

## LEIEDAL Intercommunale: “Conservation through development”

### The TRANSFO Site Project

#### New Governance Models in Leiedal

ALTERNATIVE GOVERNANCE MODELS TO TACKLE LOCAL CHALLENGES. THE INTERMUNICIPAL ORGANIZATION LEIEDAL IS ELABORATING THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK, TOGETHER WITH STAKEHOLDERS FROM THE MUNICIPALITY AND THE PROVINCE, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT SUGGESTIONS FROM EXTERNAL EXPERTS, THE FLEMISH HERITAGE AGENCY AND USERS OF THE SITE TO DEVISE A NEW GOVERNANCE MODEL UNDER THE MOTO 'CONSERVATION THROUGH DEVELOPMENT'.

The Leiedal Intercommunale is an intermunicipal organisation representing the 13 cities and municipalities located in in the Flemish province of West Flanders. The expression “Conservation through development” in the title became the moto of the organisation pointing the direction of its policies towards cultural heritage protection and conservation. It’s a sound strapline for the concept that Leiedal is trying to implement in this region.

People always looked at Cultural Heritage management as being a responsibility of governments, a public service deliverer to citizens where the intrinsic historic value of the concerned patrimony was enough reason to justify any investment made in rehabilitation. The social returns for the community were and still are evident. However, as the responsibilities of local authorities in the management of the sites became more and more important, they soon faced a sustainability problem due to the limited resources available.

By linking conservation policies to development initiatives, cities can build a more sustainable model for cultural heritage management and this way extend the capacity to do for instance more rehabilitation works or reduce operational costs of buildings. Cultural heritage management became a development issue.

We’ll analyse specifically at two projects launched by the Intercommunale that are symptomatic experiences of the challenges that the region of Leiedal is facing:

- **Transfo**, an industrial building located in the Zwevegem municipality, and
- **AHAP**, a patrimony protection scheme setup by the Intercommunale.

## The TRANSFO Site

Transfo is an A-listed power plant dating back to 1912. It is a unique ensemble of boiler rooms, a turbine hall, power distribution building and various additional buildings and machines. In 1985, the production of electricity at the Transfo power plant was shut down. The production of steam however continued in operation until 2001 but soon after the all plant was phased out and closed. As the building started to decay it became a scar in the landscape.



The rehabilitation of the site turned out to be a huge challenge for the municipality of Zwevegem with only 25.000 inhabitants. The site had undoubtedly a strategic value for the municipality, but at the same time, it was quite clear that a thoughtful and sustainable re-use would be extremely difficult.

After 15 years of investment and hard work from a partnership composed by the municipality of Zwevegem, the Intercommunale of Leiedal, the Province of West-Flanders and the Flemish Government, the site is finally gaining momentum and a growing number of initiatives and activities are being implemented there, reusing the spaces for new functions while mooring entrepreneurship with an increasing of businesses being installed at the old central.



*"It is a particularly large project that I think will never be completely finished. The challenge for the future will be to forge a team out of this large group of users; a team that takes ownership and responsibility of the entire site and discuss with us the future direction of the site. The added value of international co-operation is being able to engage in conversations with people in a similar situation, small cities with relatively large heritage projects."*

*Johan Rollez , PMO officer @ Telenet  
(ex-Mayor of Zwevegem Municipality till December 2018)*

Through INT-HERIT, Intercommunale staff could see other experiences of managing cultural heritage. The diversity of heritage and the different approaches and experiences taken by other cities gave a new perspective on how to tackle their own challenges. So the city involved several stakeholders in the transnational meetings of INT-HERIT and



setup an Urbact Local Group (ULG) for periodic meetings. The ultimate goal is to set up an informal network that facilitates regular exchange of ideas, experiences, and best practices. From these meetings came out an idea to benchmark the site 'Transfo', an ongoing project tackling a huge industrial building, against other similar sites. They called it very appropriately "Looking over the Fence" initiative. For saving resources, the visits were organised to sites in a 150 km circle with similar features, i.e., big industrial buildings put to new uses and manage by the municipality. The main objective was to look for ways to tackle the sustainability issues that are usually associated to this type of structures. It's interesting to note some comments taken from the participants' feedback:

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*"It is striking that each site has a niche-based approach!"*

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*"All functions, activities and facilities contribute to a unique ecosystem. This ecosystem should be well balanced and multifaceted. When there is too much emphasis on one single function or activity, the ecosystem becomes*

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*"Conservation through development takes time. We are talking about 20 years or more. Moreover, the work is never finished: there is no 'final result'. It is, however, important to gain momentum."*

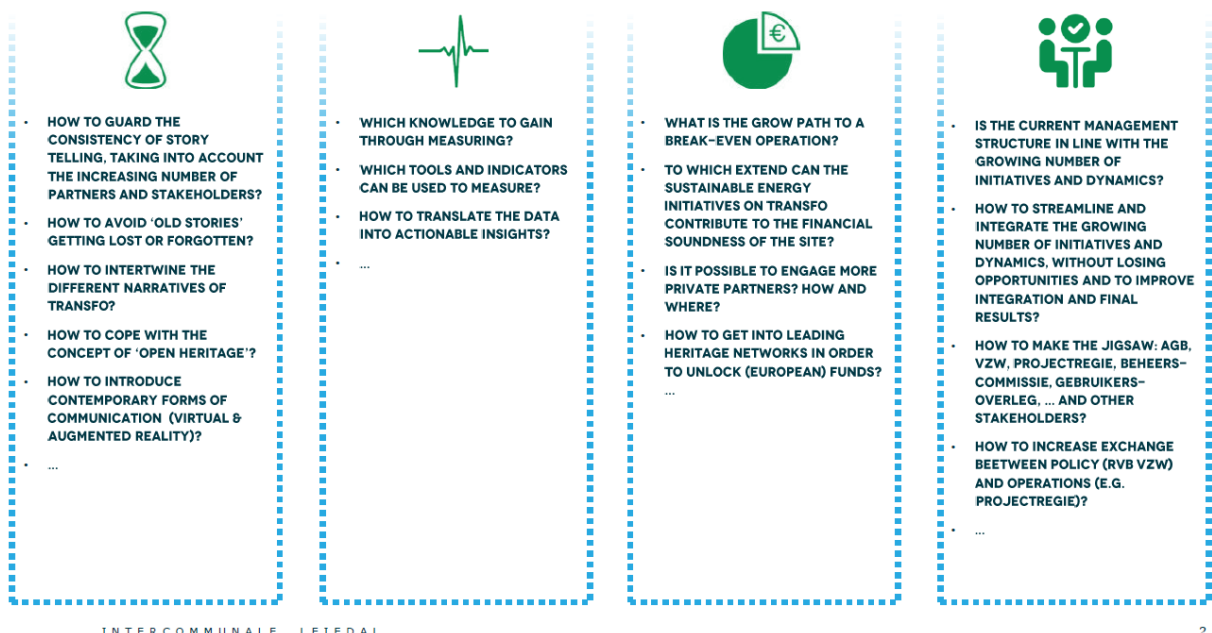
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In fact, rehabilitation of big industrial buildings for other uses is a big challenge and poses many risks. The initial capital required to restore the building usually takes all resources leaving much lesser means for the activation and management of the site. But the problem is not only money because the spaces are normally huge and finding a sustainable use of it is not an easy task. Seeing other sites and solutions will definitely help to devise ways to achieve this



"momentum". A "multifaceted ecosystem" is a demanding 'system' where you have to deal with various different functions across the building (in the case of Transfo a diving tank , an extreme park, etc) but that we need to keep adding more and more has parts of the building becomes usable for another function. A solution to manage this is to build this network of stakeholders where these multiple uses, functions and events can operate on a collaborative environment. The challenges facing the site are better described in the following chart:



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The ultimate goal is to include them in the governance model and support proper integration of the various actors operating at the site



## The AHAP protection scheme

Another interesting initiative on going is the AHAP protection scheme. It envisages enlarging the scope of protection to those buildings and sites that despite not being listed by the responsible regional authority (Flemish Architectural Heritage on Inventory - FAHI) have however local historical value that require special care in the way rehabilitation works are defined for that building. Currently, the region of Flanders has a cultural



heritage scheme in place listing all protected buildings and monuments. However the classification criterion is quite tight and the listing has left out many of the buildings that the Intercommunale of Leiedal wants also to protect because of their importance for the local history and traditions.

The concept is to decentralize the listing of cultural heritage and give municipalities the authority to avoid demolishing buildings with local historical value even without specific architecture interest. This approach is fine tuning the listing criteria according to local policies.

The AHAP puts an extra layer on top of the current regional protection scheme by providing several services to support owners of the buildings and help them on the rehabilitation works. Currently, Leiedal has screened and valued about 4.000 buildings since the start of the project in 2016. Each building permit related to architectural heritage buildings is evaluated based on the locus value and development profile. General outcome is a better and more thoughtful preservation of architectural heritage in all municipalities of the Intercommunale. Municipalities provide about 25 euros per item on the list. This includes preparation, field work, inventory, evaluation proposal, mapping of the geoportal and other tools used by the system.

The regional approach provides benefits of scale for all the municipalities. It's a simple framework, easy to implement that solution for the management of those thousands and thousands of heritage buildings that for one reason or another are not listed in the general protection scheme of the region but which have a certain heritage value because of building physics, aesthetic characteristics and/or its cultural meaning for the municipality.

## A New Governance model

The current governance framework for the Transfo site has been a good model in the past. However, due to the growing number of initiatives and dynamics, the model shows traces of wear. Stakeholders feel that the pragmatic approach no longer meets the requirements. An overview of the evolution

The governance model for Transfo today is a pragmatic one. “We just have to carry on” is the typical mindset in Flanders. This approach works wonderfully as long as things do not get very complex. This mindset has brought Transfo to a point that the site gains momentum and becomes subject to a growing number of initiatives and dynamics. The new governance framework includes a set of instruments, which are still under construction. The instruments that are developed



are (1) a new organization chart, (2) a dynamic 3D model of the site to visualize cost allocation and to manage property rights and rights of use and (3) a model for a co-operation agreement between the structural partners of Transfo. Gradually, other complementary instruments will be developed.

The improved organization chart includes new elements, like the introduction of (a) a consultative body for users, (b) a selection committee evaluating new initiatives on the site, (c) a quality supervision committee and (d) a financial working group. It also suggests improvement of the existing structures, especially the board supervising the quality of architectural and restorative interventions.

Shaping an organizational and financial governance framework typically is not something that is very open to citizens and community participation, because of the high level of technicality of the subject.

It is, however, the objective to include stakeholders in the governance of the site. The user group for instance will discuss both small and big issues and opportunities, coordinating and cooperating with the quality supervision committee, the financial working group, etc. The user group includes amongst others a representative of the housing development, the operator of Transfo Diving, the operator of Transfo Climbing, the event agency responsible for the management of the event halls at Transfo, a representative of the businesses of the New Transfo building, among other. The group meets twice a year and in between if necessary. The meetings are also a platform to communicate new initiatives, to align different interests and to resolve dilemmas and conflicts.

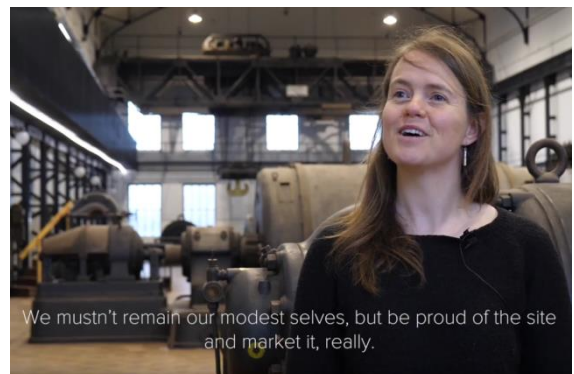


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*"The URBACT INTHERIT project is a powerful lever for igniting change. It offers a mirror and a framework to enable change. Because of the intensive interaction within the INT-HERIT network, Leiedal became aware of the benefits of looking over the fence: the exchange between partners enables Leiedal to gain practical experience in implementing a new governance model for Transfo, a historical and listed power plant in the municipality of Zwevegem."*  
*Stijn Vannieuwenborg, Project Manager at Leiedal*

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*We should appreciate that we've finally reached a milestone in the long way of redevelopment. Lets' take a pause and sell what is already there. The site has already a lot of unique things, a lot has been repurposed and there is a lot to show. We shouldn't remain our modest selves but be proud of the site and market it, really!*



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*The Flemish government drew up the architectural heritage inventory and made it available for the municipalities. The idea is for all stakeholders to take their responsibility to develop a local action plan and to highlight and enrich the inventory. The added value lies in the cooperation of municipalities, for a better overview on a larger scale.*  
*Frederic Mahieu*

## What's next?

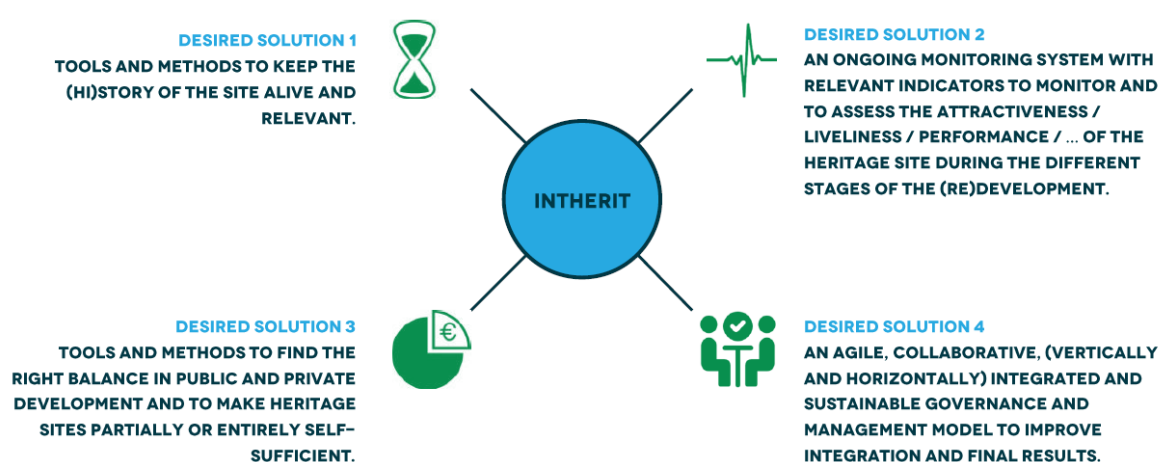
The existing co-operation agreement between current structural partners (Leiedal, municipality of Zwevegem and Province) ends in Q2 2019. The insights provided by the INT-HERIT project will definitely lead to an improved and joined-up agreement. The partners are shaping the model for the co-operation agreement, following the political discussions between the municipality of Zwevegem and the Province of West-Flanders.

The co-operation agreement includes decisions on:

- budget and financial contributions of the different partners;
- items this budget will be spent on (amongst which a dedicated site manager);
- milestones that the partnership wants to achieve in the next coming 6 years;
- responsibilities and engagements of each of the partners;
- a blueprint of the new governance framework to be implemented at the beginning of the next co-operation period.

Currently, Leiedal is elaborating the governance framework, together with the stakeholders from the municipality and the Province, taking into account suggestions from external expert, the Flemish Heritage Agency, users of the site and contributions from the INT-HERIT Network. The new model will be developed across the following priority areas (“desired solutions”):

## WHAT?



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The peer review and six visits to similar heritage sites revealed some new ideas and reignited existing ones. It provided unprecedented insights and interesting perspectives. Here are some the ideas selected for next phase of the project:

- introduction of a site manager and single point of contact
- development of a lookout point in the former water tower
- development of an experience trail related to energy
- simplification of the governance structure (e.g. shutting down the VZW, relieving Transfo of an administrative burden)
- put the focus on renewable energy; development of the EMPOWER 2.0 project (recently approved).

All these proposals are pointing a direction for advancing the project into a new phase of implementation where the site capitalizes the huge investments already done. In fact, the Transfo Site is reaching a turning point where all the initiatives taken place at the site are getting momentum and also starting to build synergies among each other, creating a new and attractive offer for the population.

The rehabilitation and repurposed of the buildings and surrounding infrastructures was for many years at the core of the team efforts to bring the site to life. An increasing number of activities, businesses and events taken place there turn the site more and more dynamic and unmanageable. Through a new governance model, the Intercommunale is seeking to build a framework that promotes a constructive dialog with the population on the future of the site (see link to vox pop video below), and a better integration of the several entities responsible for its management. It's still too soon to see what impacts will produce but the change in the mindset is already happening, creating methods and tools for a better management of cultural heritage in the region.

Rehabilitating and reusing huge industrial installations presents many challenges. It requires a lot of money (in particular the initial capital to do the works) and maybe even more important, it requires a lot of time to implement. This reality is often very hard to explain local residents that may pose the question "Why so much money has been spent over the years by the municipality on its rehabilitation when they see no results?"; It's a comprehensive question when you watch this slow evolutions of the project over time. It's time for the management team to collect all the results from previous efforts and initiate a phase of fully exploitation of the site, returning it to the local community.

**May 2019**

**By Pedro Soutinho, INT-HERIT LE**

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## Videos

Leiedal Vox pop video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adH96AUE6Zs>

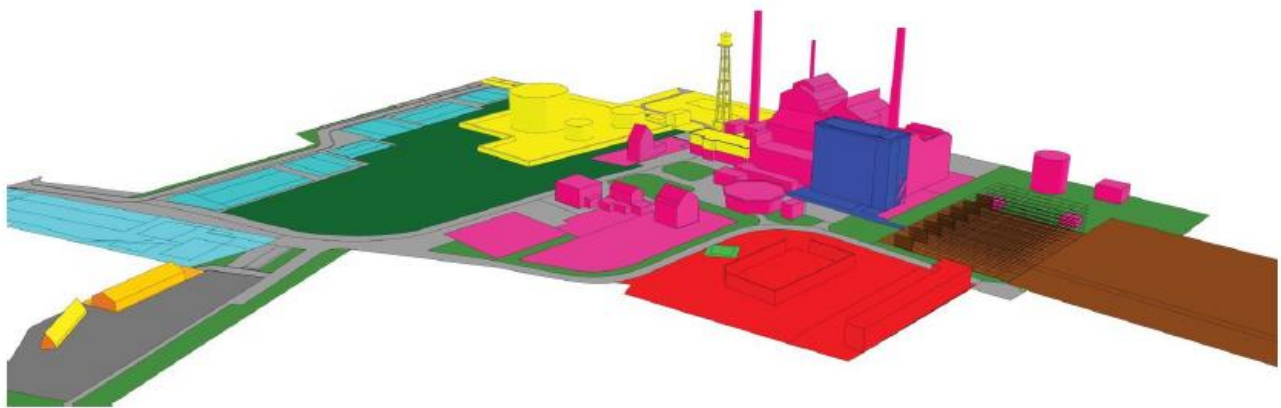
"Leading with architectural heritage" Video Case: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SuI9mIg9NF0>

"Transfo Open Monumentendag" Vox Pop Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adH96AUE6Zs>

Leiedal Transnational Meeting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjN78GkCUYA>

## About the INT-HERIT Project

The INT-HERIT project is an Implementation Network under the Urbact Programme that identifies, collects and exchanges knowledge across nine small to medium-size cities sharing similar challenges when tackling cultural heritage protection, conservation or valorisation. Implementation has all sorts of constraints and variables that may influence the final results. New smart, low cost initiatives are being implemented to overcome these constraints by adopting an integrative and participative approach towards stakeholders aiming to increase the value created for the community through heritage conservation projects. This article provides an overview of some of the initiatives currently taking place in the city in order to contribute for a knowledge base of solutions that will be hopefully useful for other cities across Europe while managing their cultural heritage."



**Dynamic 3D model of the Transfo Site**



**Team at Intercommunale Leiedal**

