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# A shift of paradigm in the way we *build*

FLOW – CHAUD, the Sauna project

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**Abstract.** LOCI-ima students built a sauna at Flow last spring! It all began in January 2024, in the heart of the forests of the Eastern Cantons of Belgium, where architecture students learned about the cycle of a sustainable forest. In June 2024, after carefully cutting and collecting only the necessary amount of dry wood, these students built a sauna at Flow in Brussels. As part of its construction course, LOCI-IMA teaches sustainable design and building methods.

**Keywords.** architecture · wood construction · self build · sustainable forest · sauna

**Résumé.** Les étudiant-es de LOCI-ima ont construit un sauna à Flow au printemps dernier ! Tout a commencé en janvier 2024, au cœur des forêts des Cantons de l'Est, en Belgique, où des étudiant-es en architecture ont découvert le cycle d'une forêt durable. En juin 2024, après avoir coupé et collecté du bois sec en quantités strictement nécessaires, ces étudiant-es ont construit un sauna à Flow, Bruxelles. Dans le cadre de son cours de construction, LOCI-ima enseigne des méthodes de conception et de construction durables.

**Mots-clés.** architecture · construction en bois · autoconstruction · forêt soutenable · sauna



- ① It all started in the heart of the forests of the Belgian Eastern Cantons, where loci-ima students in architecture learned about the cycle of a sustainable forest.
- ② Collection of cut dry wood before loading the truck.
- ③ From sketch-notes to practice.
- ④ Looking for the right scale.



On Saturday 8 June 2024, Norwegian Ambassador Jørn Gloslie cuts the ribbon marking the opening of the Flow Chaud Sauna for Pool Is Cool, along the Brussels canal. This act marks the culmination of the intense storytelling of a small wooden sauna built by LOCI students from UCLouvain in the context of the international master in architecture (ima).

It all started in January 2024, in the heart of the forests of the Belgian Eastern Cantons, where loci-ima students in architecture learned about the cycle of a sustainable forest. Students cut and collected dry wood in strict quantities necessary to build a sauna by the Summer. In the context of its *design/build* course, the ima program teaches ways of sustainable design and construction. Since working with hemp blocks in 2023, the construction course *Workshop in situ* continues these sustainable ways, using since 2024 small sections of wood. In the Eastern Cantons, students experimented with wood, used all the tools adapted to wood, already imagining ways of assembling the structure, designing benches, stools and ways of collecting water. A last picnic in the forest inspired the group before loading the trucks and bringing back the wood from the Cantons to become a sauna in the capital!

The Sauna project taught the ima students to praise the material they use in their design and construction. Cut, cured, handled, sanded, transported, assembled, the wood was respected in its every detail by the students who explored ways of celebrating it all along the process, right down to enjoying its warm embrace as first they entered the heated sauna. After a semester of analyzing existing sauna case studies, exchanging ideas online with partners in Brussels and Norway about good practices, possible arrangements and structures, students designed, described and calculated the quantities. The wooden construction was thought out, discussed, designed by all the stakeholders together. All participants in this adventure, teachers from two universities, professional architects, and non-profit associations were proud to be part of the construction at Flow-Chaud. The course was thus given in a blended manner. In the context of online courses with the partners, in-studio work was carried out by students in order to constitute a catalog of references and the illustration of their multiple dimensions (ritual, architecture, structure, techniques).

This teaching unit aims to develop transversal and practical skills in the fields of construction and knowledge of materials. In particular, it aims to develop a

thorough familiarity of the student with the purpose of a built space, in addition to the understanding of technical, scientific and normative references. The course combines theoretical teaching, production of execution documents, specifications and estimated measurements, down to the edification in the last week of the semester, celebrating teamwork and the collaborative spirit.

Designed over a four-month period and built in five days, the sauna can accommodate today around ten people at a time in its dramatic canal-side location in the heart of Brussels. The sauna could have challenged records in terms of economy of material and speed of building, but the interest does not only lie there. The most important accomplishment in this adventure lies in the bond that has been forged between the participants in the project, students, teachers and civil society! A design-build spirit that was inspired by our Chilean partner UPCV's pedagogy, the Travesías, where the aim is not the construction itself but the ways to lead to it.

These past decades, many traditional materials have seen their way of construction revisited, and many new building materials have been invented. It is the role of the architect to imagine how to compose with them to lead to new architectural expressions, by recognizing the qualities of the materials found or new, by imagining new ways of building and articulating heterogeneous elements and discover new esthetics on the way. This innovative pedagogy offers students the opportunity to acquire an in-depth knowledge of a construction material used today, to compose a simple aedicula with specific details for each constructive situation, and to build in situ a small fragment of architecture during an intensive workshop at the end of the semester, a human adventure that helps students believe that collaborative projects are still possible and that these can improve the daily lives of local communities for whom they build.



⑤ Assembling: the sauna takes shape within five days.