity for a development of the urban area level, cultural and tourism
- the establishment of a methodology innovative work, based on the cross between different services.

The management plan will address the need to develop a program of measures which not only guarantees the good conservation of the site but also ensures its development.

The development of the management plan has put into perspective all the developed actions and projects since its inclusion on the list of heritage as the City of Brussels and the Brussels-Capital Region. This tool must be seen as the start of active management and strategic development of the engine for the conservation and enhancement of the Grand Place and its buffer zone.



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