

OPEN OPROEP THEATERPLEIN EN OMGEVING

Study Assignment Theatre Area Antwerp, Belgium

I. Introduction

After studying the very complex set of conditions presented in the program brief for the arrangement of the Theaterplein area, we have come to the conclusion that the area has a great deal of potential as both a central public node within the larger urban context, as well as a thriving and lively public space in its own right. Our belief is that in the creation of great public spaces, the definition of a clear and systematic process and the statement of visions is more important in this preliminary phase than is a concrete design.

The design and the final solution itself must come about through the work of a multi-disciplinary team, which should involve many parties both from the designer's team as well as from the city entities, and it would be premature to offer solutions before these meetings have had a chance to evolve. Our approach, therefore, has been to devise a strategy for the analysis and solution of problems progressing from general to specific issues and this is how the presentation will be structured:

- The statement of the main ideas and visions which will guide our project
- The strategy for the working method, and the creation of a multi-disciplinary team to be involved throughout the project
- The separation of the issues presented in the brief into 4 strategies, where we present a set of problems, and then specific ideas and strategies for their resolution





WHAT MAKES A GREAT PLACE?

- key attributes
- strategies
- ideas

Sustainability

We believe that one of the most important concepts in creating a great public space is its sustainability. This has several implications: First of all the plaza must be able to accommodate many changing functions, and be attractive to different kinds of users- not only the theater-goers, but also parents from the neighborhood who come to use the plaza and their children, older children such as skaters who can have their own separate zone, without disturbing other groups, people who come simply to stroll through the space or use the cafes and shops in the surrounding streets, senior citizens who wish to use the space to sit and socialize.

Only when the plaza offers these kinds of multiple-use zones, each with its own character, will it become a vibrant townscape on all days of the week, and not only during weekend market, functioning both in the daytime and night-time, and in changing weather.

The materials used in all zones of the plaza should be long-lasting, durable, and have symbolic value.

All of these concepts will lead to the creation of public space with a long life and a permanent presence in the consciousness of the city.

Flexibility

We envision the plaza as being an open and flexible space, structured in such a way that it can accommodate both permanent and changing functions, throughout the day. It is our firm belief that a public space becomes successful, when its quality is more than the sum of its parts. In other words, when there is a variety of different things to do in one spot, and several focal points are created for the different activities, which will guarantee permanent use.

No functions will work unless the plaza is correctly framed and defined. There are several possible solutions for this, including the creation of dense rows of trees or new cafes and kiosks around the perimeter to define the plaza as a "room" and to close off the ambiguous corners. Another option is to work together with the owners of the existing cafes and shops along the three bordering facades to make them more involved with the activity on the plaza.



Permanent and temporary elements to introduce in the plaza:

- Permanent public elements in the plaza such as a central fountain or public sculpture, and various urban furniture to make it more habitable – benches, drinking fountains, night-time lighting, etc.
- Division of the plaza into separate and interchangeable zones, which will not take away from the feeling of the whole, including: a quite green space for children to play, an area for skaters placed so as to not disturb the other zones with noise, an area in front of the theater acting as a kind of outdoor foyer, and with billboards advertising its events, a public zone connected to the youth theater and to its new cafe, for parents and children to socialize before and after shows.
- Temporary public elements in the plaza such as: a tourist information kiosk, which may also function as a ticket sales kiosk for the theater.

- A place close to the theater set aside for changing outdoor art and sculpture exhibitions.
- A removable amphitheater for events in good weather, such as public concerts, lectures, children's shows, or even an outdoor cinema.
- The setting up, together with the city authorities in charge of cultural events, a series of events to be held on the plaza throughout the year.
- A location for street performers and artists
- An area set aside for bicycles, both for visitors of the theater, as well as of the plaza and its various zones.
- The possible opening of one or two of the existing canals under the street, in order to increase touristic interest in the area.

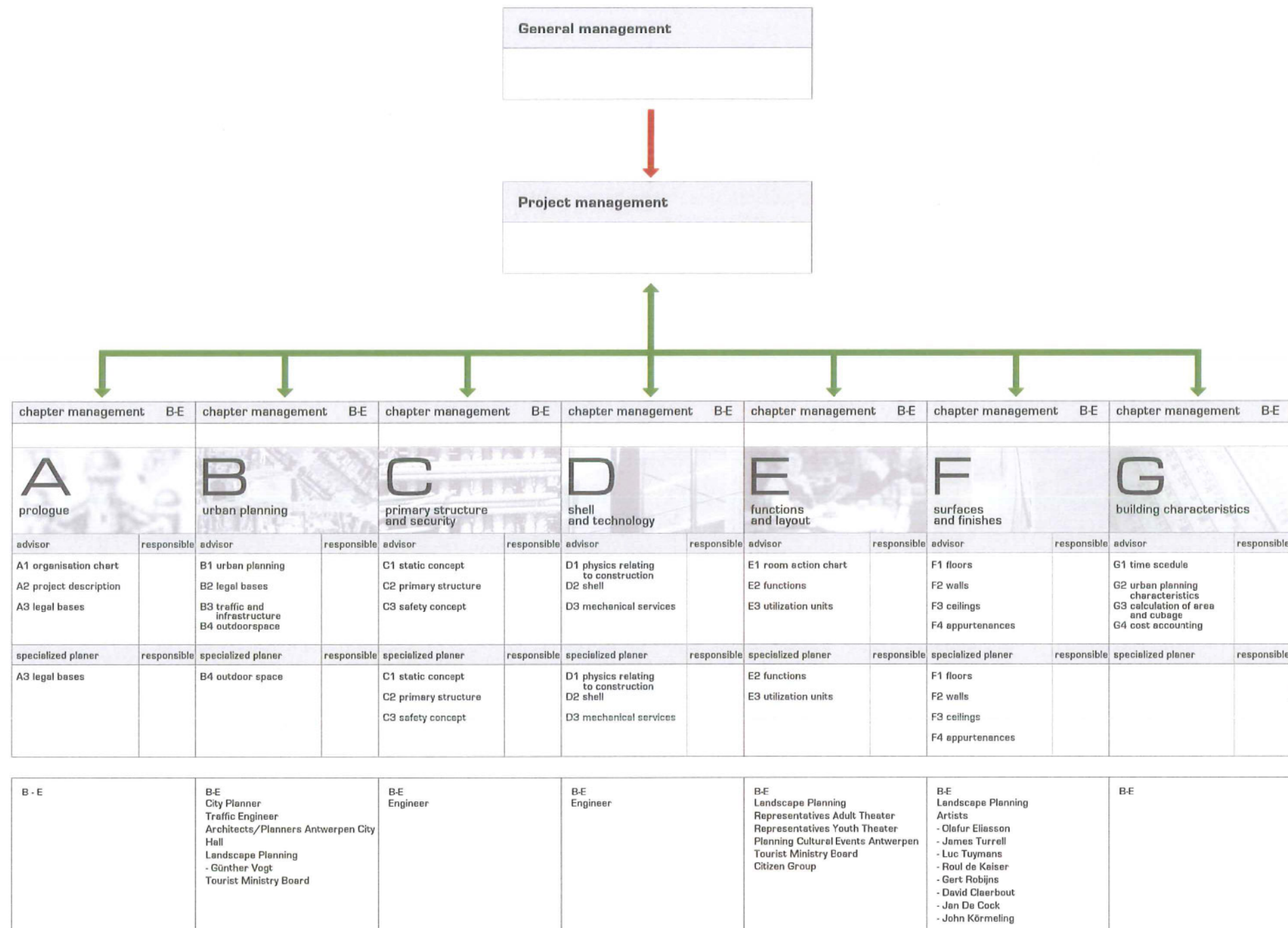
Collaboration

The most successful public projects are done in collaboration with a multi-disciplinary team of experts, and with the participation of interest groups from the city - we suggest the creation of such a team to follow the entire development of the project. The vitality of any public space, especially one as complex as this one, depends on the collaboration of various parties.

In the Theaterplein there are several urban elements that work together to form the place, yet they are managed also by several public entities: First, the adult and the youth theater, then the cafes and shops all around the plaza, the market organizers, the traffic administrators who control access to the site and the parking, the city officials who take care of landscaping and maintenance of the plaza, etc.

In a typical situation, instead of a unified approach to improving the place, there would be atomized spheres of influence- The Department of transportation manages the traffic with less concern for the users of the plaza, the owners of the cafes do not involve the pedestrians or visitors to the theater, and so on. But if we look upon these elements as interrelated components of a single place, we create more opportunities for the collaboration. How can the streets, plaza, theater, surrounding businesses, etc. support and strengthen each other? What do all of them envision for the area? By listening to all of these entities and to local citizens, the solution to what the place needs to be becomes apparent. The plaza will become a successful and vibrant place, when all entities in the surroundings become involved in this cooperative approach.





Settlement of the project

The project is being lead by the general management. He is responsible for the contextual, architectonic and functional idea of the project as well as for the communication with the investor.

The project is divided into seven chapters. They are built up in a sequential logic.

Each chapter is lead by a responsible chapter leader. This chapter leader is responsible for the controlling and coordinating of the sub-chapters. The chapter leader also is the contact person for the involved planners and subject planners.

In chapter A prologue all the basic data needed for an efficient planning process is being controlled.

Chapter B urban planning is concentrating on the city planning restrictions, which have to be respected. The design of the outside space is also dealt with in this chapter.

Chapter C primary structure certainly is a main chapter for the entire project. All the bearing structures are made visible and coordinated with the static engineer. The security is in direct relation to the primary structure. These are the basics for further steps in the project.

Content of chapter D shell and technology are all the elements of the shell of the building as well as building specific technical elements, which are in relation to each other.

Function and Layout are being dealt with in chapter E and are in relation to the structural base of chapter C.

Surfaces and finishes are the issue of chapter F.

In Chapter G all the building data is being shown.

In general graphics are in black and white only information regarding the specific chapter is shown in colours. The project leader is responsible for guiding and controlling issues overlapping chapters.



PROPOSED WORKING METHOD

- key attributes
- tasks and participants
- tasks and participants

FOUR STRATEGIES:

1. The Theaterplein as the Center of a Newly-Defined Theater District

Our vision for the Theaterplein is not only as a strong and vibrant public space in itself, but also as the center of cultural activity in the area. With a clear re-structuring of connections in and around the Theaterplein district, it can become a virtual theater district, a focus of both touristic activity and in a sense, a cultural front facade from where an exploration of the area may begin.

We may pinpoint the two main problems in the current situation as the following:

- Although the Theaterplein is situated centrally between the Boulevard and the Meier, amidst multiple theaters and close to some of the most important shopping axes, the accesses in and between these points are not clearly defined and therefore the Theaterplein becomes a detached space.

- The second problem is the lack of definition both of the Plaza as an urban space, and of the kinds of activities which should occur here, independent of those of the

market and of the theater. As a result, the area is used only intermittently, but is deserted for most of the time. Also undefined remain the inter-relationships between the various groups and organizations who should be most interested in the public life of Theaterplein and therefore, successful collaboration is not possible at this point.

The solution for the area must begin with a unification of the entire district around the Theaterplein as a focal point, a weaving together of the city fabric, so to speak, to make both Theater and Plaza participate fully in the cultural life of the city and become a "townscape". The following is a list of the connections which we would begin to establish in for working project:

- clearly defined traffic routes for both auto and bus, including access to various events on the plaza and drop-off the theater visitors

- pedestrian accesses in and between the several theaters and other cultural monuments in the area, clearly marked both for Antwerp citizens and tourists.
 - Attractive pedestrian routes which lead directly from the shopping axes to the Theaterplein, directly involving the surrounding streets
 - Connections with the historical center of Antwerp along these shopping axes, the creation of a tourist information kiosk on the plaza which will guide users to these new accesses

The second solution involves the transformation of the plaza into a magnet in this district, by concentrating many appealing functions here –our aim would be to draw people of all ages at all times of the day – to create a "city in miniature", from where the exploration of the new theater district could begin.



Funciesamenstelling dagfuncties

- Bedrij detailhandel
- Kanto horeca
- 01-op hotel
- 02-pa Ambt
- Wone bedrijven
- Bijzon kantoor
- Leeg
- Park
- Dier
- 01 - opslag (winkelopslag)
- Parke 02 - parkeerruimte particulier
- Medis
- Religi 03 - parkeergarage
- Biblic
- Schou ambachtelijk / kunst
- Schoc wonen
- Post
- bijzondere bebouwing
- Func park / tuin
- dagft dienstverlening
- Deti
- Har
- Hdti
- Bed parkeren
- Kan
- 01-c medisch
- 02-f
- 03-f religieus
- Amb
- Wor bibliotheek
- Bijz
- Lee schouwburg / opera
- Par
- Dier school
- Parl post
- Mec

2. The Plaza as a Vibrant and Sustainable Public Space

In response to the problems outlined in the program, we have identified four strategies for making the plaza in front of the theater a vibrant and sustainable public space, and these will be illustrated by images of other successful urban spaces which have made use of similar methods.

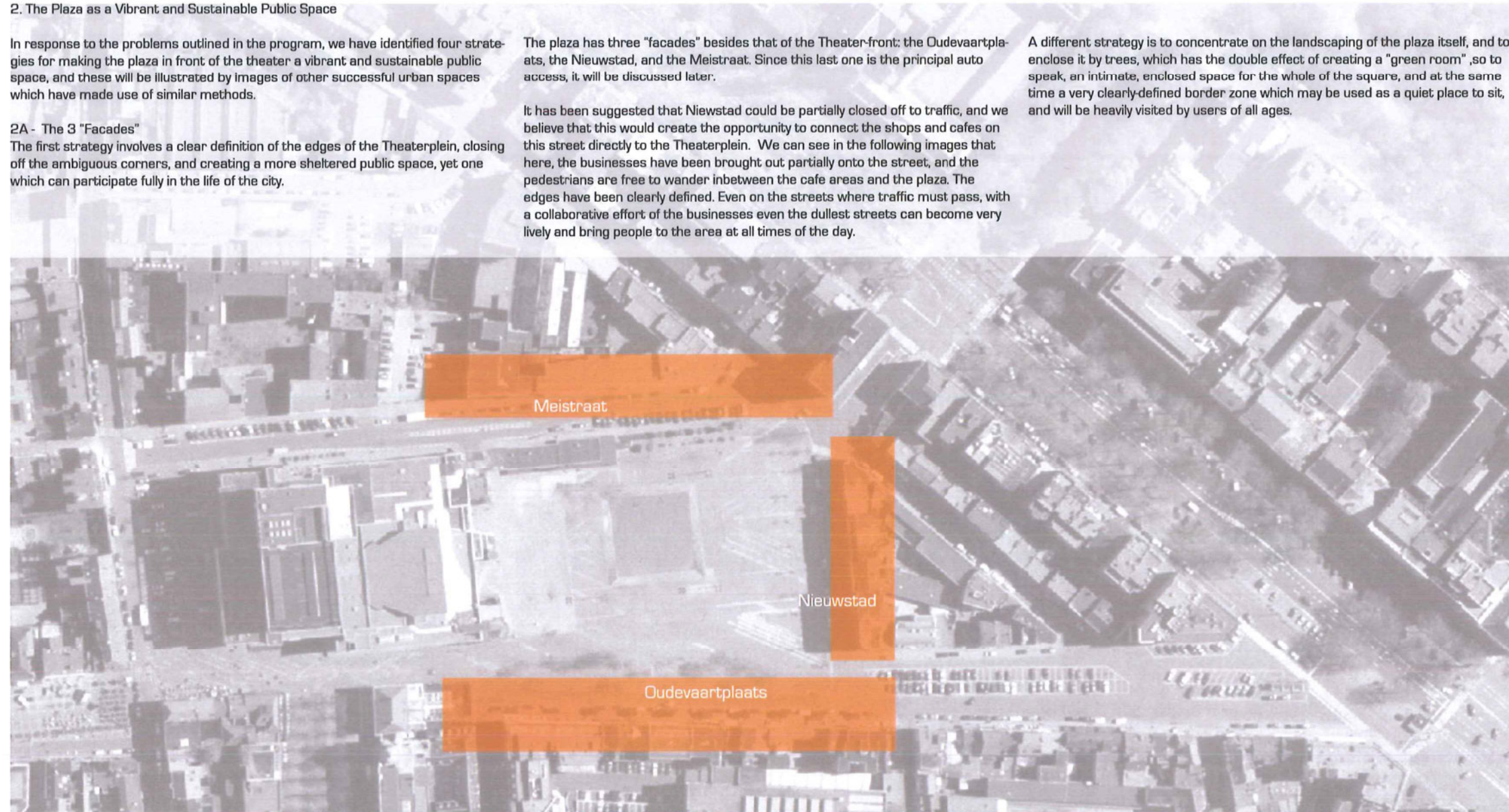
2A - The 3 "Facades"

The first strategy involves a clear definition of the edges of the Theaterplein, closing off the ambiguous corners, and creating a more sheltered public space, yet one which can participate fully in the life of the city.

The plaza has three "facades" besides that of the Theater-front: the Oudevaartplaats, the Nieuwstad, and the Meistraat. Since this last one is the principal auto access, it will be discussed later.

It has been suggested that Nieuwstad could be partially closed off to traffic, and we believe that this would create the opportunity to connect the shops and cafes on this street directly to the Theaterplein. We can see in the following images that here, the businesses have been brought out partially onto the street, and the pedestrians are free to wander inbetween the cafe areas and the plaza. The edges have been clearly defined. Even on the streets where traffic must pass, with a collaborative effort of the businesses even the dullest streets can become very lively and bring people to the area at all times of the day.

A different strategy is to concentrate on the landscaping of the plaza itself, and to enclose it by trees, which has the double effect of creating a "green room", so to speak, an intimate, enclosed space for the whole of the square, and at the same time a very clearly-defined border zone which may be used as a quiet place to sit, and will be heavily visited by users of all ages.



Meistraat



Nieuwstad



Maria Pijpelinckxstraat

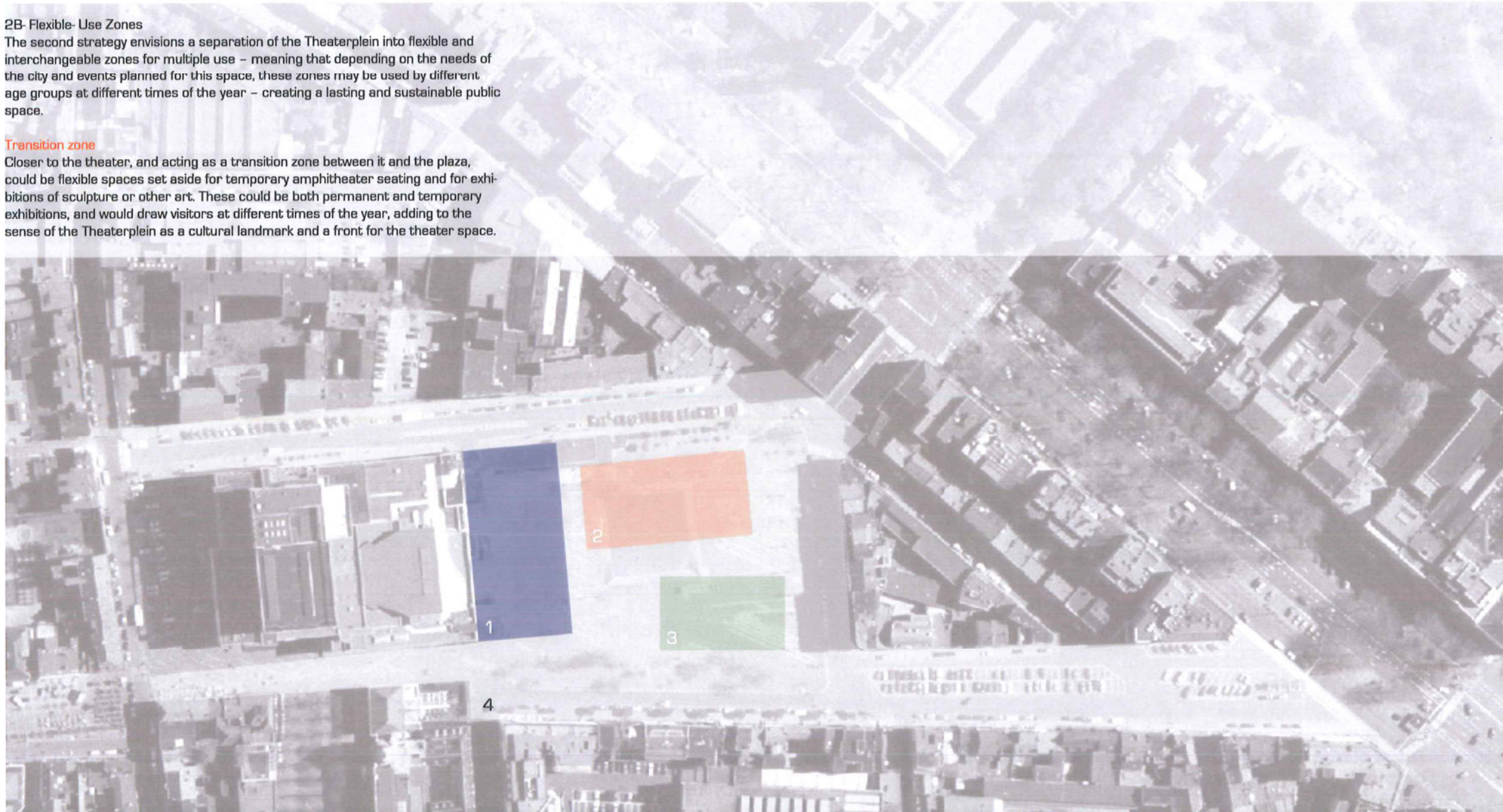


2B- Flexible- Use Zones

The second strategy envisions a separation of the Theaterplein into flexible and interchangeable zones for multiple use – meaning that depending on the needs of the city and events planned for this space, these zones may be used by different age groups at different times of the year – creating a lasting and sustainable public space.

Transition zone

Closer to the theater, and acting as a transition zone between it and the plaza, could be flexible spaces set aside for temporary amphitheater seating and for exhibitions of sculpture or other art. These could be both permanent and temporary exhibitions, and would draw visitors at different times of the year, adding to the sense of the Theaterplein as a cultural landmark and a front for the theater space.



- 1 transition zone
- 2 central element
- 3 children's area
- 4 ground



Central element

The second focus will be the consideration of a central element on the plaza, as a fountain or sculpture to replace the stairs sculpture currently here. The exact form and placement of this may only be decided in a collaborative effort between all interested parties.

We can see in these images that a central element helps not only to create a focus of public activity for the entire space, it invites the visitors to congregate around it, to use its podium or steps for conversation or people-watching.

The reason that the stairs sculpture does not work well at present, is that it can only be used fully by a small user group, which are the skaters, and only occasionally by other children. It is therefore limited in its scope, and does not provide a sustainable concept for the public life of the plaza. Additionally its size and changes in the level disrupt the running of the market, as well as views across the plaza.

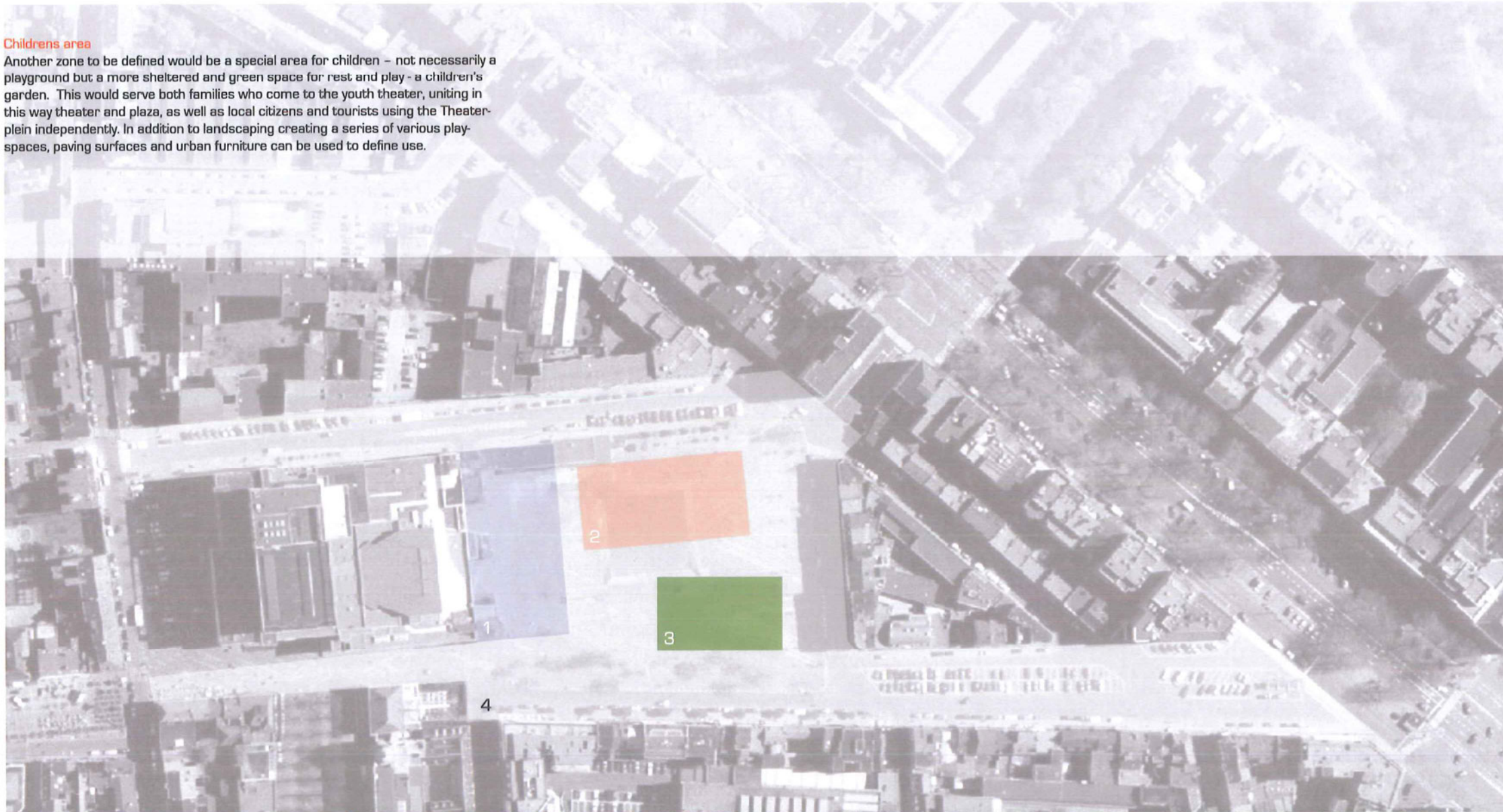


- 1 transition zone
- 2 **central element**
- 3 children's area
- 4 ground



Childrens area

Another zone to be defined would be a special area for children – not necessarily a playground but a more sheltered and green space for rest and play - a children's garden. This would serve both families who come to the youth theater, uniting in this way theater and plaza, as well as local citizens and tourists using the Theaterplein independently. In addition to landscaping creating a series of various play-spaces, paving surfaces and urban furniture can be used to define use.



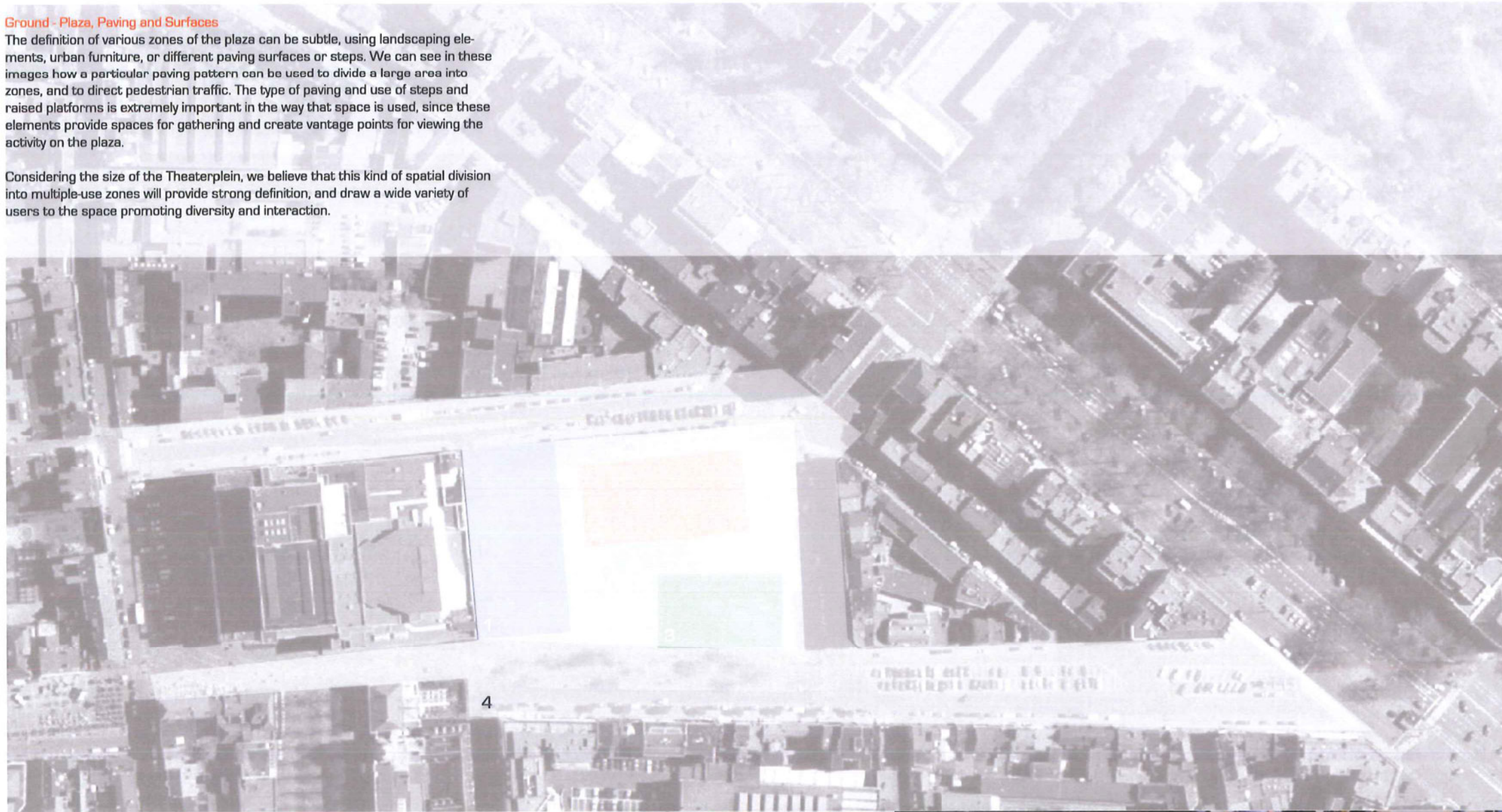
- 1 transition zone
- 2 central element
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- 4 ground



Ground - Plaza, Paving and Surfaces

The definition of various zones of the plaza can be subtle, using landscaping elements, urban furniture, or different paving surfaces or steps. We can see in these images how a particular paving pattern can be used to divide a large area into zones, and to direct pedestrian traffic. The type of paving and use of steps and raised platforms is extremely important in the way that space is used, since these elements provide spaces for gathering and create vantage points for viewing the activity on the plaza.

Considering the size of the Theaterplein, we believe that this kind of spatial division into multiple-use zones will provide strong definition, and draw a wide variety of users to the space promoting diversity and interaction.



- 1 transition zone
- 2 central element
- 3 children's area
- 4 ground



2 C - Urban Furniture and Lighting

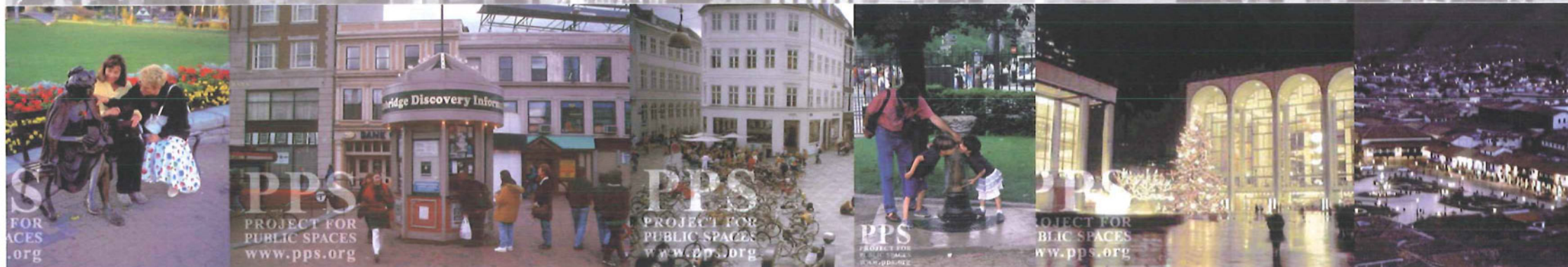
The third strategy involves the placement of urban furniture elements to highlight each multiple-use zone.

All of these elements provide spatial definition and invite the public to stop and use the various spaces. These range from the use of benches, either free-standing or around landscaping elements, drinking fountains, bicycle parking in a zone close to the theater, and information kiosks, which may provide news both about events in the theater and general tourist information for the city.

We would also propose the placement of lighting elements throughout the plaza to not only make it a safer and more attractive urban space, but also to invite visitors in the evening time both for casual use and for public events.



- 1 transition zone
- 2 central element
- 3 children's area
- 4 ground



2D - Interactivity and Public Events

The fourth strategy, and one which involves the collaboration of theater and city officials, would propose the organization of public events such as musical performances, art shows, meetings and book fairs, and outdoor film shows in good weather.

We believe that such events on the Theaterplein would serve two purposes: first, to make the plaza into a cultural focus of the city which is receiving visitors constantly, and not only on market days, and second, to improve the image of the theater itself allowing it to participate in the life of the plaza, perhaps sponsoring some of the events here. In bad weather, performances and conferences could be moved to the theater itself, making it into a more multi-functional space open to the city on many levels.

Of course for the outdoor events to be successful, the necessary infrastructure such as the urban furniture mentioned before, and a general collaborative agreement between those managing the Theaterplein would have to be in place.

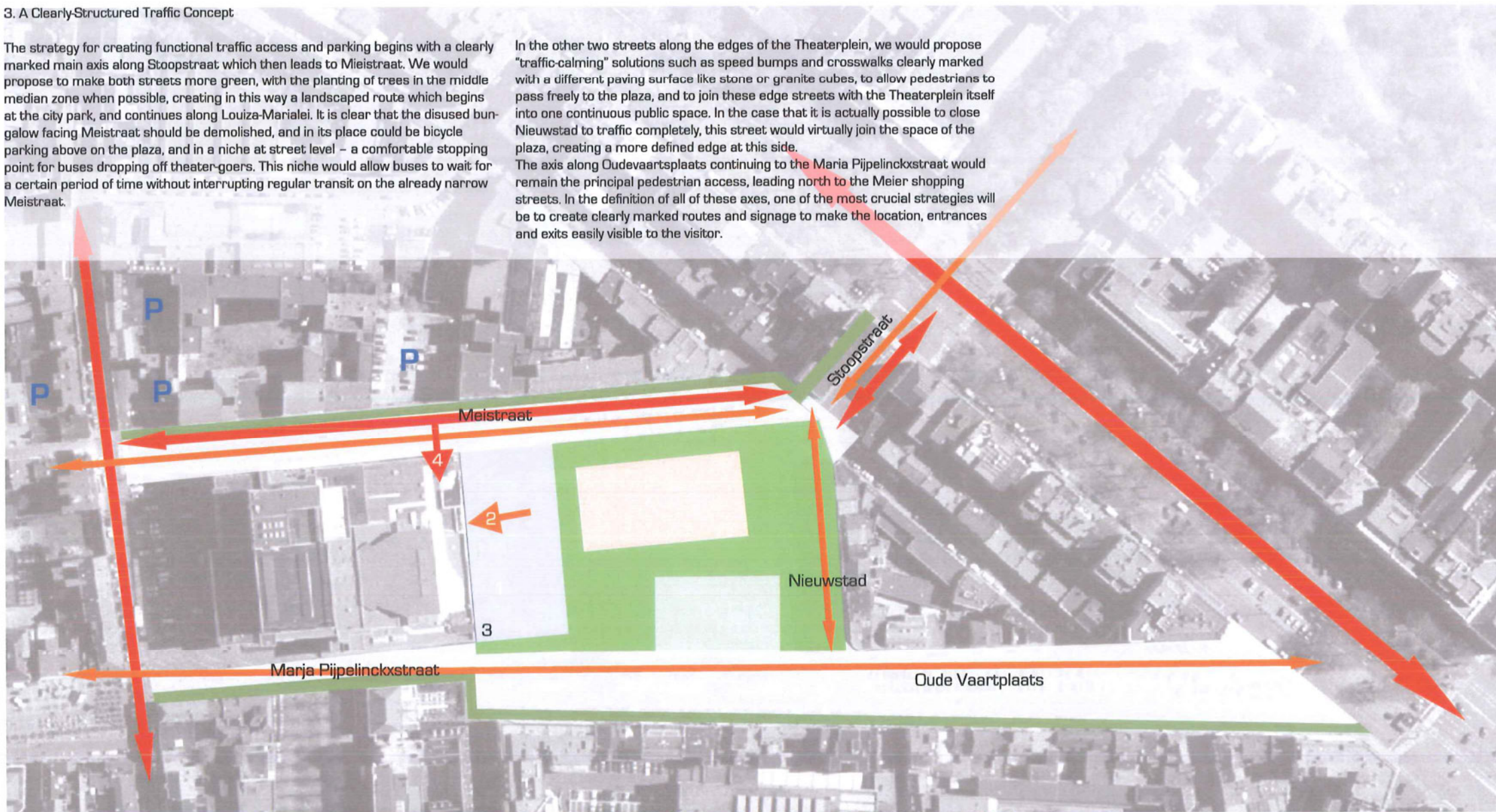
The events would attract both local visitors and tourists to the area, provide a destination for those who come to the plaza by way of the shopping and pedestrian axes, and could include both organized performances and less formal ones such as street musicians or children's shows and outdoor film screenings.



3. A Clearly-Structured Traffic Concept

The strategy for creating functional traffic access and parking begins with a clearly marked main axis along Stoopstraat which then leads to Meistraat. We would propose to make both streets more green, with the planting of trees in the middle median zone when possible, creating in this way a landscaped route which begins at the city park, and continues along Louiza-Marialei. It is clear that the disused bungalow facing Meistraat should be demolished, and in its place could be bicycle parking above on the plaza, and in a niche at street level – a comfortable stopping point for buses dropping off theater-goers. This niche would allow buses to wait for a certain period of time without interrupting regular transit on the already narrow Meistraat.

In the other two streets along the edges of the Theaterplein, we would propose "traffic-calming" solutions such as speed bumps and crosswalks clearly marked with a different paving surface like stone or granite cubes, to allow pedestrians to pass freely to the plaza, and to join these edge streets with the Theaterplein itself into one continuous public space. In the case that it is actually possible to close Nieuwstad to traffic completely, this street would virtually join the space of the plaza, creating a more defined edge at this side. The axis along Oudevaartsplaats continuing to the Maria Pijpelinckxstraat would remain the principal pedestrian access, leading north to the Meier shopping streets. In the definition of all of these axes, one of the most crucial strategies will be to create clearly marked routes and signage to make the location, entrances and exits easily visible to the visitor.



- P existing parking spaces
- orange arrow pedestrian routes
- red arrow traffic routes
- 1 entrance adult theatre
- 2 entrance youth theatre
- 3 multi-functional space
entrance parking garage
- green line additional landscaping



4. Redefining the Image of the Theater

Several problems have been identified in the functional organization of the theater, and in its relationship to the city and the Theaterplein. These are:

- functional separation between the adult and youth theaters, and access to each from the street
- clear delivery routes
- the theater being disconnected from the plaza, and lack of a positive image in the city
- the question of the front facade
- auto and bus access and parking, parking of bicycles and motorcycles

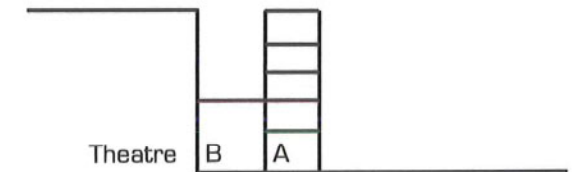
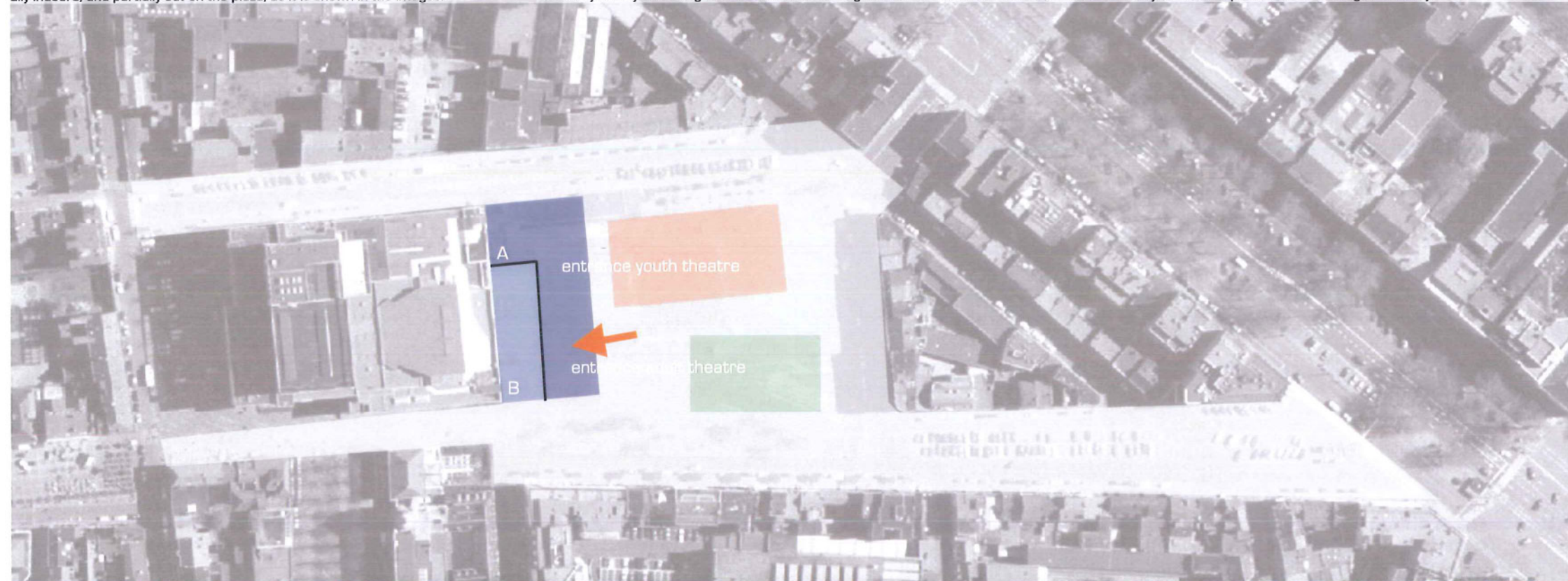
As a possible solution to the facade, we propose not a demolition of the existing elements, but rather the creation of a transition zone between plaza and theater, that would simultaneously act as a screen. In good weather, a cafe could function partially indoors, and partially out on the plaza, as it is shown in the images.

This cafe could be used before and after theater shows, but could also function as a multi-functional space, with internet access and a gift shop for the theater. Such transitional spaces, or literally extensions of the public foyer, have been used very successfully in several theater and museum projects, as in the Pompidou for example. This would act not only as a meeting space between actors and the public, parents and children, but also involve the city more completely with the events of the theater. Stepping into the esplanade area in front of the theater facade would be a part of the theater happening itself – becoming more dramatic with evening illumination. Its interior would face the theater foyer, while the exterior, facing the city, could act as an information wall for cultural activities.

In view of this new zone in front of the theater, we would propose for both entrances to the adult and youth theaters to be from the plaza. By marking the entrances very clearly and using the new cafe in front to guide visitors into each theater,

such a solution would be successful, as it is much nicer to enter from the Theaterplein than from the busy Meistraat, especially for young children. The extra doors at the two sides of the building should be used for service entrances and delivery, as these kinds of multiple entrances only create confusion for the visitors. The Meistraat can then be reserved for auto and bus access and parking, making a clear separation between automobile and pedestrian traffic.

We believe that questions such as functional separation of the two theaters and delivery problems will have to be resolved in a collaborative dialogue with the theater and city officials, at a later stage, but our vision, like that of the Het Paleis, is that the theater should be open all year long and not just for a season, and sponsor many different kinds of events rather than only formal theater performances. In this way it can contribute to the life of the Theaterplein, and become a sustainable symbol with a positive cultural image in the city.



- 1 transition zone
- A new multi-functional volume
- B covered promenade

