

**DRAWING BY RENAAT BRAEM
REPRESENTING ONE OF THE
VARIANTS FOR THE HIGH-RISE
TOWERS OF CIRCA 10 FLOORS,
ARENAWIJK ANTWERP (BE),
CA. 1960**

KRESBA RENAATA BRAEMA
ZNÁZORŇUJÚCA JEDEN
Z VARIANTOV VÝŠKOVÝCH
DOMOV S PŘIBLIŽNE DESIATIMI
POSCHODIAMI, ARENAWIJK
ANTVERPY (BE), CCA 1960

Source Zdroj: CIVA Brussels



An Inquiry into Intentional Values: The Arenawijk in Antwerp – Renaat Braem's Modernist Social Housing Ensemble as a Case Study

Skúmanie intenčných hodnôt: Arenawijk v Antverpách – modernistické sociálne bývanie Renaata Braema ako prípadová štúdia

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Komplex sociálneho bývania *Arenawijk* (1964 – 1971) v Antverpách v súčasnosti prechádza rekonštrukciou, v rámci ktorej sa polovica budov prestaví a druhá polovica zbúra a nahradí novými stavbami. Budovy, ktoré navrhol Renaat Braem (1910 – 2001), jeden z najvýznamnejších belgických modernistických architektov a urbanistov, sú mladým kultúrnym dedičstvom belgického povojnového modernizmu a rozvoja sociálneho bývania ako jednej z úloh budovania štátu. Sociálne bývanie ako špecifický typ stavby prešlo rokmi premenou, pokiaľ ide o motiváciu, dizajn i cieľovú skupinu, a to v súčasnosti vyvoláva pochybnosti o nutnosti priznať tomuto architektonickému dedičstvu ochranu. Projekty sociálneho bývania, pôvodne zamerané na zlepšenie ťažkých životných podmienok pracujúceho obyvateľstva najmä v mestách, často predstavovali hľadanie nových modelov kolektívnosti. Hlavným cieľom projektov v šesťdesiatych a sedemdesiatych rokoch bolo zabezpečiť kvalitné bývanie pre všetky vrstvy obyvateľstva a umožniť komunitné spolužitie. Tento štátom plánovaný a dotovaný trh s nájomnými bytmi však dnes slúži predovšetkým najnúdznejším. *Arenawijk* je príkladom toho, ako myšlienky sociálneho bývania – kolektívneho spolužitia v zelenom prostredí – časom postupne strácali na hodnote. Neskoršie úpravy, nedostatočná údržba a následný úpadok štvrte viedli k tomu, že budovy sú dnes v zlom stave, aj keď si zachovali svoj pôvodný architektonický vzhľad. Na pozadí ich nepretržitého využívania a súčasnej prestavby sa preto vynára otázka, či a ako môžeme toto architektonické dedičstvo uchovať.

Existujúci spôsob, akým sa pripisuje budovám význam a odôvodňuje prípadná právna ochrana, je založený na pripisovaní pamiatkových hodnôt a je zakotvený aj v belgickom práve. V tomto procese sa budovy posudzujú ako svedectvá minulosti a hodnotia sa ich existujúce hmotné a nehmotné aspekty. Prostredníctvom stanovenia hodnoty sa usmerňuje, ale aj obmedzuje budúca obnova historických budov. Možné zmeny či prestavby si však vyžadujú vizionárske hodnotenie, ktoré zohľadňuje nielen prítomné aspekty, ale aj tie, ktoré prítomné boli, ale vymizli. V tomto kontexte rozvíjame ako prístup k riadeniu zmien v existujúcej zástavbe stratégiu adaptívneho opätovného využitia, v ktorej spájame existujúce reflexívne hodnotenie pamiatok s interpretáciou minulých intencií a s aktívnym určením intenčných hodnôt s cieľom napomôcť rozhodovaniu o transformačných procesoch. Tento príspevok preto skúma „intenčné hodnoty“ ako súhrnný termín pre možnosti (architektonické

zásahy), ktoré budova, jej história a kontext ponúkajú ako inšpiráciu pre ďalšie využitie. Vychádzajúc z bádania v archívoch a odbornej literatúre skúmame nielen históriu *Arenawijk*u, ale aj diskurz o hodnotách pamiatkovej starostlivosti vzhľadom na „intenciu“. Výskum dopĺňajú rozhovory s úradníkmi Flámskeho pamiatkového úradu (Flanders Heritage Agency) a odborníkmi na sociálne bývanie. Praktické overenie navrhovanej stratégie sa uskutočnilo v rámci projektu výskumu prostredníctvom dizajnu.

Prvá časť príspevku prináša stručný pohľad na dielo architekta Renaata Braema (1910 – 2001) a na *Arenawijk* – popisuje pôvodný dizajn, zahustenie zástavby v osemdesiatych rokoch a aktuálny stav. Braem, ktorý bol ako člen organizácie CIAM vo svojej kariére silne ovplyvnený svojím mentorom Le Corbusierom (1887 – 1965), čoraz viac experimentoval s jazykom organického dizajnu. Úlohy navrhnuť rozsiahle sídliská sa zhostil tak, že využíval nepravidelné pôdorysy, plynulé formy a skulpturálne prvky na to, aby sa vyhol nebezpečenstvu monotónnosti, ktoré v modernizme často hrozilo. *Arenawijk* navrhol ako hustú obytnú zástavbu s nízkopodlažnými budovami rozmiestnenými okolo verejného parku s pôvodnými stromami, s plánovanými výškovými domami a komunitnými zariadeniami. Hala Arena, prebudovaná historická pevnosť Deurne, mala plniť funkciu komunitného centra. Výškové domy však nikdy neboli postavené a následné zníženie hustoty obytnej zástavby viedlo k tomu, že z Areny sa stal exkluzívny športový komplex, a tak sa už nedala využívať ako komunitná budova. Desať nových stredne vysokých bytových domov postavených v parku začiatkom osemdesiatych rokov vyzerá pomerne funkčne, ale pretože sú v lepšom celkovom stave, nie sú súčasťou konverzie. Braemove bytové domy v súčasnosti nespĺňajú požiadavky na komfort, energetickú efektívnosť, zvukovú izoláciu, povrchové normy a požiaru bezpečnosť sociálnych bytových družstiev. Vzhľadom na náklady na renováciu a dobrovoľný záväzok dodržiavať flámske predpisy o sociálnom bývaní sa vlastníci *Arenawijk*u, Antverpská spoločnosť pre sociálne bývanie (Antwerp Society for Social Housing) rozhodla nahradiť severné budovy novostavbami a južné predať ako kondomíniá, aby mohla naďalej ponúkať sociálne bývanie v hospodárskom rámci.

V druhej časti sa zaoberáme hodnotiacim posudkom vypracovaným Flámskym pamiatkovým úradom, ktorý vyhodnocuje *Arenawijk* ako cennú pamiatku vďaka jeho architektonickej, historickej, urbanistickej a umeleckej hodnote a jeho významu ako

celku. Historická hodnota vychádza z jedinečnej polohy komplexu na mieste pevnosti Deurne, ktorá v krajine odkazuje na vojenské dejiny 19. storočia. Štvor- až päťpodlažné bytové domy sú rozmiestnené okolo centrálného parku s pôvodnými stromami, sledujúc nepravidelné obrysy bývalej pevnosti. Architektonická a urbanistická hodnota komplexu vyplýva z príslušnosti k architektonickému dielu Renaata Braema a z významu, ktorý má ako príklad povojnového modernistického sociálneho bývania. Realizácia modernistických myšlienok zahŕňala aj definíciu nových foriem spolužitia, rovnováhu medzi jednotlivcom a spoločnosťou, medzi krajinou, súkromnými priestormi a otvorenými verejnými priestranstvami. Konštrukcia budov, nosné múry s monolitickými podlahovými doskami a stavebné materiály, ako sú sklo, vlákno-cementové dosky Eternit, železobetón odlievajú na mieste i prefabrikovaný, sú príznačné pre modernistickú architektúru. Sochárske zásahy narušajú rytmus opakujúcich sa prvkov a pílkovité budovy na juhu vytvárajú organický architektonický jazyk. Oboje znamená pridanú umeleckú hodnotu.

Tretia časť štúdie uvádza pojem „intencné hodnoty“ ako alternatívny, doplnkový pohľad na historické budovy. Keďže posudzovanie hodnoty pamiatky je východiskovým bodom pre mnohé rozhodnutia zainteresovaných strán zapojených do projektu opätovného využitia, je to vhodné miesto na vyjadrenie obáv ohľadne súčasnosti a budúcnosti. „Intencné hodnoty“ nadväzujú na existujúci rámec hodnôt pamiatkovej ochrany a sústreďujú sa na skutočný význam stavby s cieľom posilniť jej hodnotu ako pamiatky, aj keď z inej perspektívy. Na odhalenie skrytého potenciálu existujúcej budovy a zhmotnenie rôznych možností a nápadov na zmenu boli použité rôzne stratégie. Na základe rozličných aspektov stavebného kontextu a rôznych zainteresovaných strán možno potenciálne prínosy budovy

zoskupiť do piatich okruhov: ekonomické, funkčné, estetické, sociálne a minulé intencné hodnoty.

V záverečnej časti odhaľujeme ďalší potenciál, ktorý ponúka samotná štruktúra budovy, stratégiu výskumu prostredníctvom dizajnu. Najmä v architektúre sa odporúča dizajnérske experimentovanie ako stratégia na získanie ďalších poznatkov o budove, mieste a kontexte. Ručné skice, vektorové výkresy a modely nám pomohli identifikovať rôzne možnosti dizajnu a vyhodnotiť vplyv zmien.

Dospeli sme k záveru, že konvenčná štátna ochrana nie je ani vhodným, ani jediným spôsobom ochrany architektonického dedičstva sociálneho bývania. Existujúci právny rámec identifikácie a ochrany pamiatok, ktorý spočíva v statickom posúdení hodnoty z odbornej perspektívy, naráža v tomto kontexte na svoje limity. Tento rozpor dokáže adresovať diskurz hodnôt, ktorý reprezentuje neustále sociálne, kultúrne, politické, ekonomické a ekologické zmeny a vyžaduje si neustále prehodnocovanie. Platí to najmä pre také typy budov, ako je sociálne bývanie, ktoré sa musia neustále prispôbovať meniacej sa spoločnosti s meniacimi sa potrebami. Z výsledkov výskumu je jasné, že potenciál výskumu založeného na dizajne tkvie v tom, že vytvára priestor pre experimentovanie a umožňuje predstaviť si zmenu. Kľúčom k dosiahnutiu udržateľnej budúcnosti existujúcich budov z ekonomického, environmentálneho a sociálneho hľadiska je otvoriť diskusiu už v počiatočnom štádiu poukázaním na rozličné „intencné hodnoty“. Stratégia, ktorú navrhujeme, je zatiaľ len výzvou k väčšej otvorenosti v diskusii o existujúcich budovách a treba ju ďalej overovať na ďalších prípadových štúdiách a typoch budov.

Heritage Alert: Introduction and Problem Statement

The demolition of social housing shows the fragile state of modernist housing typologies. Icons which have faced demolition include St Louis' Pruitt-Igoe housing development by Minoru Yamasaki (1912 – 1986) in 1971 and London's Robin Hood Gardens by Alison (1928 – 1993) and Peter (1923 – 2003) Smithson in 2017. One of the possible reasons for these demolitions and the absence of any legal protection could well be our confrontation with the limits of traditional heritage policy making based on the model of 'heritage values'. Indeed, due to their specific typology and intensive use, the conventional selection parameters based on 'heritage values' impose conceptual restrictions on an appreciation of the richness and architectural significance of buildings.

In Belgium, we are witnessing a similar development, with major modernist housing estates similarly being marked 'on the radar' by docomomo.¹ Examples include the Koning Albert Building (1956 – 1960) in Leuven by architects Léon Stynen (1899 – 1990) and Paul De Meyer (1922 – 2012) as well as the aforementioned social housing ensemble *Arenawijk* (1964 – 1971) in Antwerp by Renaat Braem (1910 – 2001), one of the most important Belgian modernist architects and urban planners.

This paper considers the (partial) demolition of Braem's *Arenawijk* planned for 2022. *Arenawijk* is a clear example of how the ideas of social housing have been slowly devalued over the years by adaptations, lack of maintenance and the subsequent deterioration of the neighbourhood. Such ideas included collective living in a green environment for all classes of the population. Following a systematic study of the heritage values of social housing performed by the Flanders Heritage Agency from 2011 to 2016, the *Arenawijk* was included in the inventory, and was further identified as an architectural heritage site of 'exceptional heritage value' in 2019.² However, compared to the listing of a building as 'protected monument', this recognition in the inventory only provides limited opportunities for legal exemptions and support, and does not protect against substantial alteration or even demolition. The Flemish legal framework would be sufficient to protect these examples of

social housing as monuments. Yet the discrepancy between their continuous use and the preservation of the original design, as required by traditional monument protection, calls into question the suitability of legal protection for this building typology. Despite recommending and supporting the renovation of social housing estates,³ the Flanders Heritage Agency also acknowledges in its study that its value assessment “focuses on heritage values which in a later stage need to be weighed against values such as economic value, liveability, use-value and housing quality”.⁴

In the case of the *Arenawijk*, the owner (the Antwerp Society for Social Housing) faced renovation costs and the self-imposed need to comply with Flemish social housing regulations. The Society decided to replace the northern blocks with new buildings and to sell the southern blocks as condominiums in order to continue offering social housing within an economic framework.⁵

The value assessment of the Flanders Heritage Agency is not only the legal basis for a possible listing process, but a fundamental source of information. Stakeholders such as municipalities, owners and architects draw on the expertise of the agency to obtain background information, assessment of heritage value and the possible link of heritage value to material aspects of the building.

Consequently, value assessment is an instrument that can guide but also constrain the future development of heritage buildings. The current approach of valuing buildings as testimonies of the past and assigning heritage values only to their existing tangible and intangible aspects leads to a reflexive determination of values. However, possible changes or developments require a visionary assessment that considers aspects of buildings that are potentially present or were previously present but have disappeared. Therefore, this paper explores ‘intentional values’ as a collective term for possibilities (architectural interventions) that the building, its history and context offer as inspiration for continued use. Especially for a building typology such as social housing, which must constantly adapt to a changing society with changing demands, this new category of values is necessary in the conservative assessment of values.

This paper begins with a brief history of architect Renaat Braem (1910 – 2001) and his *Arenawijk*. It then reflects on the value assessment of the Flanders Heritage Agency and discusses its flaws by introducing a new conceptual model for valuation. Subsequently, the notion of intentional values is introduced as an alternative and additional perspective on heritage buildings, as applied to our case study. In conclusion, we propose the methodology of research-by-design to uncover these intentional values.

The research methodology is based on a literature review of heritage values in preservation discourse as well as in legal texts. The history of the *Arenawijk* is investigated through archival and literature research. A practical test of the proposed strategy was carried out through a research-by-design project.

The Arena District – A Short Introduction

Renaat Braem (1910 – 2001) studied architecture at the Academy of Antwerp and was then an intern for Le Corbusier (1887 – 1965), who later admitted him as a CIAM member. Similar to Le Corbusier and partly influenced by him, Braem’s frame of reference was characterised by the socialist conviction that architecture should serve the benefit of society and improve people’s living conditions. Braem’s often polemic writings have, however, not been translated into English or French to this day, resulting in a limited recognition of his work in the international context of CIAM, following Team X and La Tendenza. One work to reach an international audience was his Kiel project (1949 – 1958), which was inspired by Le Corbusier’s *Unité d’Habitation* in Marseille (1946 – 1952). Kiel is considered a breakthrough in postwar large-scale social housing, largely due to its qualities as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*: art is integrated into the architecture and colour contrasts and murals are in balance with the landscape design which in turn serve the organic architectural expression of the buildings.⁶ In his later projects, Braem evolved towards ‘organic brutalism’, as can be seen in his library building in Schoten⁷ built in 1968 – 1974. While organic architectural forms were often successfully applied to public buildings or single-family homes, such as by Aalvar Aalto (1898 – 1976) and Josep Lluís Sert (1902 – 1983), Braem implemented them for large-scale apartment blocks. Braem used irregular shapes, fluid forms and sculptural elements in the housing projects *Kruisken-slei*⁸ (1958 – 1963) and *Arenawijk*, to break the lingering monotony that modernism often brought to large housing estates. These projects stand up to comparison with architectural icons such as Hugo



PHOTOGRAPH OF THE SOUTHERN RESIDENTIAL BLOCKS WITH VIEW TOWARD THE GALLERY LEADING TO TWO-STOREY APARTMENTS, ARENAWIJK ANTWERP (BE), 2021

FOTOGRAFIA JUŽNEJ ZÁSTAVBY S POHLADOM NA GALÉRIU VEDÚCU K DVOJPODLAŽNÝM DVOJBÝTOVKÁM, ARENAWIJK ANTVERPY (BE), 2021

Photo Foto: Marie Moors



PHOTOGRAPH OF THE NORTHERN BUILDING COMPLEXES OF SINGLE-STOREY APARTMENTS AROUND SHARED STAIRCASES, ARENAWIJK ANTWERP (BE), 2021

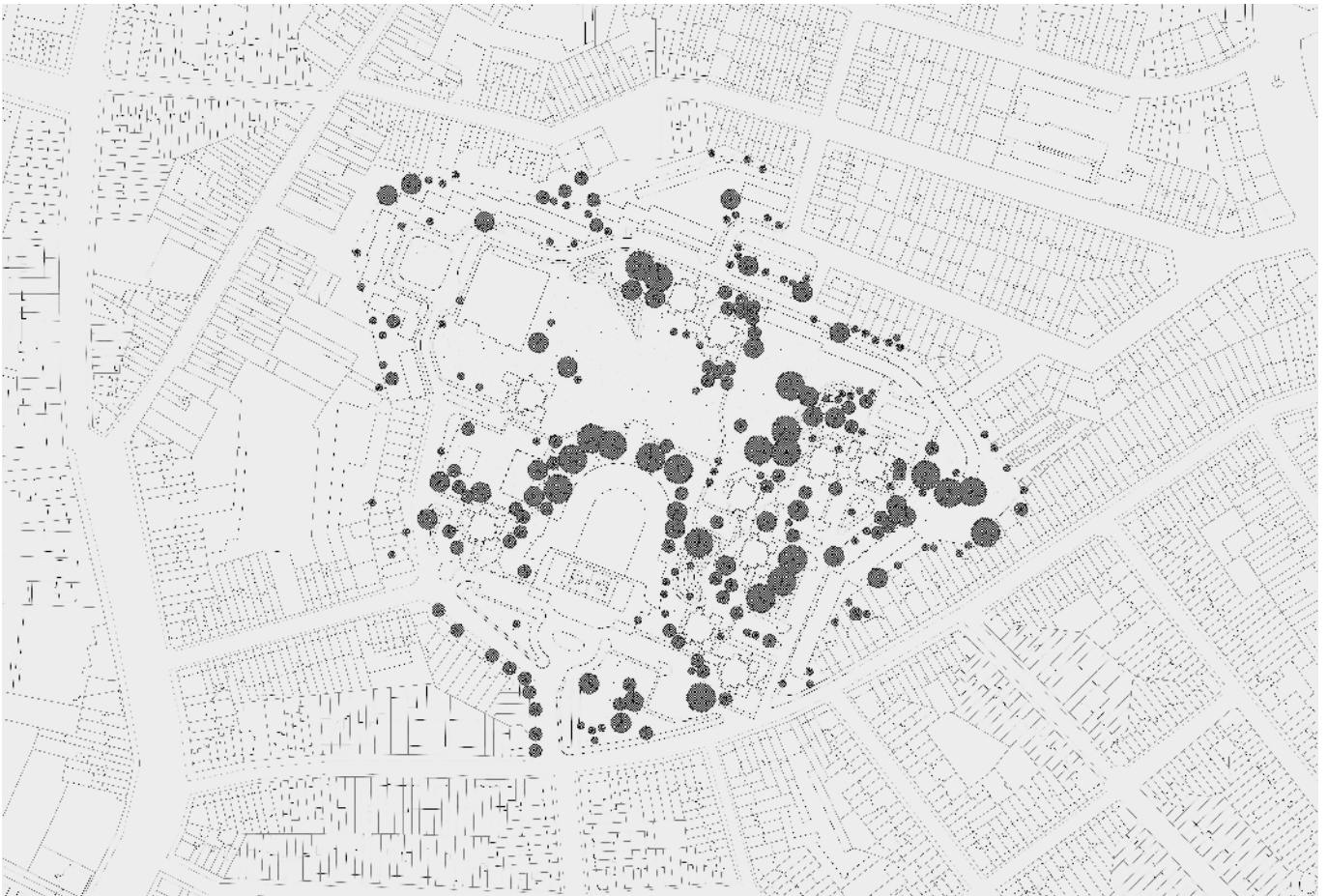
FOTOGRAFIA SEVERNÝCH KOMPLEXOV JEDNOPODLAŽNÝCH BYTOV POSTAVENÝCH OKOLO SPOLOČNÝCH SCHODÍSK, ARENAWIJK ANTVERPY (BE), 2021

Photo Foto: Elisabeth Broekaert

Häring's (1882 – 1958) *Siemensstadt* in Berlin and Hans Scharoun's (1893 – 1972) 'Romeo and Juliet' in Stuttgart.

The project site *Arenawijk* was matched to the footprint of the old Fortress of Deurne. The only remnant of the fortress is the Arena Hall, which was constructed for the fortified redoubt of Antwerp in the mid-19th century and provided shelter during World War II. After the site's recategorization as a residential zone in 1946, Braem, together with urban planner Octave De Koninckx (1914 – 1967) and architects Geo Brosens (1891 – 1967) and Flor Laforce (1902 – 1973) began the design process. The master plan of the site, developed by Braem and engineer August Mennes (1884 – 1953), was based on the CIAM principle of the 'neighbourhood unit', for which the former fortress fulfilled the role of a community centre. Due to the significant increase of inhabitants of Deurne, Braem proposed a high-density living solution via clustered towers flanking the Arena Hall. As the towers were never built, the reduction in density led to a change in the function of the fortress to a sporting complex.⁹

The initial plans for the *Arenawijk* demonstrate Braem's search for a vibrant scenography. A moderate version of this vibrancy still defines the image of the *Arenawijk* today. To the south there is an organic arrangement of housing blocks of two-storey apartments with gallery access, initially



**SITE PLAN OF THE ARENAWIJK
ANTWERP (BE), 2020**

PLÁN AREÁLU ARENAWIJK
ANTVERPY (BE), 2020

Author Autorka: Marie Moors

raised on *pilotis*. These stand in contrast to the more orthogonally arranged blocks to the north, which contain single-storey flats arranged around an internal staircase.

These different typologies were designed for a varied target audience. Braem's design used non-loadbearing interior walls within a modular system of loadbearing partition walls, which created some flexibility for the room layouts of the apartments. As the natural and landscape qualities were important to Braem, he preserved the valuable stock of trees spread over the terrain and used the irregular outer border of the former fortification constructions to determine the positions of the housing blocks, embracing a centralised park. Every flat has its own terrace and most overlook the park. In the 1970s, this park (the *Arenaweide*) was occupied by environmental movements and action groups to protect it from further construction. However, between 1980 – 1982 ten new mid-rise housing complexes were added, to Braem's dismay. The design architects were Lode Wouters (1930 – 2011), Fons Mostien (1940 – 2004) and Boud Rombouts (1947 – 2015). These blocks are strikingly different in their architectural expression (due to their grey, fast-construction brickwork) and do not fit Braem's concept. Therefore, they have a lower heritage value.¹⁰

The buildings of the Arena district are more or less preserved in their original architectural appearance. The residents reported that they still have the original bathtubs from 1968 and that only a little renovation work had occurred since then. The experimental materials used, whose longevity was unknown, are now in poor condition. Technical issues have occurred due to age, poor maintenance or ill-considered interventions over the years. Carbonation with subsequent corrosion of the reinforcement is the most common damage reflected in the exposed concrete structures.

In summary, the site does not meet the current requirements for comfort, energy efficiency, sound insulation, surface standards and fire safety of the social housing associations. Bearing in mind the poor structural conditions, the increasing vacancy rate of the flats and subsequent economic considerations, the autonomous municipal company for real estate management and

urban projects of the city of Antwerp prepared a feasibility study. As a conclusion of this study, the following strategies were proposed:

- renovation of the southern buildings,
- demolition of the northern buildings,
- new construction to replace social housing and public facilities such as a sports hall and a primary school,
- redesign of the entire public space (paths, crossings, greenery, play elements etc).

Based on these recommendations, an architectural competition was held for the redevelopment of *Arenawijk*. The resulting disturbance of the ensemble through the demolition of half of the Braem blocks is the outcome of an internal process which was not open to the public. This factor may also explain the exclusion of the Arena Hall, the 'heart' of the site, from the scope of the design brief.

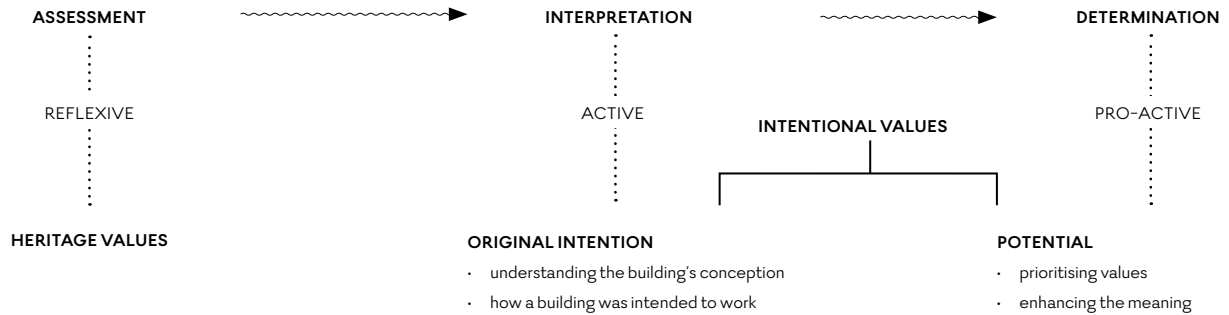
Heritage Values in the Flemish Context

Postwar modernist social housing estates occupy a special position in architectural heritage, both for their material and immaterial values. They represent the cultural heritage of postwar modernism, but they also reflect the development of social housing as a social and state-building enterprise. The Flanders Heritage Agency investigated to what extent the stock of social housing built in Flanders before 1985 is worth preserving from a heritage point of view by carrying out a thorough study.¹¹ The protection of 'monuments and buildings whose preservation is of national interest from [a] historical, artistic or scientific point of view'¹² has been based on recognition of heritage values since the first Belgian law on the Protection of Monuments and Landscapes in 1931.¹³ The current Flemish legislation refers to archaeological, architectural, artistic, cultural, aesthetic, historical, industrial-archaeological, technical, spatial-design, social, urban-planning, folklore and scientific value to identify cultural assets. In addition, the selection criteria 'rarity, recognisability, representativeness, ensemble value and context value' can be examined in relation to the identified values. Although legislation also aims to 'guide human behaviour and make society aware of a certain policy issue',¹⁴ its general motivation is to provide justification for the legal measures taken. The value assessment is also an important source of information for the valuation of the historic building stock, especially for laypersons. Regarding the *Arenawijk*, the Flanders Heritage Agency justified the exceptional heritage value¹⁵ by identifying the following values: architectural, historical, urban planning, and artistic value, as well as its significance as an ensemble.¹⁶ The historical value is motivated by the unique location of the *Arenawijk* on the site of Fort Deurne as a reference in the landscape to 19th-century military history. The architectural and urban planning value derives from its affiliation with the architectural oeuvre of Renaat Braem and its significance as an example of the postwar modernist social housing. The building structure and the building materials used are characteristic of modernist architecture. Sculptural interventions and diverse building silhouettes, which use an organic architectural language, establish an additional artistic value. As a result, the complex was included in the Flemish Inventory of Architectural Heritage based on its historical and architectural values.¹⁷

The social value specified in Flemish legislation was deliberately excluded from the study, although social housing already refers to this value in its name. The study justifies the omission of social value by stating that to assign social value, the neighbourhoods should 'retain their original purpose and target group, but also have a strong identity and a living sense of community (neighbourhood association, festivals, website, etc.)'.¹⁸ On the one hand, this example shows that the current regulatory framework is focused on identifying the former characteristics of a building. Thus, present-day characteristics and concerns are not considered in this reflexive determination of value. On the other hand, it also illustrates the difficulty of defining values, especially intangible values, with respect to the attribution of design elements that must then be protected.

In the case of a listing designation, the current structural condition of the *Arenawijk* buildings could pose problems. As the legislation cannot take into account possible changes, the assessment of the heritage value is based on the actual condition of the building. This excludes not only considerations of repairs in the case of defects in the building fabric (e.g. holes in the roof) but also alterations in the floor plan or function of the building. Managing these possible changes to buildings is the starting point of the strategy of adaptive reuse. By identifying potentials and anticipating changes in the building fabric and the significance of the building, the aim is to bridge the gap

ADAPTIVE REUSE PROCESS



ADAPTIVE REUSE PROCESS – FROM REFLEXIVE VALUE ASSESSMENT TO PRO-ACTIVE VALUE DETERMINATION, 2021

PROCES ADAPTÍVNEHO OPĀTOVNÉHO VYUŽITIA – OD REFLEXÍVNEHO POSÚDENIA HODNOTY K PROAKTÍVNEMU STANOVENIU HODNOTY, 2021

Author Autorka: Nadin Augustiniok

between conservation and reuse. Because of the increasing number of monuments, the ongoing need for conservation and the ‘underuse’ of many listed buildings, this approach seems overdue but has yet to find expression in the discourse on values and in politics.¹⁹

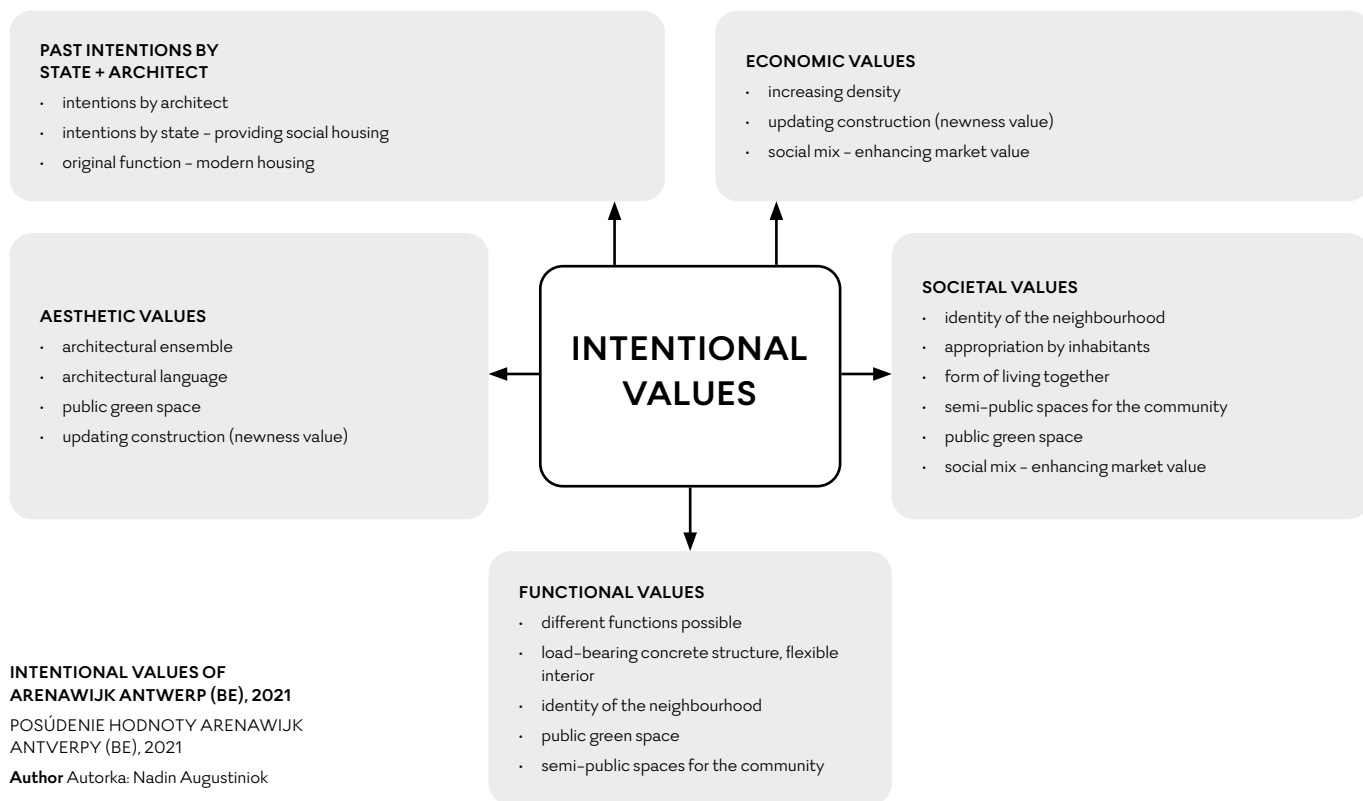
Intentional Values

“The role of the new intervention does not lie in simulating what already exists, but in reanimating it and exploiting its latent potential.”²⁰

Adaptive reuse of existing buildings is a comprehensive approach to identifying values and to the management of resultant change. The creation of values is crucial, as they reflect judgements and arise from the interaction of the observer with the context and the objects being valued. Therefore, in the theoretical identification of values, the different positions of the observers – the individual stakeholders – must first be established. This allows us to understand the original context and intrinsic meaning – intention – of the building’s design, which in turn can be juxtaposed with current circumstances and requirements to weigh the various options for the building’s future. In addition to the intentions of the architects, the state or owner, or even society, we can hence examine what possibilities the building itself still has to offer. Combining the existing reflexive value assessment of heritage values with an interpretation of past intentions and a proactive determination of intentional values can support decision-making in adaptive reuse processes.

‘Intentional’ as a term is not only used here in its most common understanding from Latin *intendere*, which means ‘intend, extend, direct’, but also in its embedded sense from *in*, meaning ‘towards’ and *tendere*, meaning ‘stretch, tend’. This allows us to not only ‘direct our attention to’, but also to ‘stretch out’.²¹ Accordingly, ‘intentional values’ can be used as an overarching term to reflect on the original ideas that led to the architectural concept, the subsequent appropriation of the design by the users and their associations with the site, as well as the hidden architectural potential. Examining the discourse on values in monument preservation to date, it becomes clear that the distinction between ‘intentional’ and ‘unintentional’ was already mentioned by Alois Riegl (1858 – 1905) in his ‘Modern Cult of Monuments’ of 1903. His distinction hinged upon the intention to build a monument and the decision that a building is a monument. In the case of an intentional monument, the commemorative value *has been determined by the makers, while we have defined the value of the unintentional ones*.²²

Within value discourse, the future aspect of ‘intention’ has often been associated with ‘option value’, which has been adopted from economic discourse. Timothy Darvill, for example, introduced a non-use value in 1996, consisting of an ‘existence value’ and the ‘option value’, the latter implying the value cultural properties will have in the future.²³ Although this included a potential value that a historical property could have for society, the strong economic orientation overshadowed these considerations. In 1997, Frey also addressed the lack of social aspects in the more economically driven valuation of the 1990s, which was based on willingness-to-pay methods. He pointed out that the value of a cultural asset is predominantly assessed in terms of the monetary revenue that can be derived. Accordingly, ‘option value’ referred to the fact that ‘a person may benefit from the supply of culture even if he or she does not currently use it’.²⁴ In 2002, Randall Mason, in his provisional typology of heritage values, also distinguishes socio-cultural values from economic values. He categorizes the ‘option value’ as an economic value, defining it as a value that refers to

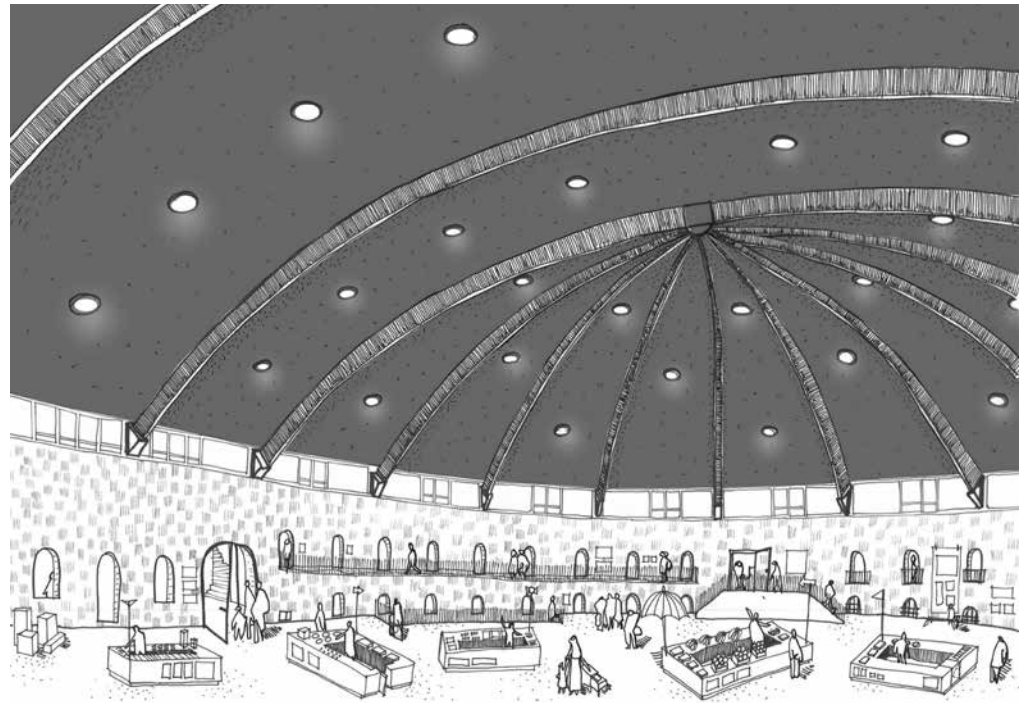


‘someone’s wish to preserve the possibility (the option) that he or she might consume the heritage’s services at some future time’.²⁵

The figure on page 154 gives an overview of the ‘intentional values’ that we have identified for the *Arenawijk* from theoretical considerations. Five groups summarise the potential benefits for the building based on the different aspects of the building’s context and the different stakeholders. The conventional framework for determining values is thus expanded, but still needs to be assessed in terms of its impact on heritage values. The past intentions include two different perspectives, that of the state and that of the designing architect. From the state’s perspective, social housing was intended to provide affordable but modern housing for all residents. The resulting social mix of inhabitants has since been lost, as social housing has developed into a safety net for the social underclass. From the architect’s point of view, a built representation of this new way of living together was realised with modern materials and building techniques. The concept of compact and collective living in a green environment with shared facilities and services, playgrounds for children, meeting points distributed throughout the neighbourhood, and often very spacious illuminated entrances, staircases or galleries as access to the flats became reality.

Considering the societal aspects, collective spaces as places to meet and build neighbourhood communities were part of Braem’s original vision. Since they were never realised, the community lacked spaces to develop an identity with their neighbourhood. Today, the library is used as a community learning and meeting space, but since it is not managed by the neighbourhood, it can only partially meet the demand.

Aesthetic values were subtly integrated into the design in the form of sculptural elements, also to counteract possible monotony and encourage residents’ affection for their new home. Although nowadays alterations to the flats by tenants are prohibited, changes have been made in the past to adapt to the needs and tastes of the residents. An example of this is the connection between the kitchen and the living room in the maisonnette flats, designed as sliding or revolving doors, made entirely of glass or without any partition. The alterations that contradict Braem’s original design represent a reduction in value and need to be evaluated whether they should be retained or the original design restored. The ground-floor areas, for example, were created by positioning the buildings



on pilotis to allow the landscape to flow under the buildings but were also intended by Braem to be communal spaces. These originally open spaces were converted into enclosed garages in the 1980s.

From an urban planning perspective, the features of the Arenawijk site – mid-rise buildings in a public park and an originally car-free zone – are again desirable. Given the increasing demand for housing and the economic pressure to densify the city, it represents a living or working environment that is difficult to recreate in this form today. In terms of functional values, alternative uses could be considered due to the incompatibility of the current condition of the flats with social housing regulations, especially since the construction of load-bearing concrete walls and the non-load-bearing interior walls offers a certain flexibility in the room layout. In this case, the functional use value as a residential building must be weighed against the historical value of preserving the building fabric as a reminder of a formal architectural language. Both the conventional heritage assessment and our comprehensive framework require further consideration and prioritisation of specific values to preserve the significance of the building.

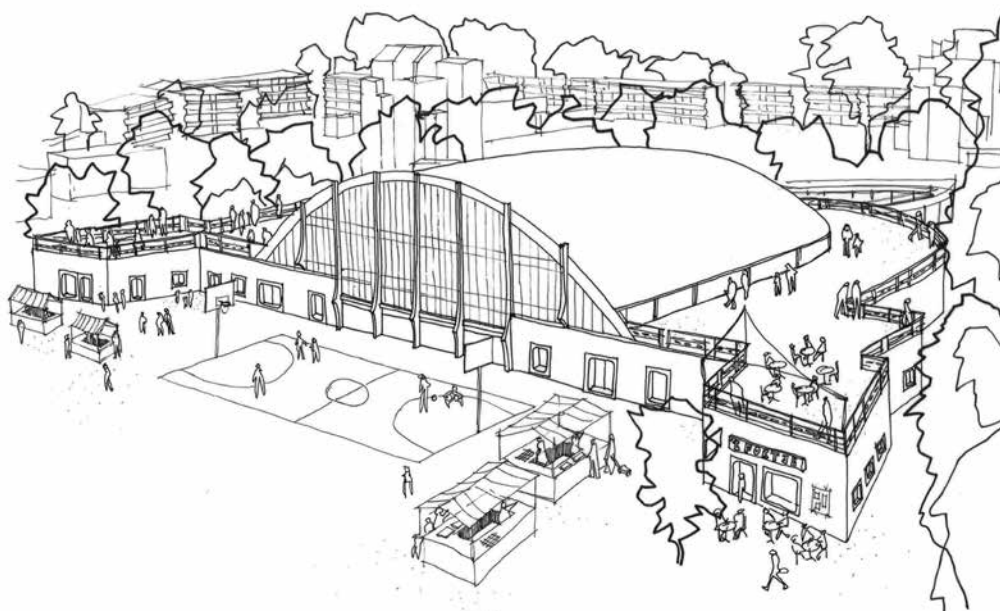
Intentional Values in Relationship with Research-by-Design

The recognised paths of preservation may benefit from including the 'intentional values' of an existing building. Concepts such as 'experimental preservation' by Jorge Otero-Pailos²⁶ already describe alternative approaches to securing the future of heritage objects. Despite the side effect of the uncertainty of the outcome, experimentation is recommended as a strategy for gaining knowledge about the objects. For architectural objects, the obvious strategy is to test different scenarios experimentally through design exercises. According to the EAAE, *research-by-design* is a method in which design is the fundamental component to generate critical inquiry within a design process.²⁷ Therefore, this paper employs 'research-by-design' as a method to uncover the intentional values linked to the *Arenawijk*. Hand sketches, vector drawings and models, helped to identify different design options and evaluate the impact of changes. The following images show the first results of this design research in which two design explorations for the Arena Hall were developed. The first proposal explored the use of the large hall as a multifunctional space. Possible purposes are a 'Grand Bazaar', cultural exhibitions/workshops, sporting complex or events such as concerts. This

PROPOSAL FOR RENEWED
ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ARENA
HALL ROOF, ARENAWIJK ANTWERP
(BE), 2021

NÁVRH OBNOVENIA PRÍSTUPU NA
STRECHU HALY ARENA, ARENAWIJK
ANTVERPY (BE), 2021

Author Autorka: Marie Moors



is combined with a library and buffet restaurant in the secondary parts of the former fortress. All the functions are complementary to each other and are specifically targeted at the inhabitants. This program vision is based on Braem's initial ideas of reusing the fort as a cultural centre. However, it also operates as an option to represent the different cultures at the site with the aim to reconnect old and young and making intermingling possible again. The second proposal was more focussed on the exterior area of the site and protected the current function of the hall (as a professional volleyball sporting complex) and its assigned heritage values. Making the roof accessible once again as a terrace and a viewing point promised a major area for people to intermingle, aside from a long ramp to the terrace, which added an adventurous, playful element in the open green park.

Building on the proven concept of establishing values to assess the significance of a building, 'intentional values' offer the possibility to identify hidden or less immediate qualities. Enlarging the decision-making process always carries the risk that too many people will become involved and will be unable to agree on a decision. However, the existing architectural heritage is a matter of public interest and must therefore also be valued with public considerations in mind. Simply raising awareness about the potentialities of a building can influence the conditions and restrictions of a reuse project. In the case of the *Arenawijk*, the opening of an architectural debate to reflect on alternative uses or the entire ensemble could have led to different choices from the beginning of the process. As the assessment of heritage values is the starting point for many stakeholder decisions, this is the best place to raise concerns for the present and the future. The 'intentional values' uncovered certainly also depend on the methods used.

The theoretical considerations discussed in this paper need to be explored further, as well as the involvement of the inhabitants and the general public as users of the spaces. The results of several informal conversations with people currently living in the *Arenawijk* were used to develop the subsequent design proposals. In addition, professional photographer Elisabeth Broekaert captured the stories of the people who lived in the Braem blocks through photographs for many years and has created a biography of persons and buildings, which was also consulted in the research.

Conclusion

Postwar modernist social housing is a relatively recent element of architectural heritage that is not yet entirely accepted as such. The function of social housing was decisive in shaping *Arenawijk's* design but maintaining this use to the present day has presented a challenge to all actors involved. In having to adapt to current regulations regarding the safety and well-being of occupants, this use

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even presents a disadvantage. The question arises as to how the original use can be maintained, or whether other priorities must be set to preserve the building. Conventional state protection may be neither the right nor the only way to preserve the architectural legacies of the social housing development. The existing legal framework for identifying and maintaining heritage buildings, consisting of a static value assessment from an expert's perspective, reaches its limits in this context. The discourse of values, representing ongoing social, cultural, political, economic and ecological changes needs constant revision. A more dynamic value scheme would be better suited to face this problem.

In this study, 'intentional values' were introduced into the admittedly already extensive framework of heritage values. This new perspective with temporal dimensions in the past and future is intended to reveal possibilities that have not been considered before. In this case, postwar modernist social housing is a challenging but very interesting typology with which to rethink 'reuse'. Starting from the potential that the building has to offer in the present, the existing building fabric must be understood as a resource, which is particularly vital at a time when affordable housing and sustainable urban planning are a priority. The aim is not only to consider concerns aside from heritage protection, but also to enhance the meaning of the building and thus strengthen its heritage values. Different strategies can uncover the hidden potentialities of an existing building or site. Research-by-design is suitable for materialising a variety of options and imagining change.

As a result of the research, the potential of design-based research is evident. It creates space for experimentation and makes it possible to imagine change. The key to achieving a sustainable future for existing buildings in economic, environmental and social terms is to open the discussion at an early stage by revealing different 'intentional values'. The strategy we propose is, thus far, primarily a call for more openness in the debate on existing buildings and our proposal needs to be tested on other case studies. Further investigations can examine which typologies this approach is suitable for, and to what extent 'intentional values' can supplement current value assessments.

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