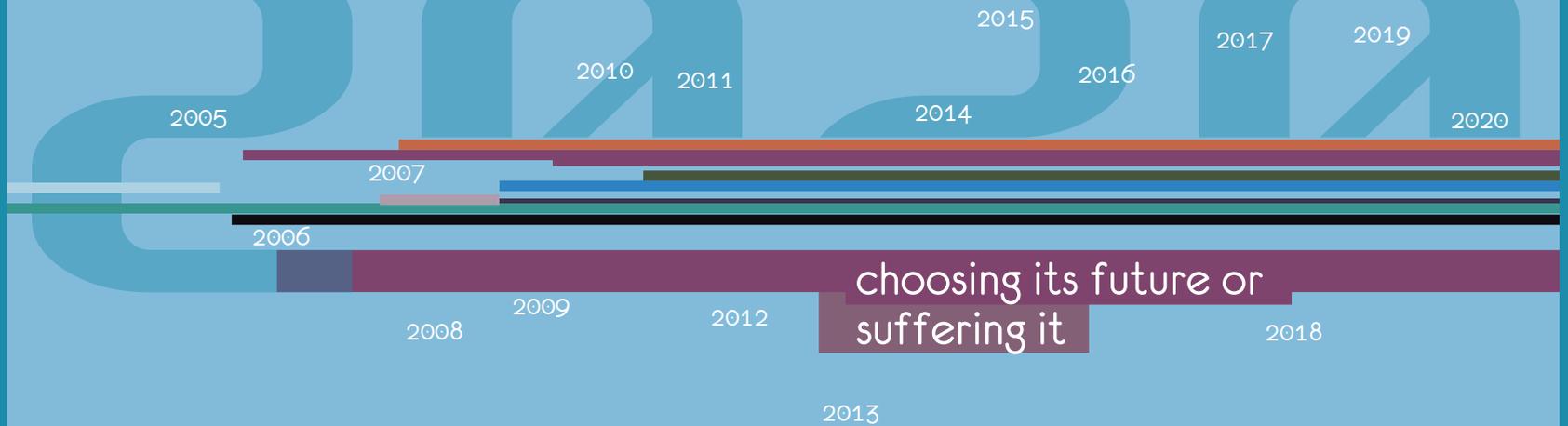
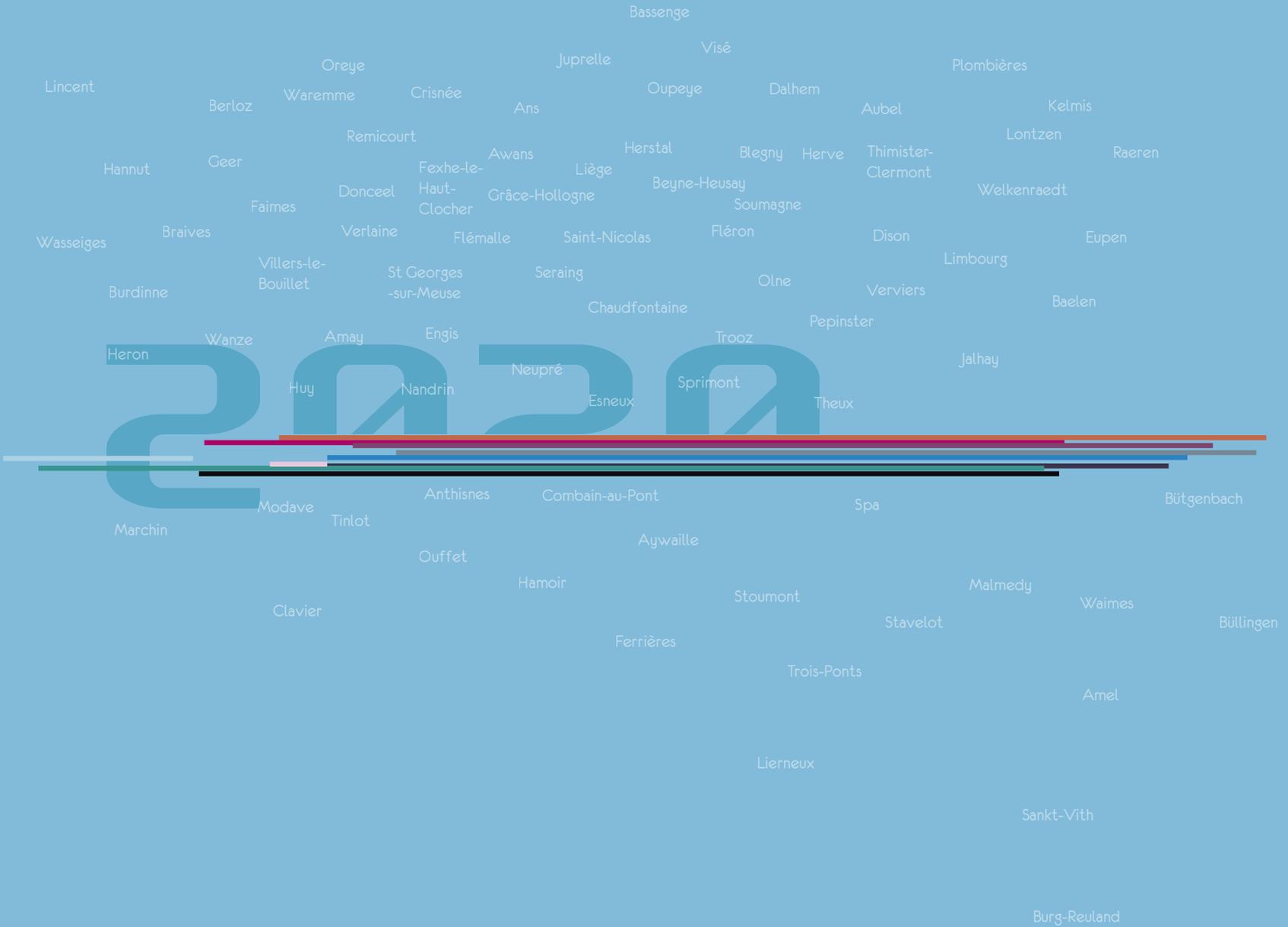


The province of Liège at the 2020 horizon





For over two years, some fifty people from all social groups from all over the province of Liège have been taking part in the Groupe de Réflexion Liège 2020 (Liège Think Tank 2020). This group was formed on the basis of an initiative by the SPI+ and has benefited from scientific advice from the foresight association Futuribles. The members of this group have accomplished this work as individuals refusing, unlike others, to accept fate based on the assumption that the future follows its own course and is simply imposed by external circumstances. It is the very condensed “result” of their work that we are presenting to you in the following pages.

“Result”? Not exactly a complete one since this work represents only a beginning. It aims to rouse among all the inhabitants of the province a **collective awareness of what is at stake** in what we risk being confronted with in the short, medium and long terms.

Towards a shared vision of a desirable future

These “possible futures” for the province of Liège allow us to isolate a certain number of crucial **areas of risk** for the province regarding which it will be vital to rapidly adopt coherent and appropriate attitudes and policies. It will be necessary in time to develop a **shared vision of a desirable future** based on the province’s many **advantages**, by formulating clear objectives and by creating a strong consensus on the way of achieving them. “Who must do what, when and how?” These are the areas that we want to submit to public debate.

It’s a work which combines anticipation and action: to identify what is at stake in the future, it has proved indispensable to form a **diagnosis** of the strengths and weaknesses of our current socio-economic environment that is as objective as possible without being alarmist and without complaint, avoiding self-recrimination but without averting our eyes to the reality that we are living either.

The formulation of **the scenarios** (4 in fact) that flowed from this is a complex exercise that needs to be well understood. It is not a matter of predicting how tomorrow will be (the foresight is not futurology...) by means of a few scenarios one should choose from! The process is absolutely not of that nature. The scenarios, which are by way of examples and explorations, have the aim of illustrating the range of possible futures.

It is therefore obvious that this study is neither definitive nor complete in itself. It aims to **encourage reflection and above all to provoke action**. With this double aim, it must be able to bring a tangible input to our thinking and to the projects currently in the pipeline in the province of Liège. And to do all this in a positive spirit of indispensable cohesion and cooperation.

For us all now to enrich the thinking and to move on from exploration of the possible futures to **the construction of a chosen future** that meets our deep aspirations and the challenges of the years to come ...

A complete technical report taking into account all of the work is available on www.liege2020.be. A summary of this technical report is also available on this site or on simple request from info@liege2020.be



2. For 20 years the province of Liège has been undergoing a slow deterioration of its social and economic situation. Too dependent on heavy industry, which is in decline, powerless in the face of the big international groups that move their decision and production centres out of the province, despite the granting of large amounts of (regional, federal and European) public funds, the province has encountered enormous difficulties in creating a real unifying project that would allow it to take steps to become a major centre in Europe in 25 years time.

However, the province of Liège has grounds for hope. New economic activities are emerging in potentially key sectors such as biotechnology, aerospace, micro-mechanics and also the logistics sector. But at the present, in terms of employment, the development of these businesses does not make up for the losses suffered elsewhere. Moreover, these new activities do not seem to be based around truly coherent strategic axes.

The province of Liège is therefore not playing the part of the regional “engine” that could be expected of it and it is going through a difficult period in its history in a Walloon region that is also trying to build a future, a federal Belgium in search of coherence, a Europe badly in need of stability and a world that is looking more and more like a powder keg ...

In view of the situation found, it serves no purpose to feel sorry for ourselves because of our fate. On the contrary, we need to **make a lucid enquiry as to the reasons for the decline and to the means of “bouncing back.” That’s totally up to us.** It is in fact useless to look for the origin of our ills in the external context, globalisation, businesses moving away, the economic situation It would be deceiving ourselves to expect our salvation to come from a blessed regeneration of growth coming from the USA or elsewhere, drawing Europe in its wake and bringing a bit of oxygen to the province ...

Things don’t work like that! Faced with the same global geopolitical context and identical internal challenges, some regions are seen to develop and others to decline. What makes the fundamental difference between the one case and the other is not so much the TGV station, the regional and European subsidies, the providential and hypothetical foreign investor ... On the contrary, what makes the difference is first and foremost **the ability of the men and women of the region to anticipate:** wasn’t it obvious for a long time, for example, that Arcelor was going to have to close some of its sites? And what makes even more differ-

ence is **to be able to mobilise ourselves in a shared project.**

If the province of Liège is struggling today to meet the challenges of the modern world, if it is struggling to take its future in hand, to build it rather than to suffer it, it is no doubt because we have pursued the policy of the ostrich for too long and our “vital energies” have been exhausted for too long in sterile conflicts.

It’s high time to put a stop to this collective suicide, to make the effort, before it’s too late, before we’re trapped into managing crises by

Don’t complain, reflect and act instead

3.

firefighting, **to anticipate what are the possible futures** of the province of Liège in the medium and long term, **what is at stake in this context and the policies that can be adopted as a consequence.**

It is in this spirit that the “Groupe de Réflexion LIEGE 2020” was created. This group, relying on the logistics of SPI+ and with the scientific leverage of the Futuribles Group, has set itself the task of uniting enlightened citizens wishing to pool their skills to create a potential approach to **the future of the province at the 2020 horizon.**

Such an approach logically must consist of two

strands:

- The first consists of establishing a dynamic diagnosis of the province, then of exploring the possible futures that might flow from the present situation. Its aim is purely exploratory but it must allow the major elements at stake with which the region is faced or risks being faced to be clearly seen.
- The second consists of examining the medium and long term policies and strategies that the major players might adopt to prevent the undesirable effects from occurring and to set in motion a real dynamism of development.

Between these two phases, **it is essential that**

a debate is established, that the diagnosis and the exploratory scenarios be checked, amended and enriched, that all players start to reflect on what they might do together to build a better future.

Four scenarios have been worked out to show the range of possible futures for the province at the 2020 horizon. Of course, none of them aims to predict exactly what the future will be. However, their probability of occurrence is clearly not equal. Everything will depend on the decisions and the actions taken by the province’s major players (naturally taking into account certain opportunities and constraints in the external environment).

4.

The province of Liège at the crossroads of four possible futures



1. Stone statues

One of the possible futures for the province might consist of a slow erosion of the current situation: groups and projects flounder, entrenched in power struggles and fighting over local interests, without any really ambitious common project being formulated. The losses of jobs in various sectors are seen as inevitable. With a lack of clearly defined strategy and a lack of appropriate networking of the skills and energies, the sources of development dry up little by little or are under-exploited. And all this of course has a very negative impact on the level of employment and purchasing power. In this unfavourable context, a chain reaction would start up that would in particular affect the creation of businesses, employment in the public sector, training levels, ...

The region would lose its structure. Without any appeal, the province of Liège would little by little become a "dormitory province": the heart of economic activity would be elsewhere ...

stone statues

at each other's throats

2. At each other's throats

This scenario consists of a worsening of the previous scenario with sudden deterioration which, by about 2008, would be distinguished in particular by a clear decline in public resources, a spiral of redundancies and bankruptcies: the absence of investment would lead to a large number of closures (in the traditional sectors and in the leading-edge ones): Liège's production base, consisting of SME's that would not succeed in reaching critical mass, would suffer globalisation more than sharing in it. The logistics sector at least would still escape the generalised disaster but it would become peripheral to the major logistics developments of Western Europe and would not generate employment in keeping with the investment made and the hopes that it would nourish. Without making the choice, Liège would become a "warehouse province" ... In a deregulated context, Liège's agriculture would experience a crisis. The absence of coordinated regional plans for organisation and for environmental protection would have major consequences for natural resources and for the development of tourism.

On the social level, migratory flows would only bring a population without qualification and without any means of integration. Crime and insecurity would increase dangerously and violent confrontations would multiply.

The major players would insist on their rights, more inclined to justify their positions and to look for people responsible for the dramatic situations experienced than to find lasting solutions to the problems. The province would have become totally passive and would rapidly deteriorate.

3. The swallow

This scene shows a different attitude on the part of the major players and decision makers of the province of Liège who, driven by alarming economic forecasts, would all get together to work out a comprehensive development strategy. It would be presented in September 2005 and rapid agreement would be reached on making a clean break with the industrial past so as to avoid too great dependence on a single sector and instead relying on the indigenous potential in such a way as to build a manufacturing industry capable of withstanding economic downturns. The existence of a focus of coordination would allow decision makers, who would otherwise be too deeply involved in their local concerns, to operate a strategy of alliances that would manage the defence of their interests whilst at the same time taking into account an overall policy. This would be organised around:

- Training and R & D,
- the choice of priority and strategic sectors which would be the focus of concerted efforts by all the major players and on different aspects (funding, infrastructure, training, ...),
- major efforts in terms of funding for SME's and of pooling their resources
- and, lastly, coordination and establishment of coherence in public development resources.

In this way, the various sectors identified as strategic would experience fluctuating development but would all lead in the medium term to large-scale job creation.

But not everything would be ideal ... If the initiatives were numerous, their coordination would pose a problem. Divisions would reappear from time to time: a common strategy would exist but there would still not really be a genuinely shared vision of a desirable future.

4. The phoenix

This fourth scenario represents an idealised version of the previous scenario. In 2012-2013, the decision makers and institutional players of Liège would go from a reasonable common understanding, the effectiveness of which they would have just confirmed during the previous 6 or 7 years to true cooperation that would transcend individual interests. From this time on, the various categories of player in the province (economic, social, political, cultural, ...) would have developed relationships with each other, sealed alliances including outside the province and built an effective network that would allow opportunities that arise to be seized quickly by drawing a share of the available resources and of the adaptive abilities of the players. The province of Liège would have become a real network nexus.

The strategic choices made 7 or 8 years earlier would yield good results. Liège's manufacturing industry would no longer suffer from globalisation but would manage to seize the opportunities that it represents for its development. In particular it could count on efficient investment and funding mechanisms.

From 2016 onwards, the employment rate would have been rising to levels close to 70 %. Everywhere in Europe "the miracle of Liège" would be mentioned. In a calm social climate, the province of Liège would once more attract foreign businesses.

What is more, with the development of a region that would not be limited to its only economic component, this development would be made with greater attention to the environment and the quality of life. The flow of thought that would have surfaced regarding future generations and the threats that hang over the life of the province would integrate this overall dimension of sustainable development, with the air and the forests being the focus of particular attention. And by benefiting from the concern for the natural heritage and for a cultural and sport policy full of events, the tourism sector would become a sector that contributes to the development and the image of the province in the outside world.



the phoenix
the swallow

With the aid of these scenarios, the principal challenges can be seen:

- To get together to formulate an overall project within a long-term strategy for the province, by combining all the economic, social, environmental, cultural etc. initiatives. That would produce a form of inventory of the possible synergies, of complementary aspects of areas defined by common agreement regarding each party's specific skills.
- To establish internal and then external alliances. That demands a spirit of openness and a proactive approach of seizing the opportunities offered, these being attitudes that require in particular knowledge of foreign languages ...

These challenges cannot be met except in the following conditions:

- All of the citizens of the province of Liège must be aware of the fact that it is up to them to define and contribute to the development of the province.
- We must capitalise on the geo-strategic situation in the province of Liège with the construction of a dynamic region in Europe with economic, social, cultural and environmental plans with a great deal of exchange.

At the Walloon regional level, we must also actively take part in regional development by putting in place a strengthened partnership with the other cities and regional groups in the Walloon region by providing a

decisive contribution on two or three strategic axes.

- We must rethink the manufacturing industry which is still too dependent on a traditional industry that is in structural decline. Relying on some crucial sectors, it's a matter of diversifying so as to be less sensitive to economic downturns.
- Development of training and skills forms an indispensable element for dealing with them. New appreciation of technical training and of the professions based on them continues to be at stake for the province.
- Coherent management of land must be implemented so as to put a brake on the uncontrolled spread of activities and housing into suburbs and also to be able to meet requirements effectively for suitable space for economic purposes.
- A proper transport and mobility policy must also be implemented so as to provide multiple modes both for people and goods and to jointly redevelop transport.
- The development of the natural and cultural capital is a major issue because, with its unifying role, it forms a solid foundation where everyone can find himself: agriculture, economy, tourism ...

Will the inhabitants of the province of Liège, faced with these four scenarios and in particular with the first two, which correspond with development trends that are to some extent threatening, really decide to take the future in hand? Will they gather to debate these possible futures and **above all** build together a **shared vision of a desirable future**, determining here who can do what and how? Here are no doubt to be found the greatest uncertainty and the major challenge.

2022



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9.

The major things at stake for the province of Liège



2020



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