ARCHITECTURAL QUALITY AS A COMMON CONCERN

European conference on architectural policies

0 Introduction

Developers

Citizens

Public authorities

Designers

For over 20 years, the European Conferences on Architectural Policies (ECAP) have been a means of sharing, on an international stage, the main concerns regarding the quality of our built and unbuilt environment, and its evolution.

Over the past few years, these policies have been widely developed at both European and national levels. As the climate transition has gradually become part of political agendas, numerous declarations and initiatives stress the importance of considering a more cultural perspective in favour of a technical-economic one in this transition, based on the development of a common, high-quality 'Baukultur'.
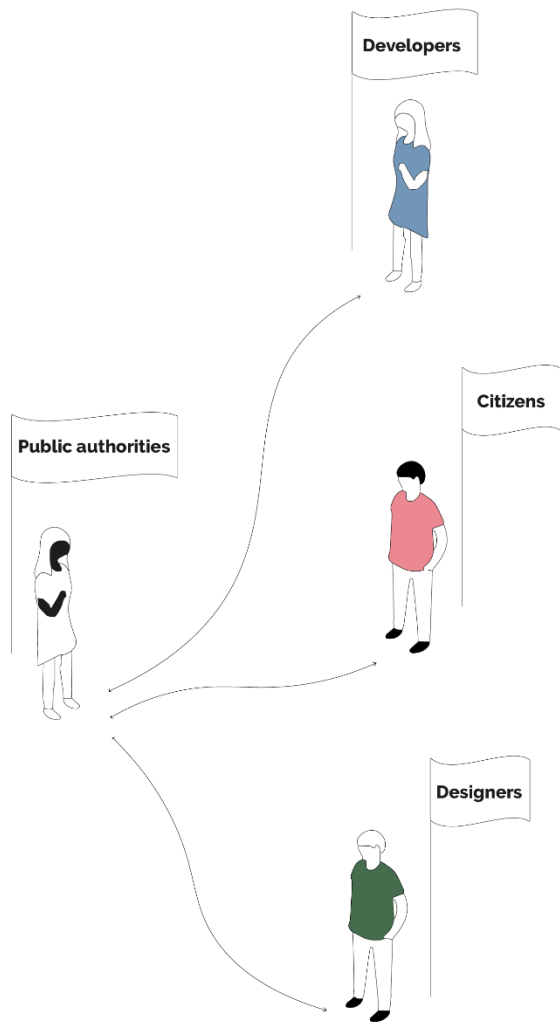
However, while tools have been created to provide a better understanding of this quality, the spaces where it can be tangibly established together have yet to be developed.

One of the many questions raised is that of the 'co-construction of public action', in terms of the ability to mobilise the various actors in a project. Although they have been invited to review their practices, many public organisations are still largely at a loss as to how to implement this renewal.
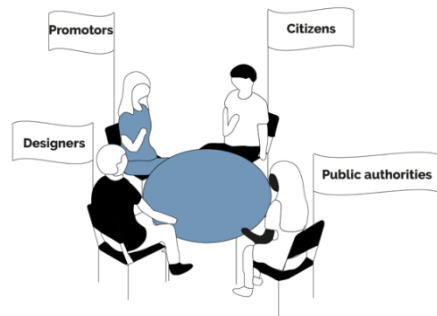
In project development, how can public project leaders interact with such diverse actors as private developers, designers and, even more so, citizens? What role do these different actors play? When? And through what mechanisms? Above all, how can we make the question of project quality central to these interactions?

By looking at each of these actors in turn, **the conference aims to examine how they can be mobilised by the public authorities.**

In preparation for the conference, **we hope to be informed about interesting projects by the EDAP and NEB partners.** Can you in one sentence describe the case study, indicate why the project fits the theme and provide us with a contact (mail and phone)? **We look for two supplementary projects per roundtable session.**
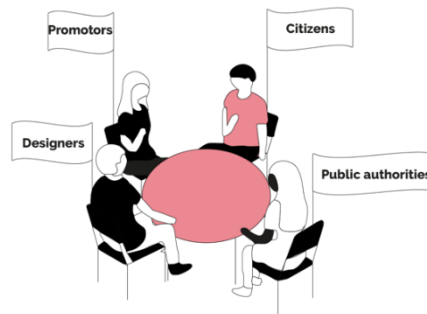
Three interactions, seven thematic workshops

Interactions with Developers

Workshop 1.1.
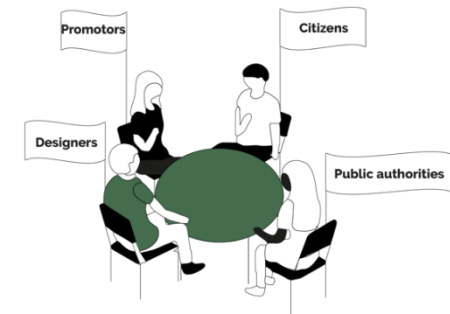Providing support for the private project of a developer/investor

Workshop 1.2.
Getting support from the investor developer for a public project

Interactions with Citizens

Workshop 2.1.
Getting support from citizens for a public space project

Workshop 2.2.
Getting support from users for a housing project

Interactions with Designers

Workshop 3.1.
Designers assisting public authorities

Workshop 3.2.
Design Expertise embedded in a policy context

Workshop 3.3.
Design Research informing policies

03 Theme 3 Interactions with Designers

Introduction

We distinguish three possible roles here:

1. Designers assisting Public Authorities : Public authorities or local administrations – e.g. of smaller or mid-sized towns - might lack specific design expertise to tackle certain spatial questions and processes and hire designers to assist them. What kind of assistance, which procedures or tool kits allow for leveraging a good outcome?

2. Design expertise embedded in a policy context: This topic investigates how civil servants trained in architecture, and urban or landscape design are assigned responsibilities in a policy context. We refer to architects working within public administrations, City or Government Architects, architects, planners and engineers within technical services. How does their design-focused expertise support policy-making?

3. Research by design informing policy-making: How can research by design inform (long-term) policy? This topic reflects on the role of experimental studies and actors like think-and-do tanks in informing policy. Often, this kind of interaction engages with complex spatial questions or tries to develop innovative approaches to, for instance, issues of climate change.

3.1 : Designers assisting public authorities

- In what way was the selection of the design teams done? How and by whom is matchmaking done? How are the specific interests of the design teams aligned with the project aims?

- In what way are the issues at stake and desired design expertise matched?

- How do external visions (and expertise) get interwoven with local knowledge and engagements?

Belgian Case: Urban Development Torhout

- Preparatory Process raising Quality Ambitions in the Transformation of a Small Town's Center
- Torhout, Belgium.

Model picture
©
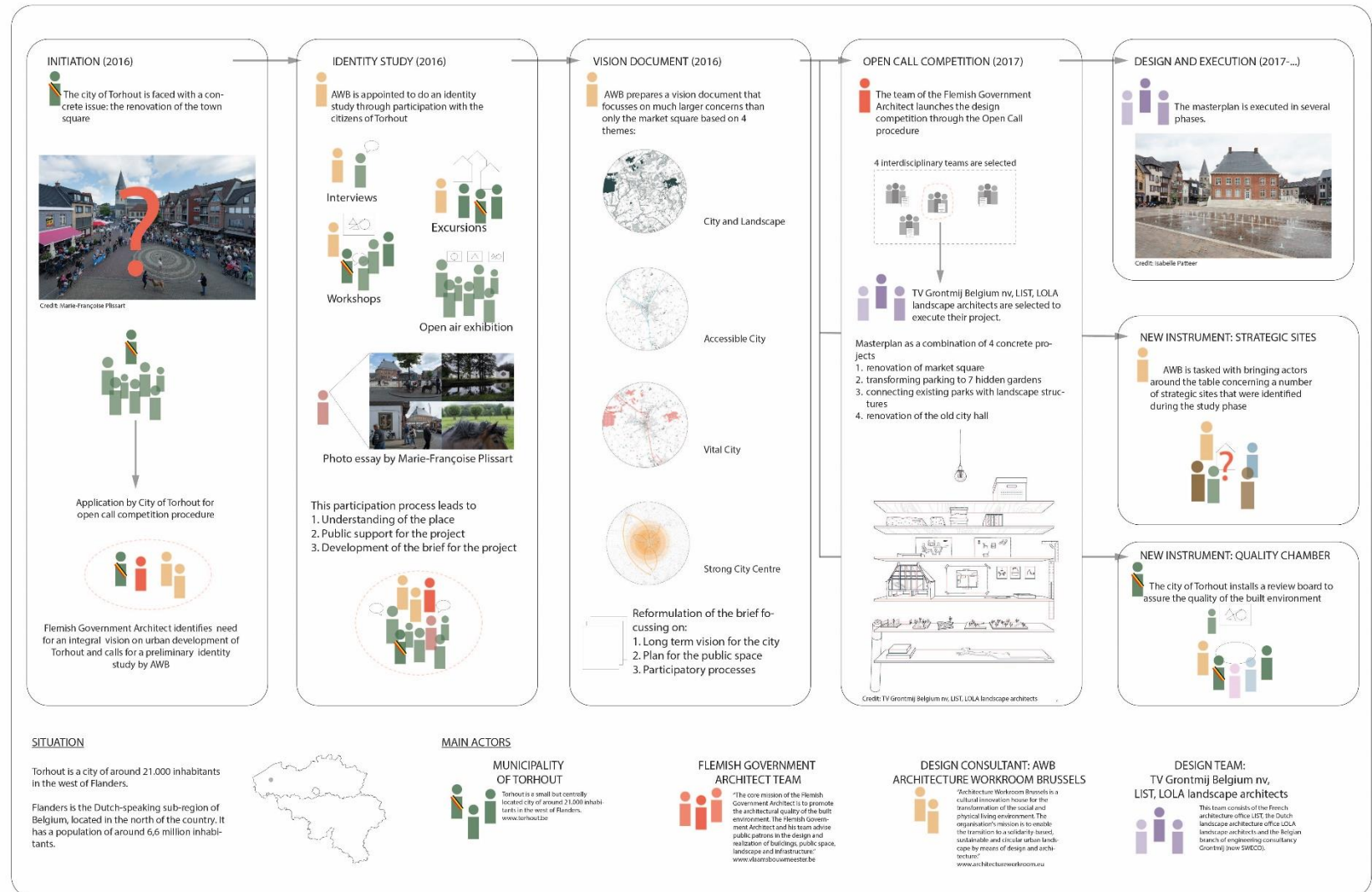LIST,
Lola Landscape Architects,
SWECO

Urban Development Torhout:
Re-design of the Market Square and Masterplan for the Town Center

- Infographs (discussion sheet available in large prints in roundtable session)

Urban Development Torhout:
Re-design of the central market square, a masterplan for the town center and the installation of a quality chamber

- Narrative

The Flemish Government architect appoints designers' collective Architecture Workroom Brussels (AWB) to assist the small town of Torhout in developing the design brief for an architecture competition - the Open Call procedure - to redesign the central market square and its environs.

Through a participatory procedure, a photography assignment and a socio-spatial research, AWB organized a townwide survey. AWB portrayed this midsize town, mapped the distinctive spatial elements of the town within its broader territory, and identified the main challenges which should be addressed in a development procedure. As a result of the intensive dialogue with several stakeholders and inspiration sessions, the initial project ambitions were raised.

New market Square in Torhout – © Mvm

Urban Development Torhout
Re-design of the central market square, a masterplan for the town center, and the installation of a quality chamber

Based on a written vision document, the brief for the architecture competition was refined. Els Vervloesem, (then) one of the directors of AWB who also supervised the preparation procedure, subsequently sat on the jury as the appointed expert and external juror.

The competition was won by a multidisciplinary design team consisting of an architecture firm (List), landscape architects (Lola) and an engineering office (Sweco). In a first phase, this team prepared a masterplan for the city: which included an ambition document, a visual quality plan for the center and the surrounding areas and a mobility plan.

In a second phase, the market square was redesigned, while AWB defined several strategic areas for further development. After the competition, AWB remains closely involved in quality control.

Under the impetus of AWB and team of the Flemish Government Architect, Torhout's City Council decides to set up a 'quality chamber' (design review panel).

Urban Development Torhout:
Re-design of the central market square, a masterplan for the town center, and the installation of a quality chamber

- ### Glossary

- **Flemish Government Architect** (NL: Vlaams Bouwmeester): an office advising the Flemish government and other public authorities in Flanders to stimulate the architectural quality of the built environment. Established in 1999, and since 2020 embedded in the transversal Departement Chancellery and Foreign Affairs, under the political responsibility of the Flemish Minister-President. The Government Architect is an expert appointed for five years, a Team of functionaries, and an experts group.

- **Open Call** (NL: Open Oproep): a stepped selection procedure organized and advised by the Flemish Government Architect, that public authorities can use to appoint a design team. Different from an architecture competition strictly speaking, this procedure brings the competing approaches of designers to the fore (rather than competition designs), and assigns a central role to public commissioners (informed by experts).

- **Socio-spatial Research**: focuses on the interrelationship between humans and their spatial environment. Inspired by the theories of Henri Lefebvre and urban sociology, it combines discourses and research methodologies from the humanities (anthropology, ethnography, demography,,…) such as participative observation and focus groups f.i., with visualization tools from the field of architecture and urban planning such as mapping and drawing.

- **Project Definition** (NL: projectdefinitie): the project definition is a key part of the project file/brief that public authorities are asked to compile when contracting designers through an Open Call selection process. Different from detailed project specifications, the project definition should articulate the public commissioner's social and cultural ambitions with the project.

Urban Development Torhout:
Re-design of the central market square, a masterplan for the town center, and the installation of a quality chamber

• Glossary

• **Visual Quality Plan** (NL: Beeldkwaliteitsplan): in the case of Torhout, the Visual Quality Plan is an image-and-text document, that is part of the Masterplan for the City Center. It documents reference buildings of quality in Torhout, and formulates criteria, prescriptions and guidelines for architects and developers, and serves as a framework for the Quality Committee

• **Quality Chamber** (NL: Kwaliteitskamer): in Belgium, Design Review Panels (grouping independent experts evaluating and advising projects for local authorities) differ from city to city qua membership profile and qua role. The Torhout Quality Chamber consists of four external experts (including the president) plus the city's chief urban planner and the alderwoman responsible for urban planning. It provides advice on projects of high visual impact, for both private projects built by developers or individuals, and public projects or the development of strategic areas initiated by the city itself. https://www.torhout.be/kwaliteitskamer

Swedish Case: Visions in the North (SE)

- the project assembled 11 creative teams, comprising some of Sweden's leading architects, artists, and designers, to conceptualize visions for sustainable living environments in the Northern provinces of Sweden.
- Municipalities Kiruna, Gällivare, Boden, Luleå, Skellefteå, and the City Umeå (SE)

Collage showing the existent Mine Infrastructure as well as new buildings made of recycled material in Kiruna,
© Team: Britta Marakatt Labba, Norell/Rodhe, Outer Space Architects, Segerstedt
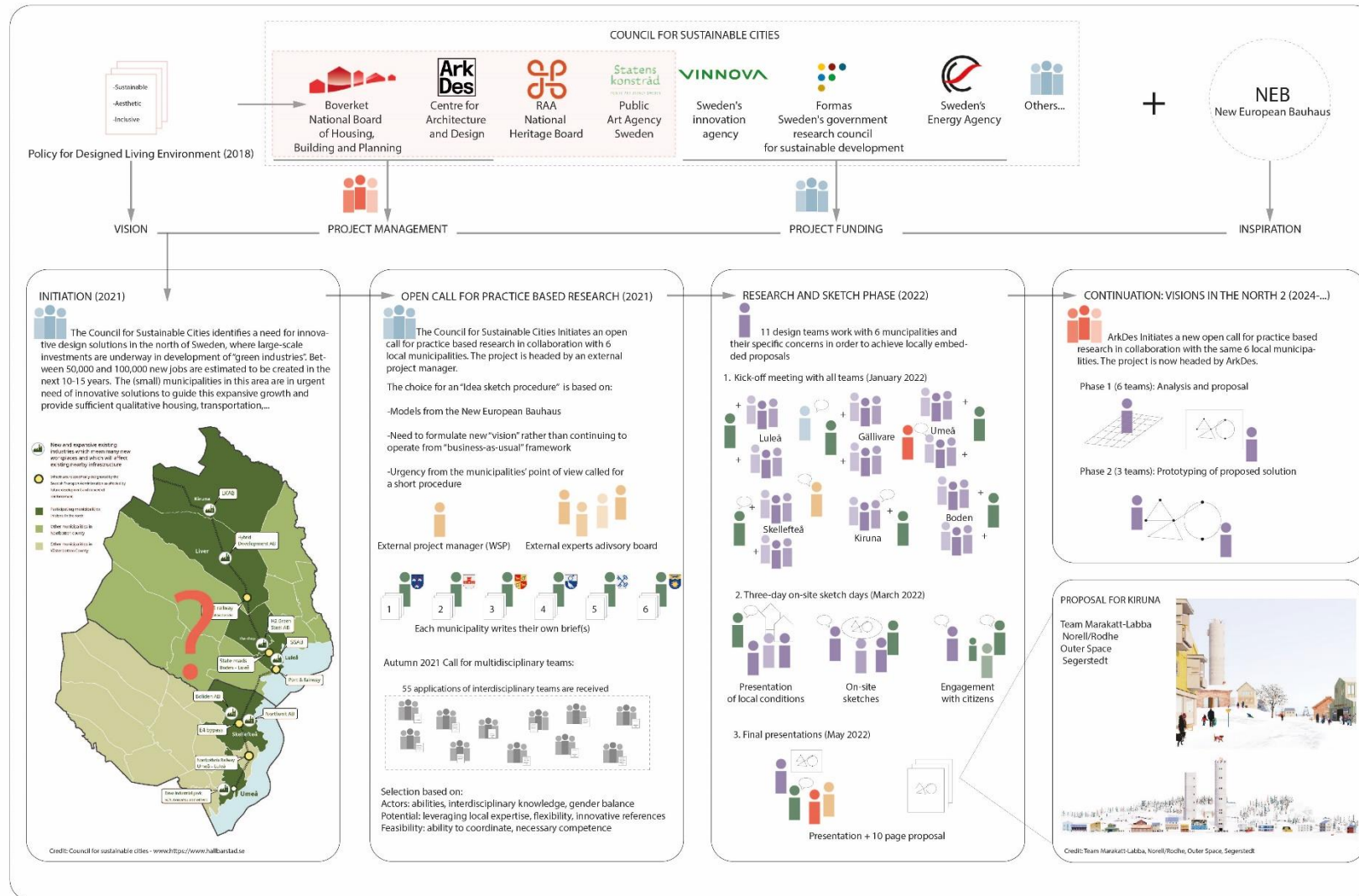
Visions in the North

- Infographs (discussion sheet available in large prints in roundtable session)

DRAFT VERSION

CASE: VISIONS IN THE NORTH (SE)
ROUND TABLE 3: ARCHITECTURAL POLICY AND DESIGN
DESIGNERS ASSISTING PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

Visions in the North

Cover Visions in the North, step 2, launched in February 2024 by ARKDES

Photography: Mats Engfors, Arctic Bath, Boden

- Narrative

'The initiative addressed the large-scale green transition underway in Norrbotten and Västerbotten, where Swedish entrepreneurs and business leaders are at the forefront of transitioning to a fossil-free world. With significant green industrial investments continuing in these regions, local municipalities are expanding to meet the demands for infrastructure, housing, social services, and community spaces.'°

You can learn more about the project and view the teams' complete concept sketches on Hållbarstad.se ↗. Actually, a second phase of the research-by-design project is initiated.

°text from: https://arkdes.se/en/designed-living-environment/practice-based-research/visions-in-the-north/

Visions in the North

'In collaboration with Kiruna, Gällivare, Boden, Luleå, Skellefteå, and Umeå, and as part of the Council for Sustainable Cities' government collaboration, various discipline experts were invited to contribute to the development of concept sketches. These sketches are based on each municipality's unique conditions and processes. The aim was to gather cross-sectoral creative expertise and citizens to contribute to the development and transition to a more sustainable society from multiple perspectives. In late autumn of 2021, interdisciplinary teams with artistic excellence were invited to express their interest in participating, and the response was overwhelming. Out of 55 applications, eleven teams were selected to envision the future living environments in these six municipalities.

The result of the teams' processes is eleven concept sketches depicting an attractive and fossil-free future, with design, culture, creativity, and municipal conditions as starting points. The ideas range from developing communities without claiming new land, transforming former mining areas into spaces for people, creating memorials for what we have lost to climate change, proposing a new management model based on local co-creation, to conceptualizing ways to handle constant changes. The teams presented their ideas in the form of vision documents, which were then summarized in a final report.'°

°text from: https://arkdes.se/en/designed-living-environment/practice-based-research/visions-in-the-north/

Visions: in the North

- Glossary

- **Council for Sustainable Cities** (SE: Rådet för hållbara städer): In December 2017, the Swedish government established the Council for Sustainable Cities. It is a collaboration between twelve governmental bodies such as Boverkert, ArkDes, Formas, etc... with the mandate to enhance the conditions for developing vibrant and sustainable cities and communities. The council also includes representatives of the County Administrative Board and the municipalities.

- **Strategy for Living Cities - policy for sustainable urban development** (SE: Strategi för Levande städer - politik för en hållbar stadsutveckling) Policy document that forms the framework in which the research by practice was initiated.

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Vlaamse overheid

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