EPISODES OF URBAN ACTIVISM IN BRUSSELS

From civil disobedience to architectural practice:
Brussels citizens challenging the conventional urban space

From the series 'Towards an Atlas of the Commons'

Elise Candry

EPISODES OF URBAN ACTIVISM IN BRUSSELS

From civil disobedience to architectural practice:

Brussels citizens challenging the conventional urban space

Elise Candry

KU LEUVEN

THANK YOU

ABSTRACT

The series 'Towards an Atlas of the Commons'[1] wants to emphasize on the concept of the commons, a notion we nowadays don't understand well anymore. Nevertheless, the so-called 'urban commons' – socially produced by the citizens – become increasingly important in cities. The law of supply and demand has been dominating urban development policies, whereby truly democratic places in the city become more and more scarce. Therefore citizens throughout the world feel the need to common parts of the urban space. Since the early 1970s bottom-up initiatives are gaining importance. We want to relink these practices of urban activism with the theme of the commons.

Here, these practices will be studied concretely in the context of Brussels. This city is often criticised for being messy. However, it is exactly this messy-ness that allows – and triggers – many acts of commoning. Several 'strategies of commoning' will be discussed. These will be ordered according to the degree in which the citizens are transforming – or want to transform – the place spatially. This mostly also implies a rising awareness about the fact that they are 'commoning' a part of the city. We will move from very spontaneous cases without agenda, to larger scaled events, which require a well-organised collective. Each strategy is going to be illustrated by two Brussels case studies: 'Using' (Parking 58, Dancing at the Station), 'Appropriating' (КУТКАТ, Bouwspeelplaats), 'Intervening' (Cyclo Guerilla, Swing in the Cracks), 'Reclaiming' (Picnic the Streets, Canal Park) and 'Designing' (ParckFarm, Commons Josaphat).

Within this research the following questions will be addressed: In which ways do people common space and how do they organise this? Can commoning be seen as an implicit critique on the conventional making of the city? Which networks exist between the different practices of commoning? Can the field of architecture and urban planning learn lessons from these practices? It is important to note that this research forms only a small part of the Atlas, towards we are working. Therefore everyone is invited to contribute to its completion.

---

1   For other theses within the series 'Towards an Atlas of the Commons' see: Assila Al-Ahmad, Ranjani Balasubramanian, Isabelle Leempoels, Sergios Strigklogiannis and Maarten Peeters.

CONTENT

PROBLEM STATEMENT

This thesis is part of a shared interest and concern for the 'commons'. With a small international group of students – from Jordan, Belgium, India and Greece – and with professor, philosopher and activist Lieven de Cauter as mentor, we became enthousiastic about the idea to make an 'Atlas of the 'Commons'. With this atlas – a work in progress – we want to emphasize on the concept of the commons, a notion we nowadays unfortunately don't understand well anymore. The 'commons' are the things we share – in common – with each other, with humanity but also with nature. It is everything that belongs to nobody, but therefore at the same time to everybody.[2]

With the introduction of modernity many existing common grounds started to be enclosed, privatized and consequently to disappear. Yet, the disappearance of the 'real' physical commons is maybe not the biggest problem. The fact that the idea of the common, as a way of thinking, is disapearing, may be even more dramatic. Although a revitalization of the notion occured during the previous years it still remains rather marginal compared to other discourses.[3]

It is rather strange that many of us don't understand the notion of the commons anymore, because actually it is all around us. Especially in cities, the rise of the so-called 'urban commons', which are socially produced by the citizens, become more and more noticeable. Since the early 1970s bottom-up initiatives such as e.g. community gardens, RTS (Reclaim The Streets) events and DIY (Do It Yourself) activism groups are gaining importance.[4] Within the 'Atlas' we want to relink these initiatives with the theme of the commons, as they can be seen as acts of 'commoning'. By bringing them together in one atlas, the potential of the bottom-up initiatives and the importance of citizens as urban actors will become clear. The aim is thus to 'common the commons'.

With the current economical, ecological and social crises in mind, the idea of the commons could become particularly important for finding solutions.[5] As the authors of 'Living in the endless city' argue: "*Seventy-five percent of the world's population is expected to be concentrated in cities by 2050 – a large proportion in megacities of several million people each and massively urbanized regions stretching across countries and continents*".[6] Also, in the cities *"all of the world's problems and conflicts are crowded together in a confined space. We are experiencing a crisis of responsibility between citizens and government and not only in Western cities and states"*.[7] Our cities have undergone a primarily market-driven globalization process. The primary force within urban development has become the law of supply and demand. Therefore democratic spaces are swallowed up by the radical economization and de-politicization of social space.[8] It is thus more and more difficult to find democratic places in the city. As a result, several groups of people are excluded from the supposed 'public' space and have to search for a space they can make 'their own'.

We can see, in cities all over the world, that citizens feel the need to common parts of the urban space. Acts of urban activism often occur in the open spaces of the city. These 'open spaces' can on the one hand be the official public space, in the sense that it is owned and planned by the state. These public spaces are often contested, as they are becoming more and more privatized, commercialised and surveilled. Already in the 1990s these issues led to the lamentation of the 'death' of public space by several theorists.[9] Acts of commoning in these public spaces will often contain an aspect of protest against the existing living conditions.

On the other hand acts of commoning can take place in the the interstitial spaces in the city: the 'other' spaces, the leftovers, the forgotten places, the places that are being ignored by the government or private owners because of their lack of economic value. Through commoning new functions and values are given to these spaces. This is not a battle for property, but for use. The aim is not to finally own the place, but to use the space in a free way.

2   DE CAUTER Lieven, 'Common Places: Preliminary notes on the (spatial) commons', *De Wereld Morgen: Lessons in Urgency*, October 2013, viewed on 12 April 2014, <http://community.dewereldmorgen.be/blogs/lieven-decauter/2013/10/14/common-places-preliminary-notes-spatial-commons>
3   Ibid.
4   SHEPARD Benjamin, HAYDUK Ronald (eds.), *From Act Up to the WTO: Urban protest and community building in the era of globalisation*, Verso, London, 2002, p 32.

5   'On the Commons: A public interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides', *An Architektur*, nr. 23, June – August 2010, viewed on 10 April 2014, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-the-commons-a-public-interview-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/>
6   BURDETT Ricky, SUDJIC Deyan (eds.), *Living in the endless city*, Phaidon, London, 2011, p 10.
7   Ibid., p 6.
8   FEZER Jesko, 'Design for a Post-Neoliberal City', *E-Flux*, nr. 17, June 2010, viewed on 18 April 2014, < http://www.e-flux.com/issues/17-june-august-2010/>
9   See for example SENETT Richard, *The fall of public man*, Norton, New York, 1992, 373 p. and SORKIN Michael, *Variations on a theme park: The new American city and the end of public space*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1994, 252 p.

These practices of urban activism will be studied concretely in the context of Brussels. As capital of Belgium and Europe, and rapidly growing city – unfortunately often at the expense of its inhabitants – Brussels is a very interesting case to study. This city has many defects, as it is for example often criticised for being chaotic, unorganised and dirty. But for many people this constitutes at the same time the charm of the city. Moreover, it is exactly this messy-ness that allows – and triggers – these many acts of commoning. This thesis wants to contribute to the creation of an 'Atlas of the Commons', with a chapter on Brussels. With the term 'atlas' we refer to a collection of stories and examples, which are related to the commons, grouped per geographical region, in this case Brussels. Although mappings will be included in the atlas, the emphasis will be on the story and process behind the commoning initiatives.

The first part will address the theoretical framework about the commons, the context of Brussels, and how urban activism can be seen as an act of commoning. This is followed by the second part, in which a series of Brussels case studies will be discussed. As it is impossible to pursue completeness, ten case studies have been selected, giving a representative overview. Yet, the Atlas in itself is a common work: Other people should complement and change it over time. The third part, to conclude, will reflect further on the questions: In which ways do people common space and how do they organise this? Can commoning be seen as an implicit critique on the conventional making of the city? Which networks exist between the different practices of commoning? Can the field of architecture and urban planning learn lessons from these practices?

Hopefully throughout this research inspiration will be given for further thinking and research about the commons. In any case, it would already be fantastic to contribute to make the idea of the commons alive again in our common sense.

PART 1

URBAN ACTIVISM
THE CITY AND THE COMMONS

1/ STATE OF THE ART

THE COMMONS

"*Usually the soil belonged to the lord while grazing belonged to the commoners, and the trees to either – timber to the lord, and wood to commoners*".[10] Peter Linebaugh

Throughout history a lot has been said and done about the commons. Nowadays – with the urgent need for solutions for the economical, ecological and social crises we are facing – it is becoming particularly important again. Moreover, the neoliberalist paradigm has reached a point at which it will possibly be replaced by a new governance of capitalism, one in which the 'commons' gain more importance.[11] According to David Harvey, geographer and anthropoligist "*the recent revival of emphasis upon the supposed loss of urban commonalities reflects the seemingly profound impacts of the recent wave of privatizations, enclosures, spatial controls, policing, and surveillance upon the qualities of urban life in general, and in particular upon the potentiality to build or inhibit new forms of social relations (a new commons) within an urban process influenced if not dominated by capitalist class interests*".[12] For Silvia Federici two particular reasons stand out why the 'archaic' idea of the commons has come to the center of political discussions again: "*On one side is the demise of the statist model of revolution that for decades had sapped the efforts of radical movements to build an alternative to capitalism. On the other, the neo-liberal attempt to subordinate every form of life and knowledge to the logic of the market has heightened our awareness of the danger of living in a world in which we no longer have access to seas, trees, animals, and our fellow beings except through the cash-nexus*".[13]

But what are these 'commons' actually? What does it mean 'to common'? Although we use the word a lot we don't grasp its meaning very well. As Negri and Hardt have nicely put it "*with the blinders of today's dominant ideologies it is difficult to see the common, even though it is all around us*".[14] So then, how do we define a 'common'? With the simple but very effective words of Lieven de Cauter we could say that "*the common is that what belongs to nobody and therefore to everybody, or, what belongs to everybody and therefore to nobody*."[15] It is what people share with each other, the common wealth of the world such as e.g. air, water and fruits, what is often claimed to be the inheritance of humanity as a whole.[16] We can call these the 'natural' commons.

However, this resource-based definition of the common is too limited, so we should break it further open. Negri and Hardt argue in their 'Commonwealth' that we could consider common "*also those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledge, language, information, etc.*".[17] They don't see the common as something already given to society but as something which needs to be produced through collective social practices. Herein the city forms the factory for the production of the common.[18] These socially produced commons can be seen as the 'urban' commons. A clear summary of the concept of the commons can be found in the words of Massimo de Angelis, who argues that conceptualizing the commons involves three things at the same time: "*First, all commons involve some sort of common pool of resources, understood as non-commodified means of fulfilling peoples needs. Second, the commons are necessarily created and sustained by communities. These are sets of commoners who share these resources and who define for themselves the rules according to which they are accessed and used. In addition to these two elements - the pool of resources and the set of communities - the third and most important element in terms of conceptualizing*

10   LINEBAUGH Peter, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and commons for all*, University of California Press, London, 2008, p 33.

11   'On the Commons: A public interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides', *An Architektur*, nr. 23, June – August 2010, viewed on 10 April 2014, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-the-commons-a-public-inter-view-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/>

12   HARVEY David, *Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*, Verso, London, 2012, p 67.

13   FEDERICI Silvia, 'Feminism and the politics of the Commons', *The Commoner*, January 2011, viewed on 18 April 2014, <http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=113>

14   HARDT Michael, Antonio NEGRI, *Commonwealth, Harvard University Press*, Cambridge, 2009, Preface p viii.

15   DE CAUTER Lieven, 'Common Places: Preliminary notes on the (spatial) commons', *De Wereld Morgen: Lessons in Urgency*, October 2013, viewed on 12 April 2014, <http://community.dewereldmorgen.be/blogs/lieven-decauter/2013/10/14/common-places-preliminary-notes-spatial-commons>

16   HARDT Michael, Antonio NEGRI, *Commonwealth, Harvard University Press*, Cambridge, 2009, Preface p viii.

17   Ibid.

18   Ibid., p 120.

the commons is the verb ' to common' the social process that creates and reproduces the commons".[19] According to De Angelis there can't be commons without communities. These communities, however, are not necessarily fixed to a locality: they can operate both in local and trans-local places, such as social practices using modern communication technologies.[20] The only commons without a real link to 'communities' are the ones who don't refer to community practices for their access and reproduction, namely the 'global commons'. In this case there can be a rather abstract concept of 'global community'.[21]

The third required element to talk about commons was the verb 'to common', which was also discussed by Peter Linebaugh in his book 'The Magna Carta Manifesto'. There he illustrates how the English commoners in the thirteenth century were able to maintain and develop certain commons, such as collecting wood in the forest, or setting up villages on the king's land. In the end the King recognised these already used practices also as *de facto* rights.[22] In this way Linebaugh illustrates the importance of law to protect the commons. Also David Harvey has written about the practice of 'commoning'. According to him "*at the heart of the practice lies the principle that the relation between the social group and that aspect of the environment being treated as a common shall be both collective and following the logic of market exchange and market valuations. This last point is crucial because it helps distinguish between public goods construed as productive state expenditures and a common which is established or used in a completely different way and for a completely different purpose*".[23]

So, throughout history and also today we feel, or we should feel, the need to 'common the commons'. But how did we loose the commons in the first place? When did they disappear? Already in the sixteenth century Thomas More documented, in his book 'Utopia', how together with modernity the enclosure of the spatial commons started in Europe.[24]

19   'On the Commons: A public interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides', *An Architektur*, nr. 23, June – August 2010, viewed on 10 April 2014, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-the-commons-a-public-inter-view-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/>

20   DE ANGELIS Massimo, 'Reflections on alternatives, commons and communities or building a new world from the bottom up', *The Commoner*, nr. 6, Winter 2003, viewed on 18 April 2014, < http://www.commoner.org.uk/deangelis06.pdf>

21   Ibid.

22   'On the Commons: A public interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides', *An Architektur*, nr. 23, June – August 2010, viewed on 10 April 2014, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-the-commons-a-public-inter-view-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/>

23   HARVEY David, *Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*, Verso, London, 2012, p 73.

24   DE CAUTER Lieven, 'Common Places: Preliminary notes on the (spatial) commons', *De Wereld Morgen: Lessons in Urgency*, October 2013, viewed on 12 April 2014, <http://community.dewereldmorgen.be/blogs/lieven-decauter/2013/10/14/common-places-preliminary-notes-spatial-commons>

A long time after that, in the nineteenth century, Karl Marx discribed the process of expropriation of the commoners in part eight of his famous work 'Capital*'*. Marx refers to expropriation as 'primitive accumulation'. This is the process that created the precondition of capitalist development. It is a necessary fact because the only way to get out of the vicious circle of 'capital versus surplus-value' is by supposing a primitive accumulation preceding capitalistic accumulation.[25] This primitive accumulation was established when the landlords granted themselves the poor farmer's land as private property. As Marx described: "*The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process*".[26] The history of this expropriation assumed different aspects in different countries, and ran through various phases. Marx took England as an example, which according to him had "the classic form".[27] In sixteenth- to eighteenth-century England, the process of 'primitive accumulation' became known as 'enclosure'. The commons in these times were fundamental elements within the lifes of people throughout the world. They had access to the forest to collect wood and to common grassland to graze their cattle. The enclosure of the commons contributed to mass poverty, mass migration and mass criminalization. It also created on the one hand the modern proletariat and on the other hand the accumulation of capital necessary to fuel the industrial revolution.[28]

But the massive appropriation of the common was not only caused by capitalism. Also under communism commons were nationalised, and even the rise of the modern state has also nationalised the commons and thus 'enclosed' them.[29] In his 'Magna Carta Manifesto' Peter Linebaugh illustrates how old but also how recent the struggle for the commons is. He distinguishes three tendencies that emerge from the different stories throughout the world: "*First, planetary woodlands are being destroyed in favor of commercial profit. Second, petroleum products are substituted as the base commodity of human reproduction and world economic development. Third, indigenous people worldwide – commoners all – are expropriated*".[30] Linebaugh shows us that commons have been the thread that has

25   MARX, Karl, *Capital: A critical analysis of capitalist production (Vol. 1 and 2)*, Wordsworth Editors, Hertfordshire, 2013, p 501.

26   Ibid., p 504.

27   Ibid., p 504.

28   'On the Commons: A public interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides', *An Architektur*, nr. 23, June – August 2010, viewed on 10 April 2014, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-the-commons-a-public-inter-view-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/>

29   DE CAUTER Lieven, 'Common Places: Preliminary notes on the (spatial) commons', *De Wereld Morgen: Lessons in Urgency*, October 2013, viewed on 12 April 2014, <http://community.dewereldmorgen.be/blogs/lieven-decauter/2013/10/14/common-places-preliminary-notes-spatial-commons>

30   LINEBAUGH Peter, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and commons for all*, University of California Press, London, 2008, p 5.

connected the history of the class struggle into our time, and that the fights for the commons are still happening at this very moment.[31]

An early criticism on a commons-based system was the famous article 'The Tragedy of the Commons' of 1968 by American ecologist Gerrit Hardin. In his article, Hardin argues that such system is only feasible under the condition of a low-population density: "*a finite world can support only a finite population; therefore, population growth must eventually equal zero*". [32] As the world population keeps rising, we are thus confronted with a big problem. Moreover, he argues that each individual will always try to maximize his own personal benefit without limit, in a world that is limited. He uses the example of a common grazeland. According to Hardin each herdsmann will try to keep as many cattle as possible on the common land: "*ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons*".[33] He already anticipates on the argument that education could counteract the natural tendency to do the wrong thing, by arguing that the unlimited sequence of generations will require the constant refreshment of this knowledge.[34]

Opposed to Hardin, Massimo de Angelis argues that historical and economic research has shown that certain types of commons – for example graze lands – rarely encountered these problems, because the commoners made rules for accessing the resources.[35] Moreover, he argues that "*Hardin could develop a 'tragedy of the commons' argument because in his assumption there existed neither community nor commoning as a social praxis, there were only resources subject to open access*".[36] Also David Harvey brings up some counterarguments. He sees Hardin's 'Tragedy of the commons' as an irrefutable argument for the justification for privatisation. He sees a problem in Hardin's use of the metaphor of the cattle, as being a private ownership of several individuals on a piece of common land. Harvey argues that, "*if the cattle were held in common, of course, the metaphor would*

not work. This shows that it is private property in cattle and individual utility-maximizing behavior that lie at the heart of the problem, rather than the common-property character of the resource".[37]

Further on in 'The Tragedy of the Commons' Hardin makes a jump in scale from the herdsmann's cattle to the global commons, which according to him are also being destroyed through a commons-based system. He gives the example of the oceans, where the believe in the "inexhaustile resources of the oceans" is bringing several species to extinction.[38] But what would the best solution be then? According to Hardin, the best way to sustain a common resource is either through privatization or direct state management.[39] David Harvey notes that there is an analytical 'scale problem' at work here, as Hardin's metaphor is misleading: he uses a small-scale example of private capital to explicate a global problem, although the nature of the problem and the solution for it change dramatically when we "jump scales". [40] Good solutions at the scale of the local do not necessarily form good solutions at the scale of the global and vice versa. Harvey also argues how thinking about the commons in this too narrow way has often polarized between private property solutions and authoritarian state intervention.[41] However, Hardin also notes that privatisation of the common goods is also confronted with some difficulties: "*This is rightly feared for an ancient reason – Quis custodiet ipsos custodes? – Who shall watch the watchers themselves? The great challenge facing us now is to invent the corrective feedbacks that are needed to keep custodians honest*".[42]

Hardin notes the present feeling that the United Nations is "our last and best hope".[43] Yet, Silvia Federici argues that, since the early 1990s, both the United Nations and the World Bank have appropriated the language of the commons to put it at the service of privatisation: "*Under the guise of 'protecting biodiversity' and 'conserving the global commons', the World Bank has turned rain forests into ecological reserves, has expelled the population that for centuries had drawn their sustenance from them, while ensuring access to those who can pay, for example through eco-tourism. The United Nations on the other hand has revised the international law governing access to the oceans in ways that*

---

31   FEDERICI Silvia, 'Feminism and the politics of the Commons', *The Commoner*, January 2011, viewed on 18 April 2014, <http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=113>

32   HARDIN Gerrit, 'The Tragedy of the commons', *Science*, Vol. 162, nr. 3859, December 1968, p 1243.

33   Ibid., p 1244.

34   Ibid., p 1245.

35   'On the Commons: A public interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides', *An Architektur*, nr. 23, June – August 2010, viewed on 10 April 2014, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-the-commons-a-public-inter-view-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/>

36   'On the Commons: A public interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides', *An Architektur*, nr. 23, June – August 2010, viewed on 10 April 2014, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-the-commons-a-public-inter-view-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/>

37   HARVEY David, *Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*, Verso, London, 2012, p 68.

38   HARDIN Gerrit, 'The Tragedy of the commons', *Science*, Vol. 162, nr. 3859, December 1968, p 1245.

39   Ibid., p 1245.

40   HARVEY David, *Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*, Verso, London, 2012, p 69.

41   Ibid., p 68.

42   HARDIN Gerrit, 'The Tragedy of the commons', *Science*, Vol. 162, nr. 3859, December 1968, p 1246.

43   Ibid.

enables governments to concentrate the use of seawaters in fewer hands, again in the name of preserving the common heritage of mankind".[44]

Yet, it is important noting that we cannot make too quickly conclusions about any kind of 'enclosure'. According to Harvey there is much confusion over the relationship between the commons and the "supposed evils of enclosure". He argues that it is sometimes necessary to preserve a common.[45] Massimo de Angelis argues how commons often emerge out of the struggle against their negation: "*struggles against intellectual property rights opens up the question of knowledge as commons. Struggles against privatization of water, education and health, opens up the question of water, education and health as commons. Struggles against landlessness open up the question of environmental commons. In a word, struggle against actual or threatened enclosures opens the question of commons*".[46] In the words of David Harvey we can therefore make the conclusion that "*questions of the commons are contradictory and therefore always contested*".[47]

Another criticism that has been given on a system based on the commons is that it has not been questionned how to bring together the many commons that are being defended in one coherent whole, which could lead towards a new mode of production.[48] "*An exception is the theory of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, who argue that a society built on the principle of 'the common' is already evolving from the informatization and 'cognitivization' of production*".[49]

Negri and Hardt view the city as a factory for the production of the common. They argue that with the rise of immaterial labor – based on communication and knowledge exchange – we have reached a new situation.[50] "*As production now becomes production of knowledge, culture and subjectivity, organised through the internet, a common space and common wealth are created that escape the problem of defining rules of inclusion or exclusion*".[51]

As for example the use of resources on the internet multiplies them instead of reducing them, this mode of production offers the possibility of a society built on abundance. Their concept of 'biopolitical labor' – with which not only goods are produced, but also social life – indicates that the traditional distinction between economy, politics, and culture has become increasinlgy blurred. The appeal of their theory is that it does not seperate the 'common' from work and production, but that it shows the connection between them. However, its limit is that it leans upon skills that are not given to most of the world population.[52] We thus still have to figure out in which ways a system based on the commons could open new opportunities today. New forms of social cooperation are constantly being produced, including in certain locations that previously even did not exist, such as the internet for example.[53] The commons are thus still surprisingly present.

44   FEDERICI Silvia, 'Feminism and the politics of the Commons', *The Commoner*, January 2011, viewed on 18 April 2014, <http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=113>

45   HARVEY David, *Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*, Verso, London, 2012, p 70.

46   DE ANGELIS Massimo, 'Reflections on alternatives, commons and communities or building a new world from the bottom up'*, The Commoner*, nr. 6, Winter 2003, viewed on 18 April 2014, < http://www.commoner.org.uk/deangelis06.pdf>

47   HARVEY David, *Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*, Verso, London, 2012, p 71.

48   FEDERICI Silvia, 'Feminism and the politics of the Commons', *The Commoner*, January 2011, viewed on 18 April 2014, <http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=113>

49   Ibid.

50   HARVEY David, *Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*, Verso, London, 2012, p 67.

51   FEDERICI Silvia, 'Feminism and the politics of the Commons', *The Commoner*, January 2011, viewed on 18 April 2014, <http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=113>

52   FEDERICI Silvia, 'Feminism and the politics of the Commons', *The Commoner*, January 2011, viewed on 18 April 2014, <http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=113>

53   Ibid.

INTRODUCTION TO BRUSSELS

Within the theme of the (urban) commons Brussels is a very interesting context to study. The city is still undergoing difficulties as a result of the shift from an industrial Fordist city to a post-industrial and Post-Fordist one. Hereby the city shifted from a wealthy industrial economy to a dual tertiary labour market. It also underwent a major change, going from a Belgian national capital to an international global city. Furthermore the city was awarded a very complex administrative structure, with one region, two institutionalized communities and nineteen municipalities.[54] As Eric Corijn and Jacqueline Groth argue, therefore "*there are many examples of urban struggles and resistance in a city basically run by private developers and alien political forces*".[55]

Moreover, Belgium has a problematic relationship with its capital city. The average Flemish citizen is for example still convinced that the criminality in Brussels is high and keeps rising. Just as they also widely believe that those criminals are 'Moroccan youngsters'. However, if we may believe the Dutch criminologist Jan Van Dijk – winner of the 2012 Stockholm Prize in Crimonology – the criminality throughout the western world has decreased strongly over the last ten years. Since 2000 also in Belgium we see a strong decrease. According to numbers of the Federal Police there was a decrease of 3,5% in 2012 compared to 2011. In Brussels we see, over the same period, the strongest decrease with 6,4%. The numbers are worth having a closer examination. In 2012 there was, in Brussels, a decrease of 6,6% for theft and extortion, of 10,1% for physical violence, of 14,7% for vandalism and of 19,2% for drugs.[56] Of course Brussels has to deal with several serious issues. But is not every big city confronted with those issues?

In their 'Brussels Reader' Eric Corijn en Eefje Vloerberghs describe Brussels as "a small world city". It is one of the major cities in the world, more specifically the ninth in the ranking of the '2012 Global Cities Index and Emerging Cities Outlook'.

54   CORIJN Eric, GROTH Jacqueline, 'The need for freezones: Informal actors setting the urban agenda' in: DE CAUTER Lieven, DE ROO Ruben, VANHAESEBROUCK Karel (eds.), *Art and Activism in the age of globalisation*, Nai Publishers, Rotterdam, 2011, p 149.

55   Ibid.

56   LLESHI Bleri, 'Criminaliteit in Brussel: perceptie en werkelijkheid', *Knack*, viewed 9 January 2014, <viewed 10 February 2014, < http://www.knack.be/nieuws/belgie/criminaliteit-in-brussel-perceptie-en-werkeli-jkheid/article-opinion-123240.html>

Brussels thanks this position to the international political institutions it houses, such as NATO and the EU activities and its central position, but equally to its liveliness and cultural richness. "*In a few decades Brussels evolved from being a national industrial capital city to a transnational post-industrial service economy*".[57] This high-speed growth has triggered some positive developments, but to some extent at the expense of its inhabitants.

Brussels has to deal with several social and economic problems. Catalyst for many of those problems is the sharp demographic rise. Whereas from the 1960s till the middle of the 1990s there was a decline of the population, the number of 'Bruxellois' is rising since 1996. Between 1996 and 2012 there was an increase of population with nearly 19%. Today Brussels has a population of 1,154 million people – with a density of 7175 inhabitants per km^2 – and it is expected that its population will increase to 1,2 million by 2020, which is an increase of approximately 15000 people per year.[58]
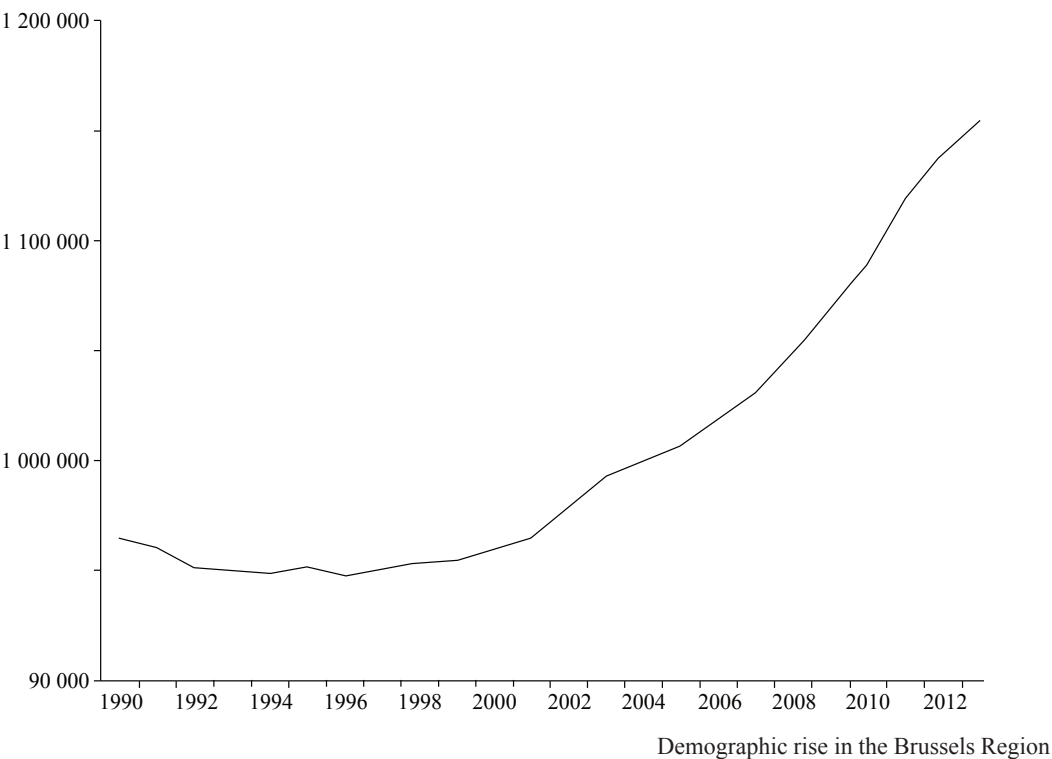
Last year the Federal Planning Agency calculated that if the population keeps growing at a similar rate, then Brussels will count one and a half million people by 2060. According to demographer Patrick Deboosere from the VUB the maximum number the city can handle is about two million people.[59] The most important factor for this strong increase is migration. Patrick Deboosere argues: "*Brussels is a real migrants city. More than 50% of its inhabitants were born outside of the Brussels Region. In certain neighbourhoods the half of the population changes every five years*".[60] Moreover the migration is very diverse, consisting both of rich Europeans working for the international institutes as poor migrants looking for a better life in Belgium.[61]

Another reason for the demographic rise follows out if this first one, namely the high birth rate among the immigrant residents. Brussels counts a high number of young people. The average age in 2013 was 37,44 years, while in Flanders this was 41,99. Moreover, the trend in Flanders is one of aging (from an average age of 39,96 in 2000 to 41,99 in 2013) whereas the Brussels Region is rejuvenating (from an average age of 39,06 in 2000 to 37,44 in 2013).[62] Contributing to the rejuvenation are especially the municipalities located in the so-called 'poor sickle', also known by the French-speaking inhabitants as 'le croissant pauvre'. This area, concentrated along the canal, has never completely restored from the departure of the industry since the 1960s. It runs from Schaarbeek and Sint-Joost-ten-Node in the North, via Sint-Jans-Molenbeek and Anderlecht till Sint-Gillis in the South, complemented with the western part of the central pentagon. This poor sickle is often described a "social-economic time bomb" for Brussels.[63]

Demographic rise in the Brussels Region

57   CORIJN Eric, VLOEBERGHS Eefje, 'Brussels, a small world city' in: CORIJN Eric, VAN DE VEN Jessica (eds.), *The Brussels Reader: A small world city to become the capital of Europe*, VUB Press, Brussels, 2013, p 13.
58   RENARD Han, ZUALLAERT Jeroen, 'De paradoxen van de hoofdstad', *Knack*, nr. 16, April 2014, p 27.

59   DEGREEF Christophe, VILEYN Danny, 'De bevolkingsboom: het wordt (misschien) dringen', *Brusselnieuws*, 25 April 2012, viewed on 14 April 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/de-bevolkings-boom-het-wordt-misschien-dringen>
60   RENARD Han, ZUALLAERT Jeroen, 'De paradoxen van de hoofdstad', *Knack*, nr. 16, April 2014, p 27.
61   Ibid.
62   BISA, *Bevolking: leeftijdsstructuur*, 2013, viewed on 21 April 2014, <http://www.bisa.irisnet.be/themas/bevolking/bevolking#.U1Unm9wxHlI>
63   TELEMANS Dieter, 'Molenbeek, de sociaal-economische toekomst van Brussel', *De Tijd*, 12 April 2014, viewed 12 April 2014, <http://www.tijd.be/nieuws/politiek_economie_belgie/Molenbeek_de_sociaal_econo-mische_toekomst_van_Brussel.9489253-3139.art>

The poor sickle
(prosperity index in the Brussels Region)

no info
<65
65-80
80-90
90-100
>100
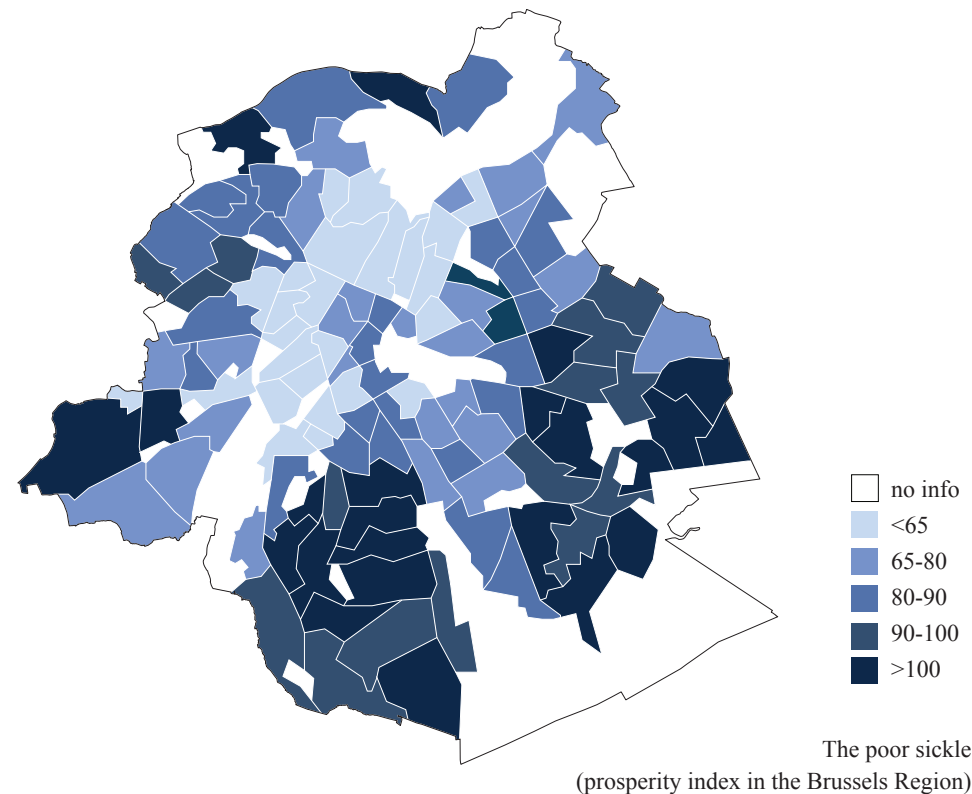
The demographic rise creates a number of challenges for the coming years, especially in these neighbourhoods. The high birth rate for example has led to capacity problems in schools and nurseries. Moreover many schools in Brussels have to deal with a shortage of teachers, financial problems and early school leavers.[64]

Another important problem, and related with education, is the high unemployment of the Brussels labour active population, which almost reaches 20%.[65] Moreover, 30% of the children are raised in a family without an income originating from employment.[66] This unemployment is a structural unemployment, which is hardly influenced by the economic climate. According to Yves Bastaerts, deputy director at Actiris, the Brussels Service for Employment, this unemployment has to do with the structure of the Brussels' labour market: "*We have a large service sector, with plenty of jobs for highly educated people. There is almost no industry left. About 70% of our job offers is for highly skilled people, but about 70% of the jobseekers is low skilled. The core problem is thus the mismatch between demand and offer*".[67]

Especially the youth unemployment is alarmingly high. In some neighbourhoods it reaches 40%. Mostly it are young people with a migration background, who are low skilled or who finished school without diploma.[68] It is therefore not surprising that poverty is very high in Brussels: 34% of the Brussels citizens lives below the poverty line, opposed to 9% in Flanders and 19% in Wallonia.[69]

The concentration of poverty is the highest in the densely populated neighbourhood of the 'poor sickle'. There the share of household living from an OCMW-payment is five times as high as in the rest of the Brussels region.[70] Also these municipalities suffer the most from the lack of social housing in Brussels. Of the 500 000 houses in the city, only 40 000 are social housing (good for only 8%).[71] In 2012 the waiting list for social housing counted almost 92 000 people[72], while Brussels counts about 30 000 empty houses.[73] For example the municipality of Sint-Jans-Molenbeek counts less than 10% social housing while more than 50% of the inhabitants could be qualified for it. Even more alarming: in spite of all these issues, the government of Molenbeek decided to economize on social services and invested instead two million Euro in new security cameras.[74]

Despite the several issues Brussels has to deal with, the city holds many opportunities. For example its messy-ness allows many spontaneous initiatives. As Brussels architect and redactor of 'A+' architecture magazine Ward Verbakel argues: "*Brussels is much more eclectic than Hasselt, Leuven, Ghent or Antwerp. Those cities all look like each other. There it is beautiful, safe, clean, you know what you can expect. But things that are not so evident can't happen there. Here suddenly trees can start to grow out of waste wood. Here there's space for experiment*".[75]

64   RENARD Han, ZUALLAERT Jeroen, 'De paradoxen van de hoofdstad', *Knack*, nr. 16, April 2014, p 27.
65   ACTIRIS, 'Statistieken van de Brusselse arbeidsmarkt', 2013, viewed on 21 April 2014, <http://www.actiris.be/marchemp/tabid/211/language/nl-BE/Statistieken-van-de-Brusselse-arbeidsmarkt.aspx>
66   RENARD Han, ZUALLAERT Jeroen, 'De paradoxen van de hoofdstad', *Knack*, nr. 16, April 2014, p 27.
67   Ibid., p 30.

68   RENARD Han, ZUALLAERT Jeroen, 'De paradoxen van de hoofdstad', *Knack*, nr. 16, April 2014, p 30.
69   Ibid.
70   BISA, 'De conjunctuurbarometer van het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest nr. 19: Armoede in Brussel: vaststellingen en evoluties', January 2011, viewed on 21 April 2014, <http://www.bisa.irisnet.be/bestanden/publicaties/dossiers-van-de-conjunctuurbarometer/BD19_armoede_in_Brussel_vaststellingen_en_evoluties.pdf>
71   RENARD Han, ZUALLAERT Jeroen, 'De paradoxen van de hoofdstad', *Knack*, nr. 16, April 2014, p 27.
72   WINCKELMANS Wim, 'Wachtlijst voor sociale woning piekt', *De Standaard*, 17 November 2012, viewed on 21 April 2014, <http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20121116_00371777>
73   AHIDAR Fuad, *Leegstand Brussel*, viewed on 21 April 2013, <http://www.leegstandbrussel.be/actie/Bienvenue_3.html>
74   LLESHI Bleri, 'Criminaliteit in Brussel: perceptie en werkelijkheid', *Knack*, viewed 9 January 2014, <viewed 10 February 2014, < http://www.knack.be/nieuws/belgie/criminaliteit-in-brussel-perceptie-en-werkelijkheid/article-opinion-123240.html>
75   HUBO Bettina, 'Architect Ward Verbakel: Picnic the Streets was hoogtepunt van 2012', *Brusselnieuws*, 3 January 2013, viewed on 10 April 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/architect-ward-verbakel-picnic-streets-was-hoogtepunt-van-2012>

Moreover, with 50% of the territory being green space Brussels has a lot of potential for development. The city has plenty of 'hidden treasures' that can potentially be re-appropriated by its commoners. The Regional Development Plan (PRD) for example appointed fourteen 'leverage areas' in the Brussels Region. These areas, mostly large wastelands, carry a lot of potential or require special attention and effort for development. The central criterion in determining the leverage areas are the fourteen GGB's (Gebieden van Gewestelijk Belang) or 'areas of regional importance', which were appointed by the GBP (Gewestelijk Bestemmingsplan). These are sites with a supra-local importance, often located near train stations or former army barracks. The government wants to exploit them for several urban programs such as housing, commerce, offices, government services, green space and hotels.[76] The city even holds few real common grounds. For example a small site in the northern part of Brussels close to the main ring road. It is squeezed between Neder-Over-Heembeek and the industrial developments along the canal. The name of the street along the site, the Gemene Beemdenstraat ('gemene' meaning common in Dutch), indicates the special status of the place, which is originally common land. Because of this status the place is a popular location for trailer park dwellers.[77] In any case Brussels still holds many more interesting locations, maybe not real common grounds, but perfect locations for commoners to claim.

Leverage areas:
(1) Erasmus
(2) Vorst
(3) Zuid
(4) Canal
(5) Tour & Taxis
(6) Botanique
(7) Europawijk
(8) Gulden Vlies
(9) Heizel
(10) Military hospital
(11) Schaarbeek-vorming
(12) RTBF-VRT
(13) Delta
(14) Weststation

1 km

GGB's:
(1) Helihaven
(2) Gaucheret
(3) Weststation
(4) Van Praetbrug
(5) Prins Albert
(6) Tour & Taxis
(7) Van Volxem
(8) Marsveld
(9) Charles-Albert;
(10) Veeartsenschool
(11) Cité Administrative
(12) Louisalaan
(13) Josaphat Station
(14) Stadspoort
Common ground:
(4) Site Gemene Beemdenstraat

1 km

76   CORIJN Eric, VLOEBERGHS Eefje, *Brussel! Urban notebooks*, VUB Press, Brussels, 2009, p 265.
77   DE MEULDER Bruno, RYCKEWAERT Michael, 'De alledaagse ruimte van armoede en uitsluiting in het stadslandschap: Onderzoek naar de ruimtelijke dimensie van armoede en de architectonische invulling van minimumgrenzen voor een kwaliteitsvol leven', Final Report OSA Research, KU Leuven, Leuven, 2002, p 184.
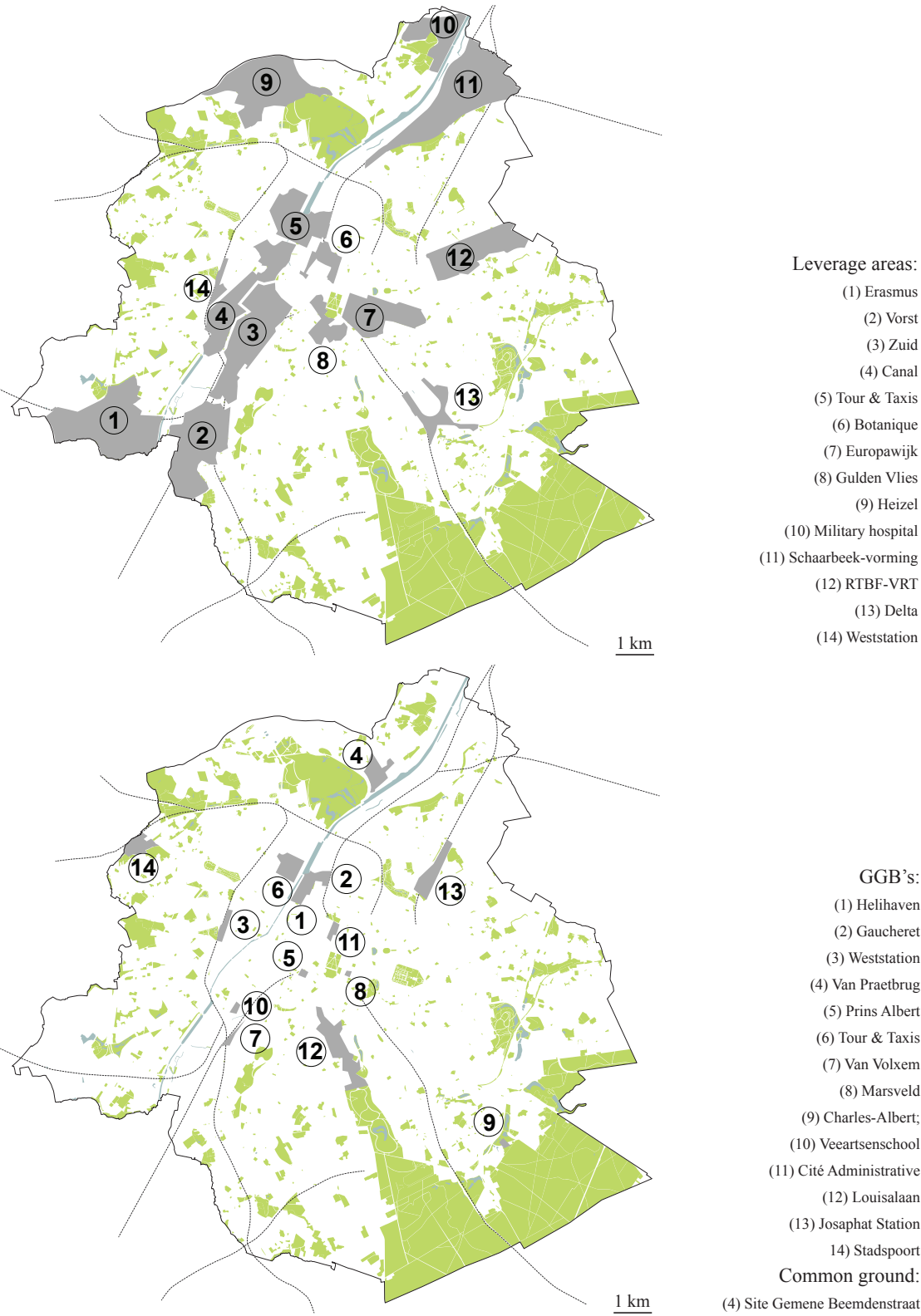
2/ THE POST-FORDIST CITY: A CONTESTED PUBLIC REALM

HOW PUBLIC IS 'PUBLIC SPACE'?

One would expect that in the city many places exist where citizens with all diferent backgrounds can meet, without exceptions: namely the public space. However, the fact that the search for alternatives keeps rising, raises some questions about our contemporary public space. The notion 'public space' is difficult to define. As a concept, it can be traced back to the ancient Greek 'polis', in which the 'agora' or marketplace constituted a public platform for democratic and collective decision-making. This is often seen as the ultimate and classical function of the public space: the place for dialogue between citizens and the state.[78] Throughout history, forums, parks, market places, squares and streets have been seen as the embodiment of public space. In the birds view scenes of sixteenth-century painter Peter Bruegel the Elder for example, the vitality of the public spaces and their many different functions is represented.[79] Public space has always been an important facet of the urban culture. It provides opportunities for socializing but also for protest.

Yet, in contrast to the idealistic visions upon public space, the making of it often reflects a different political and social reality. At the end of the twentieth century the debate within the architecture and urbanism discourse did put a heavy weight on the visions on public space. Several theorists lamented the 'end of public space'.[80] Among others Richard Sennett was talking about 'The fall of public man' in 1977.[81] Also in the 1990s the theme was still relevant, for example in Michael Sorkin's 'Variations on a Theme Park: The new American city and the end of public space'.[82] Similar to the issues Sorkin discusses, but in a more ironic way, Rem Koolhaas in 1995 introduced the term 'generic city'. He described how the city has become more and more generalized and has lost its personal identity.

He describes this with the typology of the airport and the shopping mall, places which are the same everywhere.[83]

But to equal all this with the 'death of public space' would – as Don Mitchell has argued – be a bit too simplistic.[84] However public space (in its physical appearance) is not something that is 'just there'. As Anthony Vidler suggests, "*we need to be aware that the idea has never been guaranteed. It has only been won through concerted struggle, and then, after the fact, guaranteed (to some extent) in law*".[85] Public space needs to be socially produced through struggle. The production of public space is therefore always a dialectic between the 'end of public space' and its beginning.[86] An interesting viewpoint is how several theorists – such as e.g. Margaret Crawford, Don Mitchell and Graham and Marvin – have argued that the idea of a 'dying' public space is actually based on an idealistic image of public space that has never truely existed.[87] Already in the ancient 'polis' citizenship rights were only awarded to free, non-foreign men. This means that more than half the population – among which women, slaves and foreigners – were excluded from the debate on the 'agora'.[88] As Setha Low and Neil Smith argue in 'The politics of public space' "*in practice, in both Greece of old and the Western world today, truly public space is the exception not the rule*".[89]

A key component of public space is clearly the access to it, which is not free and open to all, but restricted by a set of rules and laws determining who is (or is not) allowed to use it. Therefore the space needs control to make sure these rules are being complied. Ownership plays an important role, although it does not always determine how a space is used and controlled. Nowadays nearly all space is owned by somebody – be it the government, private organisations, private individuals or financial institutions. In general we call the space owned by the government 'public'.[90]

78   CUPERS Kenny, MIESSEN Markus, *Spaces of uncertainty*, Verlag Müller und Busmann, Berlin, 2002, p 34.

79   RIVLIN, Leanne, 'Found spaces: Freedom of choice in public life' in: FRANCK Karen, STEVENS Quentin (eds.), *Loose space: Possibility and diversity in urban life*, London, Routledge, 2007, p 38.

80   LOW Setha, SMITH Neil, *The politics of public space, Routledge*, New York, 2006, p 1.

81   See SENETT Richard, *The fall of public man*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977, 386 p.

82   See SORKIN Michael, *Variations on a theme park: The new American city and the end of public space*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1994, 252 p.

83   DE CAUTER Lieven, *The capsular civilization: On the city in the age of fear*, Nai Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, p 44.

84   MITCHELL Don, *The right to the city: Social justice and the fight for public space*, The Guilford press, New York, 2012, p 8.

85   Ibid., p 5.

86   Ibid., p 36.

87   DE CAUTER Lieven, DEHAENE Michiel (eds*.), Heterotopia and the city: Public space in a Postcivil Society*, Routledge, London, 2008, p 112.

88   LOW Setha, SMITH Neil, *The politics of public space, Routledge*, New York, 2006, p 4.

89   Ibid.

90   MINTON Anna, 'What kind of world are we building? The privatisation of public space', RICS, London, 2006, p 9.

The French sociologist Henri Lefebvre argued that throughout history every society shapes a distinctive social space to meet its social and economic requirements. In the same way as the agora reflected the social and political culture of its time, so public space continues to be viewed by sociologists and anthropologists as a social and political barometer.[91]

Which issues in our contemporary society does this 'barometer' then exactly reflect? Since the last thirty years the urban environment has undergone major changes. While the industrial Fordist growth model was characterised by a regulatory and re-distributive framework of the centralized welfare state, the Post-Fordist city tells a completely different story. [92] As Eric Corijn and Jacqueline Groth argue: "*The urban realm is no longer marked by more or less homogenized life patterns and spatial practices, but by a pronounced plurality and fragmentation in terms of lifestyles, by tensions arising from the co-existence of multiple and contested identities and by new mechanisms of exclusion and polarization*".[93]

Several issues within the urban realm come together in a new dominant typology, which is taking over the 'real' public space: the shopping mall. This typology has become a popular paradigm to describe public space. As several 'starchitects' have proclaimes: "*the city is the mall and the mall is the city*".[94] Marc Augé was the first to describe this kind of space using the concept of 'non-place', which he opposes to the traditional sense of place, connected with identity, social relations and history.[95] As Kenny Cupers and Markus Miessen argue "*a lot of contemporary spaces cannot be described in these terms. A growing number of people tend to circulate in this type of space only. As a result, public space in its classical definition disappears*".[96] So which are the different issues that contributed to this disappearance?

A first issue we are confronted with – in our 'age of fear' is the excessive desire to control. [97] Among other Jeffrey Hou has put the attention to this issue: "*In the post-9/11 world of hyper-security and surveillance, new forms of control in public space have curtailed freedom of movement and expression and greatly limited the activities and meanings of contemporary public space*".[98] Unplanned behaviour is not being tolerated, which has big consequences for the experience of the public space. Wim Cuyvers argues therefore that what we would call 'the backside of public space' is actually the 'real' public space. These are the parts of the city where one can escape from the controlling eye, where rubbish remains uncleaned, where everyone can do whatever he or she wants. However, he adds to this that the idea of public space has a platonic notion, so that one hundred percent public space would be unimaginable.[99]

We see this 'desire to control' clearly in the example of the shopping mall in which the consumer – secured by private companies and camera surveillance – is sheltered from the possible dangers of everyday life.[100] "*There are no areas within these futuristic worlds that inhabit unpleasant surprise: no dog-shit, no dirt or broken bottles attack the visitor's eyes. Treated most carefully, the consumers are never disrupted by non-conformist behaviour or statements in their happy stroll inside the mall*".[101] Even the Internet – the virtual extension of the physical public space – does not escape the controlling eye.[102]

The desire to control is also clearly reflected in the recently much discussed topic of the 'GAS-fees' in Belgium. A 'GAS-fee' is a punishment, which a municipality can impose to citizens who break the municipal regulations. In this way it should offer a solution to the problem of 'public disturbance' on a local level.[103] In 2013 a tightening of the law was approved. Consequently the most ridiculous examples of civil punishments made the news. Two editors of 'Knack' magazine made an overview of the hundred most absurd GAS-fees. A nice example: in the Nieuwstraat in Brussels a lady got a fee of fifty Euro for throwing one cherry stone on the street. There comes more: she was addressed by four policemen in bulletproof vest and a commissioner, responsible for their training.[104] Moreover, the 'GAS-fees' are being questioned because they constitute an infraction of the separation of

91   MINTON Anna, 'What kind of world are we building? The privatisation of public space', RICS, London, 2006, p 9.

92   CORIJN Eric, GROTH Jacqueline, 'The need for freezones: Informal actors setting the urban agenda' in: DE CAUTER Lieven, DE ROO Ruben, VANHAESEBROUCK Karel (eds.), *Art and Activism in the age of globalisation*, Nai Publishers, Rotterdam, 2011, p 147.

93   Ibid.

94   CUPERS Kenny, MIESSEN Markus, *Spaces of uncertainty*, Verlag Müller und Busmann, Berlin, 2002, p 12.

95   Ibid., p 15.

96   Ibid., p 17.

97   See DE CAUTER Lieven, *The capsular civilization: On the city in the age of fear*, Nai Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, 200 p.

98   LOW Setha, SMITH Neil (eds.), *The politics of public space*, Routledge, New York, 2005, 185 p. Quoted in: HOU Jeffrey, *Insurgent public space: Guerilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities*, Routledge, London, 2010, p 2.

99   CUYVERS Wim, 'Musea voor actuele kunst, van het bordeel via school naar Ikea', *De Witte Raaf*, nr. 128, July – August 2007, viewed on 4 April 2014, < http://www.dewitteraaf.be/artikel/detail/nl/3206>

100   CUPERS Kenny, MIESSEN Markus, *Spaces of uncertainty*, Verlag Müller und Busmann, Berlin, 2002, p 26.

101   Ibid., p 15.

102   HOU Jeffrey, *Insurgent public space: Guerilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities*, Routledge, London, 2010, p 7.

103   *Wat zijn GAS*, Gemeentelijke administratieve sancties, viewed on 8 April 2014, <http://www.gasboetes.be/>

104   EERDEKENS Eddy, NOLF Jan, 'Top 100 van de absurdste GAS-boetes: een klucht zonder weerga, *Knack*, 21 December 2013, viewed on 8 April 2014, <http://www.knack.be/nieuws/belgie/top-100-van-de-absurdste-gas-boetes-een-klucht-zonder-weerga/article-opinion-120656.html>

powers.[105] The Youth Council combats, together with other youth organisations, the GAS-fees. They believe that normal youth behaviour should not be punished. They declared the weekend of 10th May 2014 as one of 'civil disobedience'.[106] Also ex-prime minister Elio Di Rupo thinks it is not a good idea to punish youngsters with GAS-fees: "We have to let *gamins* be *gamin*".[107]

A second issue is the privatization and commercialisation of the public space. Few places remain immune to this pressure. "*Follow the money: public spaces where people gather are privatized for profit.*"[108] As Lieven de Cauter and Michiel Dehaene have described in 'Heterotopia and the City' economization is blurring the distinction between the notion of private (oikos) and public (agora) space.[109] Not only shopping malls, but also the street tends to become a commercial area. As Kathleen Kern puts it: "*The heterotopian logic of exclusion characteristic of shopping malls and theme parks has also come to dominate the makeover and governance of public commercial streets, as the managerial techniques constructed within the confines of the mall increasingly provide the model for the organization and management of public spaces*".[110] The commercialisation is making public space in the city less and less 'public'. One of the few places which escape this phenomenon are city parks. In the city center however, the main activities are shopping or doing terraces, for which one is obliged to pay. Also Wim Cuyers argues that nowadays a square is not a very 'public' space, seen the fact that "*the bartender or the shopkeeper appropriates the space, installs his terraces or shop there and carefully sweeps the garbage together*".[111]

A third issue, and strongly connected with the previous ones, is social exclusion. Whether it is based on gender, class or race, today's urban environment is creating an image of who belongs in the city and who does not. As a result minority groups are increasingly

threatened.[112] Also in the shopping mall we see this trend: "*Private security services make sure that 'undesirables' are escorted out of the mall, protecting those deemed worthy through their behaviour and their appearance from having to encounter those portions of society that may be disturbing – the poor, rowdy teenagers, the politically volatile*".[113] With this increased level of control over the environment we want to counterbalance our fear of 'the other' such as e.g. the poor or the stranger. This concept of 'the other' was brought forward by French philosopher Michel Foucault and has become a key theme within academic debates on public space.[114] Yet, keeping the public realm accessible to all should be part of urban culture. Jane Jacobs has argued that keeping the city liveable requires city-dwellers who will commit to that and therefore should be a site of dialogue.[115]

Via Jane Jacobs we arrive to another issue within the public space, namely the predominance of 'king car'. As David Harvey proclaims, "*before the car came along, streets were often a common – a place of popular sociality, a play space for kids. But that kind of common was destroyed and turned into a public space dominated by the advent of the automobile*".[116] Streets get clogged with traffic and make public space almost unusable, even for drivers. The development of cities has strongly been determined by mobility. As a result of this the street is becoming pure infrastructure.[117]

On top of that the lively neighbourhoods and cosy streets that still do exist are often the victim of gentrification. David Harvey writes: "*The ambience and attractiveness of a city is a collective product of its citizens. Through their daily activities and struggles, individuals and social groups create the social world of the city, and thereby create something common as a framework within which all can dwell. While this culturally creative common cannot be destroyed through use, it can be degraded and banalized through excessive abuse*".[118] The effort which is put into creating an interesting and pleasant neighbourhood is easily being abused by private interests of entrepreneurs, financiers and upper class consumers.[119]

105   'Liga voor mensenrechten: GAS schenden scheiding der machten', *Brusselnieuws*, 28 November 2014, viewed on 21 April 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/liga-voor-mensenrechten-gas-schenden-scheiding-der-machten>

106   BELGA, 'Jeugdraad roept op om massaal GAS-wet te overtreden', *De Standaard*, 1 April 2014, viewed on 8 April 2014, <URL: http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20140401_01049923>

107   EERDEKENS Eddy, NOLF Jan, 'Top 100 van de absurdste GAS-boetes: een klucht zonder weerga, *Knack*, 21 December 2013, viewed on 8 April 2014, <http://www.knack.be/nieuws/belgie/top-100-van-de-absurdste-gas-boetes-een-klucht-zonder-weerga/article-opinion-120656.html>

108   SHEPARD Benjamin, HAYDUK Ronald (eds.), *From Act Up to the WTO: Urban protest and community building in the era of globalisation*, Verso, London, 2002, p 201.

109   DE CAUTER Lieven, DEHAENE Michiel (eds*.), Heterotopia and the city: Public space in a Postcivil Society*, Routledge, London, 2002, p 4.

110   KERN Kathleen, 'Heterotopia of the theme park street' in: DE CAUTER Lieven, DEHAENE Michiel (eds*.), Heterotopia and the city: Public space in a Postcivil Society*, Routledge, London, 2008, p 105.

111   CUYVERS Wim, 'Musea voor actuele kunst, van het bordeel via school naar Ikea', *De Witte Raaf*, nr. 128, July – August 2007, viewed on 4 April 2014, < http://www.dewitteraaf.be/artikel/detail/nl/3206>

112   CUPERS Kenny, MIESSEN Markus, *Spaces of uncertainty*, Verlag Müller und Busmann, Berlin, 2002, p 27.

113   KERN Kathleen, 'Heterotopia of the theme park street' in: DE CAUTER Lieven, DEHAENE Michiel (eds*.), Heterotopia and the city: Public space in a Postcivil Society*, Routledge, London, 2008, p 108.

114   MINTON Anna, 'What kind of world are we building? The privatisation of public space', RICS, London, 2006, p 8.

115   See JACOBS Jane, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Random House, New York, 1961, 485 p.

116   HARVEY David, *Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*, Verso, London, 2012, p 73.

117   CUPERS Kenny, MIESSEN Markus, *Spaces of uncertainty*, Verlag Müller und Busmann, Berlin, 2002, p 18.

118   HARVEY David, *Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*, Verso, London, 2012, p 73.

119   Ibid. p 78.

Finally not only changes and issues occur in the existing public space, but actually also a new kind of public space has arisen, namely the Internet. To a certain extend this has underminded the importance of place-based public spaces.[120] An important part of our social life now happens from behind a computerscreen. Also this kind of 'public space' is subject to control and commercialisation. Moreover, it has almost completely destroyed the notion of privacy. However, the Internet has also enabled new types of actions and means of public dissent.[121] As art critic and activist Brian Holmes argues: "*Email lists and websites have opened up a new kind of transnational public sphere, where artistic activities can be discussed as part of a larger, freewheeling conversation on the evolution of society*".[122]

So then what can people, who are left out of the system (or who are not satisfied by it anymore) find in order to replace this contested public space? More and more, groups of people are commoning spaces in the city, which they use as a substitute for the undemocratic public spaces. As the notions 'public space' and 'commons' are both rather vague, it is important to first define more precisely the difference between them.

In 'Rebel Cities' David Harvey explains the difference between 'public space' and 'public goods' on the one hand, and 'the commons' on the other: "*Public spaces and public goods in the city have always been a matter of state power and public administration, and such spaces and goods do not necessarily make a commons. Throughout the history of urbanization, the provision of public spaces and public goods (such as sanitation, public health, education, and the like) by either public or private means has been crucial for capitalist development. To the degree that cities have been sites of vigorous class conflicts and struggles, so urban administrations have often been forced to supply public goods to an urbanized working class. While these public spaces and public goods contribute mightily to the qualities of the commons, it takes political action on the part of citizens and the people to appropriate them or to make them so*".[123]

Another good explanation can be found in the words of Stavros Stravrides, who explains that the important difference lies in the comparison between the concept of 'public' and of 'community'. Commons are related to the concept of 'community', which refers to an entity, namely a homogeneous group of people. The concept of the 'public' on the other hand puts emphasis on the relation between different communities. The public realm is – or should be – the place where people from different social groups can meet.[124] Commons always imply a community, a group of 'similar' people and are therefore not necessarily more inclusive than the public space.

The notions of 'public space' and 'the commons' thus each indicate something different. However, we should clarify the used terminologies. The term 'public space' refers to the places in the city which are owned by the state and which are committed to offering a place where citizens can e.g. meet, exchange ideas, relax, eat, wait. As these spaces are state property, regulations about how to use the space can be put forward. Whoever does not follow these rules can thus be put out or denied access.

The term 'commons' on the other hand refers to places or resources that are neither privately

120   HOU Jeffrey, *Insurgent public space: Guerilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities*, Routledge, London, 2010, p 7.
121   Ibid.
122   HOLMES Brian, 'Do it yourself geopolitics: Map of the world upside down' in: AAA (eds.), *Urban Act: A handbook for alternative practice*, Aaa-peprav, Paris, 2007, p 305.

123   HARVEY David, *Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*, Verso, London, 2012, p 72.
124   'On the Commons: A public interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides', *An Architektur*, nr. 23, June – August 2010, viewed on 10 April 2014, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-the-commons-a-public-interview-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/>

nor publicly owned, but belong to a certain community. The community consists of a set of commoners who share the common and who define rules for themselves according to which they are accessed and used. These communities, however, are not necessarily bound to a locality.[125] The community can be small scaled, but can also reach the global scale.

Finally there is the verb 'to common' that refers to the social process that creates and reproduces the commons.[126] As physical commons have become very rare, we will mostly speak of this verb. Commoning is the practice that produces social relationships between a community and a common. Commoning is more about the process and the use, than about the actual property. Acts of commoning can thus take place in both privately and publicly owned spaces. David Harvey explains: "*of the practice of commoning lies the principle that the relation between the social group and that aspect of the environment being treated as a common shall be both collective and non-commodified-off-limits to the logic of market exchange and market valuations. This last point is crucial because it helps distinguish between public goods construed as productive state expenditures and a common which is established or used in a completely different way and for a completely different purpose, even when it ends up indirectly enhancing the wealth and income of the social group that claims it*".[127] Harvey gives the example of a community garden, which is not built with the purpose of making money, even if some of the food they grow there is being sold.[128]

BRUSSELS: CITY OF CONTRASTS

Back to the focus of this research: Brussels. It is – as other cities – confronted with the issues of public space discussed above. By means of 'fieldwork' I cycled around in Brussels to observe the public space in different neighbourhoods. The fieldwork resulted into several photo-essays, which will appear throughout the text. As Brussels is a very diverse city – over a distance of few kilometers you can feel like you are in another city – it was very important to show this characteristic. Therefore the examples run trough a variety of neighbourhoods, both geographically, socially and economically. The trajectory went from North to South, starting at the area around the North Station, moving through Sint-Jans-Molenbeek, the city center, and finally Elsene. The photo-essays will appear throughout the text, supporting the theoretical framework.

To start with, Brussels inherited some persistent issues from the past. At the end of the 1940s, Brussels suffered from a particularly aggressive planning policy, also known as 'brusselisation'. One of the consequences of this policy is that the city was designed for cars. The road infrastructure was developed in such a way that cars can reach the heart of the city. Both public transport and 'soft' mobility were underdeveloped. Still today there are six cars for every ten inhabitants and more than 225 000 commuters use their car daily.[129] Although, as Cathy Macharis, professor Mobility and Logistics at the VUB argues, the modal shift has started – Brussels' citizens are increasingly using public transport – the traffic jams are also still increasing because of the sharp demographic rise.[130] Therefore the car keeps ruling the city, which is is very noticeable, especially while riding a bike in Brussels. Many streets don't have indicated bicycle lanes, so cars are filling up the width of the street, often without paying any attention to the bikers passing by. Although there are many plans for change, they are often being postponed. Cathy Macharis explains: "*In nearly all Brussels mobilitydossiers an interregional cooperation is necessary, which is not obvious*".[131]

125   DE ANGELIS Massimo, 'Reflections on alternatives, commons and communities or building a new world from the bottom up'*, The Commoner*, nr. 6, Winter 2003, viewed on 18 April 2014, <http://www.commoner.org.uk/deangelis06.pdf>

126   'On the Commons: A public interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides', *An Architektur*, nr. 23, June – August 2010, viewed on 10 April 2014, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-the-commons-a-public-interview-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/>

127   HARVEY David, *Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*, Verso, London, 2012, p 73.

128   Ibid.

129   CORIJN Eric, VLOEBERGHS Eefje, 'Brussels, a small world city' in: CORIJN Eric, VAN DE VEN Jessica (eds.), *The Brussels Reader: A small world city to become the capital of Europe*, VUB Press, Brussels, 2013, p 22.

130   RENARD Han, ZUALLAERT Jeroen, 'De paradoxen van de hoofdstad', *Knack*, nr. 16, April 2014, p 28.

131   Ibid.

Another result of the aggressive post-war urban development policy was the creation of a cityprofile as an administrative centre at the heart of Europe, through the creation of mono-functional office districts. When the 'European Economic Community' first started in 1958 a small office building was sufficient. But already after a short period it got saturated, and since then an insatiable appetite for office space started. [132] The expansion of office space was based on gradual and uncontrolled private development and erased large parts of the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century urban fabric. This occurred first in the old Leopold Quarter, but later on also in other northern and southern parts of the city, such as for example the area around the North Station.[133] Ironically enough, nowadays 10% or 1,4 million m^2 of the built office space in Brussels is unused.[134]

This aggressive stile of urban development stirred up a lot of reactions and protest. Several organisations – such as 'Atelier de Recherche et d'Actions Urbaines' (ARAU), 'Inter-Environnement Bruxelles' (IEB) and 'Brusselse Raad voor het Leefmilieu' (BRAL) – arose in the battle against this form of urban development. They were able to put a lot of political pressure and triggered the so-called 'first turn' at the end of the 1970s. This first turn, as described by Jacques Aron, made a shift from a technocratic planning approach towards a more consultative planning.[135] Mathieu Van Criekingen, social geographer at the ULB, argues how many actors of the 'first turn', which overlapped with the protests of residents committees, became more or less part of the institution after the institutionalisation of the Brussels Capital Region in 1989. Their discourse switched from protest to the language of the established powers. Many members, once close to ARAU or IEB, work now in different cabinets of the city.[136]

Luckily, nowadays the awareness about the importance of the architectural quality of facilities is again growing. Among other architect and urban planner Benoit Moritz described this as a 'second turn' in the Brussels urbanism policy. This second turn, situated between 2003 and 2005, consists of the shift from consultative planning towards a more participatory, coproductive and hybrid development.[137]

Symbolic for this second turn was the refurbishment of the Flagey Square in Elsene.[138] In 2003 the neighbourhood association 'Platform Flagey' organised an alternative design contest for the refurbishment of the square, opposed to the proposal the city had already made. Everybody could make their own proposal, and the best ones were presented to the Brussels region. A new proposal was chosen and executed, in dialogue with the local residents.[139]

However, Mathieu Van Criekingen is very cynical about this supposed 'second turn': "*There is no second turn of the Brussels urbanism, that's just hot air. A new generation of young architects is trying through this discourse to conquer a position on the Brussels' real estate and project development market, next to big firms such as l'Atelier d'Art Urbain, Michel Jaspers, etc. They are looking for a place on the market to position themselves with their urban visions for Brussels. The refurbishment of the Flagey Square has indeed worked as a catalyst in this sense. However, their discourse is not getting further than the architecture discourse. They live in their own small world, in which there are no power relations and social battles present.*"[140] The appointment of the Brussels region's first Master Architect Olivier Bastin in 2009 is also characterising for this period. However, a further strengthening and redefining of the urban development strategies will still be necessary.

132   VAN CRIEKINGEN Mathieu, 'Brussel: De kloof door de navel van België', *Tiens Tiens*, 19 January 2009, viewed on 14 April 2014, <http://www.tienstiens.org/tt16/p26>

133   AURELI Pier Vittorio, PATTEEUW Véronique, DECLERCK Joachim, TATTARA Martino (eds.), *Brussels: A manifesto: Towards the capital of Europe: A theory on the city*, NAi, Rotterdam, 2007, p 61.

134   VAN CRIEKINGEN Mathieu, 'Brussel: De kloof door de navel van België', *Tiens Tiens*, 19 January 2009, viewed on 14 April 2014, <http://www.tienstiens.org/tt16/p26>

135   CORIJN Eric, VLOEBERGHS Eefje, *Brussel! Urban notebooks*, VUB Press, Brussels, 2009, p 259.

136   VAN CRIEKINGEN Mathieu, 'Brussel: De kloof door de navel van België', *Tiens Tiens*, 19 January 2009, viewed on 14 April 2014, <http://www.tienstiens.org/tt16/p26>

137   CORIJN Eric, VLOEBERGHS Eefje, *Brussel! Urban notebooks*, VUB Press, Brussels, 2009, p 259.

138   VAN CRIEKINGEN Mathieu, 'Brussel: De kloof door de navel van België', *Tiens Tiens*, 19 January 2009, viewed on 14 April 2014, <http://www.tienstiens.org/tt16/p26>

139   BELGA, 'Flageyplein wil zelf uitzicht bepalen', *De Standaard*, 9 August 2003, viewed on 10 April 2014, <http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dexr09082003_009>
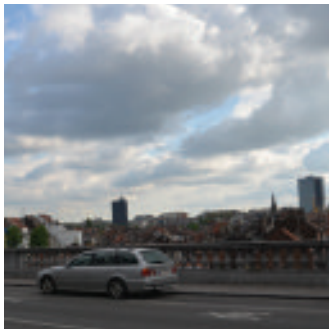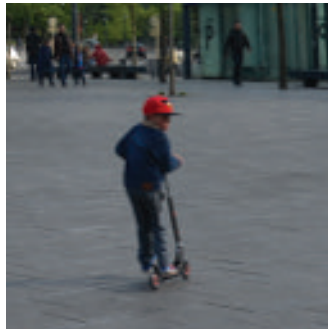
140   Originally quoted in: VAN CRIEKINGEN Mathieu, 'Brussel: De kloof door de navel van België', *Tiens Tiens*, 19 January 2009, viewed on 14 April 2014, <http://www.tienstiens.org/tt16/p26>

As mentioned before Brussels has some important challenges in prospect, among which the sharp demographic rise. Between 1996 and 2012 there was an increase with almost 20% and the population keeps keeps on rising.[141] It is expected that the poorest municipalities of the Brussels region – Anderlecht, Sint-Joost-ten-Node, Brussel-stad, Schaarbeek and Sint-Jans-Molenbeek – will be confronted with the strongest population growth. Currently those municipalities are already the most densely inhabited. [142] Furthermore, the inequality becomes even stronger when we have a look at the allocation of public green. As Gerben Van den Abbeele, former member of BRAL and urban activist, argues, the Brussels Region is often described as a very green one, with twenty-five square meters of green space per inhabitant. However, in certain neighbourhoods – especially around the canal – this is only a half square meter per inhabitant, which is dramatically low.[143] The Brussels Region map with the distribution of green space clearly shows this imbalance. Compared to the eastern part of Brussels, the area around the canal appears very blank.

Furthermore, the inequality is not only reflected in the public green, but also in the private space. If we for example compare a typical housing block of Etterbeek with one of Molenbeek, we see a noticeable difference. The first is filled, as we would expect, with private gardens while the one from Molenbeek is filled with industrial plots. Many people in these neighbourhoods don't have a garden, which makes the presence of open public spaces even more important.

Nevertheless Brussels still possesses great potential in terms of open spaces. Green and open space is taking up 53% of the region's soil. Apart from the Zoniënwoud and Ter Kamerenbos, which constitute a large part of this surface, Brussels possesses many wastelands, which, if used in a strategic way, could make a key contribution towards quality of life in the city.[144]

1 km
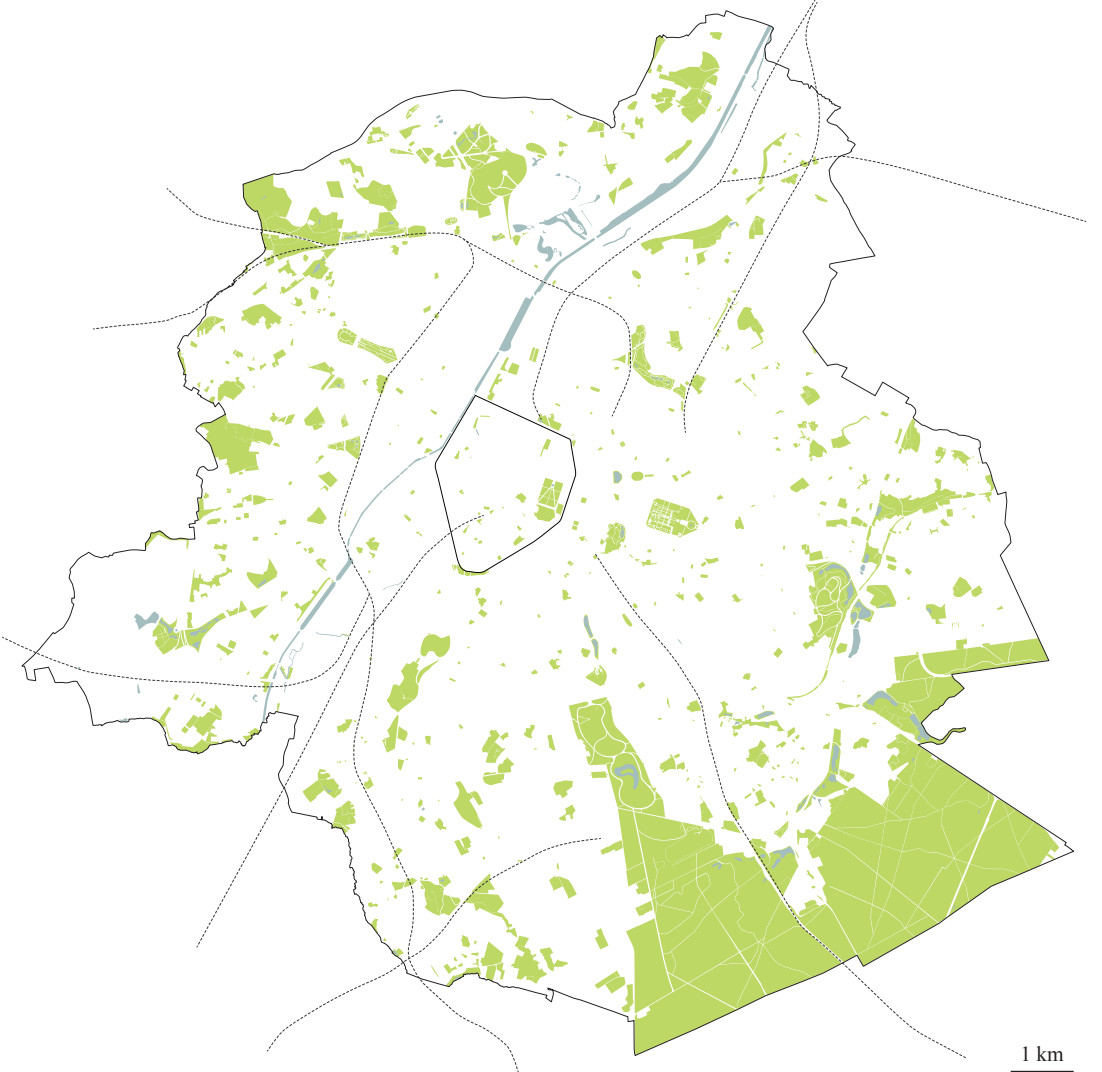
Distribution of public green

Molenbeek VS Etterbeek

141   WAYENS Benjamin, VAESEN Joost, 'BSI synopsis. Education in Brussels: complex crisis management', *Brussels studies*, n° 70, August 2013, p 6.

142   DEGREEF Christophe, VILEYN Danny, 'De bevolkingsboom: het wordt (misschien) dringen', *Brussel Deze Week*, 25 April 2012, viewed on 14 April 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/de-bevolkings-boom-het-wordt-misschien-dringen>

143   GROWFUNDING BXL, *Koop een pop up park in de Brusselse Kanaalzone*, viewed on 7 April 2014, <https://www.growfunding.be/bxl/canalpark>

144   DECLERCK Joachim, DUDAL Roeland, 'Urban planning for a qualitative environment' in CORIJN Eric, VAN DE VEN Jessica (eds.), *The Brussels Reader: A small world city to become the capital of Europe*, VUB Press, Brussels, 2013, p 234.

There do exist many projects to make use of these spaces, but the execution is often very slow. For example, in 2010 the Brussels Region asked the famous landscape architect Michel Desvigne to design a project for a new large park at Tour & Taxis. The first phase of the park was programmed for the spring of 2012.[145] Except for the temporary opening of a part of the site within the biennial Parckdesign (from May to September 2014), the construction works for the final park are still on the waiting list.[146]

That Brussels is a highly dualistic city is not only visible in the distribution of public space, but also in its use by the inhabitants. Brussels houses a lot of different nationalities, but often no real mix is constituted. As the city offers multiple cultural, social and economical facets growing up in Brussels should broaden the spirit. Yet, Andrea Rea, sociologist at the ULB, notes that the Brussels diversity results more and more in adversity: "*The city offers a physical proximity but a growing social distance*".[147] Every day the city's duality increases more and more. People with the same background gather together in strongly connected groups, and these different groups have a mutual fear of each other.[148]

The neighbourhoods in the 'poor sickle' are characterised by a high amount of immigrant population, mainly from Moroccan origin. In Sint-Jans-Molenbeek for example 30% of the inhabitants in 2010 had a Moroccan origin.[149] Although a major part of them has adopted the Belgian nationality, they maintain strong sentimental ties with the country of origin. They are very visible in the streetscape because of their clothing and skin colour and therefore often the victim of stubborn prejudices and discrimination.[150] Previous academic research has shown that the 'neighbourhood feeling' is an important part of the identity of the immigrant population in Brussels.[151] A study from the online academic magazine 'Brussels Studies' is drawing the attention to the identification of this population with their neighbourhood, and their appropriation of it. The use of the public space in these neighbourhoods – a more Mediterranean use – is therefore very different from the eastern part of Brussels and the city centre.

The city centre, known as the 'pentagon', is formed by the old medieval town, whose former defensive walls form the line of the inner ring road. The public spaces in this part of the city serve especially the consumer culture of the new urban middle class. However, the city is slowly evolving towards a new future. In 2009, the metro-network of line two and six was completed in a loop.[152] As the pentagon is thus spreading westward, the canal could become a spine instead of a barrier.

However, this initially positive development is leading to another issue, namely the gentrification of the neighbourhoods along the canal. The development of the Dansaert straat has been exemplary for the gentrification process in the city centre. In the middle of the 1980s the street was completely reshaped and today is one of the trendiest areas for shopping- and nightlife. Since ten years the city wants this 'Dansaert effect' to cross the canal into the direction of neighbourhoods as Molenbeek, Laken and Anderlecht. But the gentrification is pushing away the current population. In political and even academic circles it is often said that gentrification can also be positive, as it is giving a new life to neighbourhoods. Yet, the real question is, as Mathieu Van Criekingen puts it, how to improve neighbourhoods for the people who live there, and not by attracting new people.[153] The social repression happens both through the refurbishment of the public space and streets as through an increase of control and surveillance. Several municipalities adopted an urban renewal policy, primarily through neighborhood contracts. The renovation of public space was seen as a key issue to establish a peaceful coexistence in the neighborhoods.[154] This is often being sold as the establishment of a 'social mix'. However, social housing makes up only 10% of the housing in the Brussels Region.[155] Moreover, the social housing market is especially investing in renovation and not in new buildings. The repression of the poor population happens automatically through the prize regulation of the housing estate. As Mathieu Van Criekingen has argued this social inequality makes Brussels a city in which five kilometres of distance can make a gigantic difference in terms of life chances.[156]

145   BRAL, *Tour & Taxis: Toujours pas de grand parc urbain en vue*, 29 August 2013, viewed on 15 April 2014, <http://bralvzw.be/tour-taxis-toujours-pas-de-grand-parc-urbain-en-vue>

146   PARCKDESIGN, *Farmparck*, viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.parckdesign.be/fr>

147   INTER-ENVIRONNEMENT, 'Jeunes en ville, Bruxelles à dos? L'appropriation de l'espace urbain bruxel-lois par des jeunes de différents quartiers', Brussels, 2008, p 7.

148   Ibid.

149   BISA, *Sint-Jans-Molenbeek*, viewed on 21 April 2014, <http://www.bisa.irisnet.be/bestanden/publicaties/bru19/St-Jans-Molenbeek.pdf>

150   DEBOOSERE Patrick, EGGERICKX Thierry, VAN HECKE Etienne, WAYENS Benjamin, 'The population of Brussels: A demographic overview', *Brussels Studies*, Synopsis nr. 3, March 2009, p 9.

151   USE IT, O.U.R., 'Marokkaanse jongeren in Molenbeek: Hun gebruik van de ruimte in het Brussels hoofdst-edelijk gewest', Brussels, 2011, p 10.

152   ROBBERECHTS Catherine, ALKINS Ted (eds.), *Cahier #3: Open baarheid: Over publieke planning en restruimte*, Team Vlaams Bouwmeester, Brussel, 2010, p 125.

153   VAN CRIEKINGEN Mathieu, 'Brussel: De kloof door de navel van België', Tiens Tiens, 19 January 2009, viewed on 14 April 2014, <http://www.tienstiens.org/tt16/p26>

154   BERNARD Nicolas, ZIMMER Pol, SURKIN Johan, 'Housing, control over land use and public space', *Brussels Studies*, Synopsis nr. 6, January 2009, p 3.

155   VAN CRIEKINGEN Mathieu, 'What is happening to Brussels' inner-city neighbourhoods? Selective migra-tion from areas undergoing gentrification', *Brussels Studies*, Issue 1, December 2006, p 2.
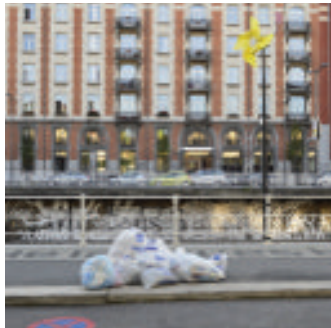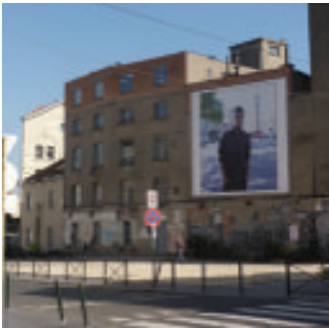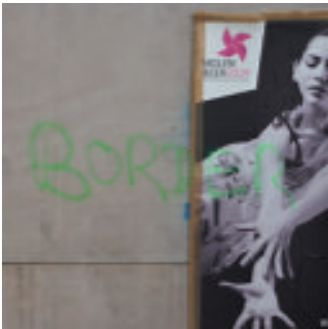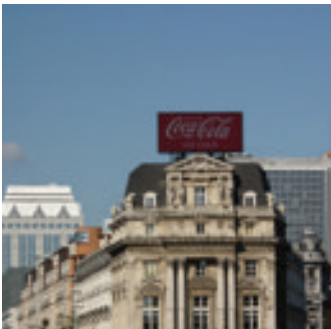
156   VAN CRIEKINGEN Mathieu, 'Brussel: De kloof door de navel van België', Tiens Tiens, 19 January 2009, viewed on 14 April 2014, <http://www.tienstiens.org/tt16/p26>

3/ COMMONING THE CITY:
QUEST FOR ALTERNATIVE URBAN SPACE

RECLAIMING THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

As we have seen, it is difficult to find truly democratic public spaces. Consequently, certain groups are being marginalized and excluded. Moreover, other groups don't feel satisfied by the public space, although they are not necessarily excluded. So what is the reaction of both these groups? They start to look for other spaces they can make their own. This happens bottom-up, from the citizens themselves, and can be seen as an act of commoning. However, before we go deeper into the 'how', we should ask ourselves: since when did such practices arise in the urban environment?

Although in the late 1970s efforts were made to involve urban dwellers in urban planning by way of participation, this process often led to an unsatisfactory result on both sides. By planners and investors the participation process was mostly seen as a bureaucratic complication of their work. For the participating residents it was frustrating as well, as they were at the end not really allowed to make decisions or map things out.[157] As an alternative to this more and more do-it-yourself practices came up.

In the introduction of 'Urban Catalyst' Philipp Oswalt, Klaus Overmeyer and Philipp Misselwitz explain how these temporary uses and do-it-yourself practices – such as the construction of community gardens – were a non-issue in the public debate till the end of the 1990s. They also note how afterwards the situation radically changed. First of all because architects, planners and planners entered the debate, which became more dynamic and leading to new projects, but also because many municipalities opened themselves up to this kind of initiatives and supported them in a way.[158] There was at that time a shift in the viewpoint on what is essential to city economics and culture. Slogans as 'The Creative City' or 'The Innovative city' showed the growing idea that the true important capital for cities is social and cultural – in other words human – capital. This capital does not only originate from the cultural sector, but also from the citizens themselves, which constitute a constantly

changing population, socially and culturally mixed, looking for opportunities and inventing new solutions to big city problems.[159] As the authors of 'Urban Catalyst' argue: "*Post-Fordism is characterized by a flexibilization and dynamization of social processes. This is also reflected in the use of space. The potentials of this augmented urbanism stimulate – and indeed generated – completely new urban practices, of which flash mobs and virtual urban games were only the first, early examples. Architecture is for the most part too sluggish for the innovations of the Post-Fordist knowledge society, which has led to the emancipation of numerous new urban practices*".[160]

We can relate this engagement among the citizens with the notion of 'The right to the city', which was coined in 1968 by French Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre. He sees this 'right to the city' as a right "*to urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and complete usage of moments and places*".[161] Stavros Stavrides explains: "*For Lefebvre the right to the city is the right to create the city as a collective work of art. The city, thus, can be produced through encounters that make room for new meanings, new values, new dreams, new collective experiences. And this is indeed a way to transcend pure utility, a way to see commons beyond the utilitarian horizon*".[162]

So how do citizens claim their right to the city through commoning? We will focus more specifically on commoning in the open spaces in the city. Although these spaces have often been abandoned, they mostly do belong to someone, be it an individual, a company or the state. We can thus see practices of commoning as a reversed dynamic of the privatisation of the public space, as here citizens are commoning places which are often actually 'private'. There is an interesting interplay at work here. Below we will go deeper into these practices.

---

157   OSWALT Philipp, OVERMEYER Klaus, MISSELWITZ Philipp, *Urban Catalyst: The power of temporary use*, DOM Publishers, Berlin, 2013, p 14.

158   Ibid.

159   OSWALT Philipp, OVERMEYER Klaus, MISSELWITZ Philipp, *Urban Catalyst: The power of temporary use*, DOM Publishers, Berlin, 2013, p 14.

160   Ibid., p 10.

161   MITCHELL Don, *The right to the city: Social justice and the fight for public space*, The Guilford press, New York, 2012, p 19. Originally quoted in: Lefebvre, 1996, p 179

162   'On the Commons: A public interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides', *An Architektur*, nr. 23, June – August 2010, viewed on 10 April 2014, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-the-commons-a-public-inter-view-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/>

THE CONTESTED AND THE NEGLECTED: SETTINGS FOR COMMONING

"There are spaces which allow events that public space does not allow at all"[163]

As mentioned, we focus on commoning of open spaces in the city, which have been ignored or forgotten by the government or the citizens in general. On the one hand these can be parts of the public space which are contested because of their present condition. On the other hand they can also be the interstitial, leftover spaces in the city, which are often private property (or even state property), but which have been empty or disused for a long time, because of their lack of economic value. Practices of commoning in both kinds of spaces have already been discussed by several authors during the last ten years. We will therefore first have look at what has already been written on them.

Commoning through the (re)claiming of public space can be related to the term 'guerilla urbanism'. *"Guerrilla urbanism movements try to establish improvements in the present public space or to invite public discussion about the ways our cities have been constructed, especially in the areas of transportation and walkability"*.[164] Acts of guerilla urbanism want to test in a quick way more permanent future developments within cities. There does not exist something as one confined guerilla urbanism movement but it is rather an overall term to include the series of ideas and initiatives that have been implemented all over the world.[165] Out of this urban activism, some new urban practices have emerged.

In New York City for example many community gardens originated in the 1980s as a consequence of Green Guerrilla's activist actions in the 1970s. These actions started with illegal planting, continued with occupation of land, and then grew into community protest actions to preserve the created gardens.[166] Another famous guerilla act is the 'Reclaim the Streets' (RTS) event. RTS emerged in the 1990s, when a group of citizens found inspiration in 'The social ideology of the motor-car', a text written by French philosopher André Gorz in 1973. The first RTS party was held in the spring of 1995 in Camden Town in London.

Thereafter the concept gained popularity in countries all over the world: *"a new form of popular protest was born"*.[167] Some participants explained: *"It is about reclaiming the streets as public inclusive space from the private exclusive use of the car. But we believe in this as a broader principle, taking back those things which have been enclosed within capitalist circulation and returning them to collective use as a commons"*.[168]

Naomi Klein argues that the spirit of the new social movements reclaiming public space is one of 'Do It Yourself' (DIY) activism. The question of where to draw the line between public and private sphere characterizes very well our age of globalisation. In the Anglo-Saxon context DIY activism created new forms of direct participation, based on principles of self-management and self-production. The key of the RTS protests for example is that they only work if everyone participates. The organizers of the protest secure the space and provide the music and the post-protest support, but what really happens at the action depends mostly on the participation of the people.[169]

Doina Petrescu explains the difference between 'organized participation', which is somehow 'preformed' and under control, and a 'transversal participation', which crosses different social layers, and generates unexpected and continually evolving reactions.[170] But as she argues, organizing a 'transversal participation' is a real architectural question: *"Participation is also 'creating space' by creating space for discussion, liberating speech. Rigid discussion spaces produce rigid conclusions, and liberated speech can liberate space as well. What would this space be like that does not freeze speech and does not solidify the space produced by it? Urban decisions can be taken during informal meetings, whilst cooking and laughing together"*.[171]

Clearly, real public space is something being fought for, and which is always in danger of being the subject of privatization or bureaucratic control. However they are not commons.[172]

163   PETRESCU Doina, 'Losing control, keeping desire' in JONES Peter Blundell, PETRESCU Doina, TILL Jeremy (eds.), *Architecture and participation*, Taylor and Francis Group, London, 2005, p 51.
164   WORLDPRESS: THE CITY SPACE, *Guerila Urbanism: Vandalism or Activism?*, August 2013, viewed on 24 April 2014, <http://thecityspace.wordpress.com/2013/08/12/guerrilla-urbanism-vandalism-or-activism/>
165   Ibid.
166   PETRESCU Doina, 'Losing control, keeping desire' in JONES Peter Blundell, PETRESCU Doina, TILL Jeremy (eds.), *Architecture and participation*, Taylor and Francis Group, London, 2005, p 47.

167   HOLMES Brian, 'Do it yourself geopolitics: Map of the world upside down' in: AAA (eds.), *Urban Act: A handbook for alternative practice*, Aaa-peprav, Paris, 2007, p 304.
168   SHEPARD Benjamin, HAYDUK Ronald (eds.), *From Act Up to the WTO: Urban protest and community building in the era of globalisation*, Verso, London, 2002, p 32.
169   SHEPARD Benjamin, HAYDUK Ronald (eds.), *From Act Up to the WTO: Urban protest and community building in the era of globalisation*, Verso, London, 2002, p 220.
170   PETRESCU Doina, 'Losing control, keeping desire' in JONES Peter Blundell, PETRESCU Doina, TILL Jeremy (eds.), *Architecture and participation*, Taylor and Francis Group, London, 2005, p 50.
171   Ibid., p 47.
172   Ibid., p 57.

In the words of David Harvey: "*It takes political action on the part of citizens and the people to appropriate them or to make them so. Syntagma Square in Athens, Tahrir Square in Cairo, and the Plaza de Catalunya in Barcelona were public spaces that became an urban commons as people assembled there to express their political views and make demands. The street is a public space that has historically often been transformed by social action into the common of revolutionary movement, as well as into a site of bloody suppression*".[173]

A second answer on the part of the citizens is the quest for alternative places as a substitute for the 'traditional' public space. On their way, wandering through the city, they discover places – so-called interstitial spaces – which they use and thus claim as 'theirs'. These informal activities can transform such a space into what Sophie Watson calls, "*a site of potentiality, difference, and delightful encounters.*"[174] Doina Petrescu explains it like this: "*Today the promise of a free space, perhaps, paradoxically, may be found in what is not – yet – public space: parts of our contemporary urban landscape that are untouched by design, seem unintended, or are simply neglected*".[175]

These interstitial spaces are the leftover spaces in the city, sometimes waste from the real-estate market or neglected areas within the urban planning, such as e.g. former industrial areas, waterfront areas, railroad stations, airports, unused commercial parks, and vacant lots.[176] Studies have demonstrated that especially in big cities these spaces sometimes serve as an alternative to the conventional public space.[177] In almost every city, in Europe as well in other parts of the world, spontaneous activities develop in many of these locations waiting for redevelopment. In most cases, the activities are removed when redevelopment actually starts.[178]

Cupers and Miessen call these the 'spaces of uncertainty', which are the opposite of the functional spaces in the city.[179] Their attractiveness lies in their freedom, as everything is still possible there. Spontaneous activities that escape existing rules and regulations can take place. Individuals or groups can temporarily occupy them. They can be turned into a variety of spaces such as e.g. informal markets, community gardens, playgrounds and sports fields.[180]

174   WATSON Sophie, 'City Publics: The (Dis)enchantments of Urban Encounters, Routledge, New York, 2006, p 19. Quoted in: HOU Jeffrey, *Insurgent public space: Guerilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities*, Routledge, London, 2010, p 9.

175   ROBBERECHTS Catherine, ALKINS Ted (eds.), *Cahier #3: Open baarheid: Over publieke planning en restruimte*, Team Vlaams Bouwmeester, Brussel, 2010, p 95.

176   OSWALT Philipp, OVERMEYER Klaus, MISSELWITZ Philipp, *Urban Catalyst: The power of temporary use*, DOM Publishers, Berlin, 2013, p 52.

177   PETRESCU Doina, 'Losing control, keeping desire' in JONES Peter Blundell, PETRESCU Doina, TILL Jeremy (eds.), *Architecture and participation*, Taylor and Francis Group, London, 2005, p 58.

178   REIJNDORP Arnold, 'Cultural Generators' in: OSWALT Philipp, OVERMEYER Klaus, MISSELWITZ Philipp, *Urban Catalyst: The power of temporary use*, DOM Publishers, Berlin, 2013, p 132.

179   CUPERS Kenny, MIESSEN Markus, *Spaces of uncertainty*, Verlag Müller und Busmann, Berlin, 2002, p 58.

180   ROBBERECHTS Catherine, ALKINS Ted (eds.), *Cahier #3: Open baarheid: Over publieke planning en restruimte*, Team Vlaams Bouwmeester, Brussel, 2010, p 97.

173   HARVEY David, *Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*, Verso, London, 2012, p 73.

Karen Franck and Quentin Stevens describe these as 'loose spaces' in their equally named book 'Loose space: Possibility and diversity in urban life'.[181] In the same volume Leanne Rivlin calls them 'found spaces' and she differentiates the qualities of these spaces from pre-programmed, 'designed' spaces: "*These spaces are 'found' in the sense that users locate and appropriate them for uses that they serve effectively but which were not originally designed to serve. Found spaces offer alternative places for public life since their uses spring from a complex matrix of needs brought to them by users. These activities do not differ dramatically from those occurring in spaces designed for leisure activities, but they do differ in their origins, their diversity and often in the physical qualities of their sites*".[182]

Looseness in a city thus has the ability to expresses desires of users – such as children and elderly – that may otherwise be forgotten by designers and planners.[183] Moreover Leanne Rivlin remarks how "*By looking closely at contemporary found spaces and their uses and users, we can discover much about public behaviour and come closer to understanding what people are seeking in their use of the public domain*".[184]

Whether we call them 'interstitial', 'found' or 'loose spaces, it is clear that we can see them as a kind of 'commons', as they offer a free space that belongs to everybody and nobody, where people can do what they want, and which cannot be claimed permanently for a specific function. As Jeffrey Hou writes: "*no longer confined to the archetypal categories of neighbourhood parks, public plaza, and civic architecture, these insurgent public spaces challenge the conventional, codified notion of public and the making of space*".[185]

Also according to Antonio Negri it is at the border of the capitalist city that 'biopolitical creativity' swarms, for example in squats, industrial wastelands, 'centri sociali', encounters on the street corner, street parties, and temporary occupations.[186]

181   See FRANCK Karen, STEVENS Quentin (eds.), *Loose space: Possibility and diversity in urban life*, London, Routlegde, 2007, 303 p.

182   RIVLIN Leanne, 'Found Space: Freedom of choice in public life' in FRANCK Karen, STEVENS Quentin (eds.), *Loose space: Possibility and diversity in urban life*, London, Routlegde, 2007, p 39. Quoted in HOU Jeffrey, *Insurgent public space: Guerilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities*, Routledge, London, 2010, p 23.

183   HOU Jeffrey, *Insurgent public space: Guerilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities*, Routledge, London, 2010, p 23.

184   RIVLIN, Leanne, 'Found spaces: Freedom of choice in public life' in: FRANCK Karen, STEVENS Quentin (eds.), *Loose space: Possibility and diversity in urban life*, London, Routledge, 2007, p 38.

185   HOU Jeffrey, *Insurgent public space: Guerilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities*, Routledge, London, 2010, p 2.

186   PETCOU Constantin, PETRESCU Doina, 'Acting space' in: in: AAA (eds.), *Urban Act: A handbook for alternative practice*, Aaa-peprav, Paris, 2007, p 326.

As Wim Cuyvers suggests, leftover spaces may be the only sites that are radically 'public' – compared to the existing 'public space', which he does not see as truly public – because of their lack of economic value.[187] When Robert Palmer was director of 'Brussels 2000' (Brussels as Cultural Capital of Europe) he even argued: "*one of the prerequisites for a creative and dazzling city is a range of undetermined spaces, of real public spaces, spaces that are not privatized by anything or anybody*".[188]

Despite the absence of an economic value, leftover spaces can be particularly interesting and valuable for the liveliness of a city. Because acts of commoning do not require a lot of investment or infrastructure, they can accomplish changes very fast, by a small group of people. These actions have helped to release possibilities for new interactions, functions and meanings. Urban populations and cultures are becoming more heterogeneous with bigger cultural and social differences, which should also be reflected in the use of the open spaces in the city.[189] The practices by the citizens of claiming and using space establishes a mode of city making that is different from the institutionalized form of urbanism and policy making, which tends to be dominated by professionals and experts. It suggests the ability of citizen groups and individuals to play a role in shaping the contemporary urban environment, by taking initiatives in their own hands to effect changes.[190]

TOWARDS A NEW URBAN(IST) PRACTICE?

"Rather than remaining within the field of a discourse that upholds its privilege by inverting its content, one can try another path: One can analyze the microbe-like, sigular and plural practices which an urbanistic system was supposed to administer or suppress, but which have outlived its decay"[191] Michel De Certeau

As we have seen the inherent qualities of commoning, the question arises: What can the field of architecture and planning learn from this? Although current changes in cities have caused an increasing awareness in comparison with the modernist approach, new urban strategies are still not paying justice to the city's plurality of life. Eric Corijn and Jacqueline Groth give the example of the restructuring of city centers, which are consolidating a 'divided' city: "*space is functionally and economically shared but subject to an increasing social and cultural segregation*".[192]

As German publisher and curator Jesko Fezer argues, the law of supply and demand is dominating our urban development, and therefore blocking urban policies. The protagonists are mostly people who have little or nothing to do with planning and design. Today, the crisis of the neoliberal ideology may offer an opportunity to imagine alternative urban practices. The city could become a new political arena for experiments in democracy and a new design: a design for a post-neoliberal city.[193] "*The crisis of the contemporary city can no longer be handled only with the classic tools of large-scale top-down planning. Socio-spatial practices are too complex and heterogeneous for that, too dynamic and contradictory. Not to plan, however is to abandon too easily the project of design. New design for the city is urgently needed: for, by its very nature, a city cannot be anything but designed. It is socially produced*".[194]

187   CUYVERS Wim, 'Musea voor actuele kunst, van het bordeel via de school naar Ikea', De Witte raaf 128, juli-augustus 2007

188   ROBBERECHTS Catherine, ALKINS Ted (eds.), *Cahier #3: Open baarheid: Over publieke planning en restruimte*, Team Vlaams Bouwmeester, Brussel, 2010, p 8.

189   HOU Jeffrey, *Insurgent public space: Guerilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities*, Routledge, London, 2010, p 15.

190   Ibid.

191   DE CERTEAU, Michel, *The practice of everyday life*, University of California Press, London, p 96.

192   CORIJN Eric, GROTH Jacqueline, 'The need for freezones: Informal actors setting the urban agenda' in: DE CAUTER Lieven, DE ROO Ruben, VANHAESEBROUCK Karel (eds.), *Art and Activism in the age of globalisation*, Nai Publishers, Rotterdam, 2011, p 148.

193   FEZER Jesko, 'Design for a Post-Neoliberal City', *E-Flux*, nr. 17, June 2010, viewed on 18 April 2014, < http://www.e-flux.com/issues/17-june-august-2010/>

194   Ibid.

An increased sensitivity of architecture and planning professionals for the possibilities lying in the margin – as the different practices of commoning are showing – could lead towards a more open future.[195] It could be argued that it is paradoxical in a sense that planning approaches could learn from the practices revolting against them. Yet, informal urban actors have in a way contributed to democratizing processes around urban development, even if their demands do not always coincide with the final plan.[196] The difficult question is how to avoid freezing the spontaneity and diversity of these practices while organising and designing them. How to maintain 'otherness' as a rule within planning and design?[197]

Doina Petrescu argues that "*a revolutionary reform in urban planning cannot be initiated solely by centralized structures and governmental bodies. It should include these 'microscopic attempts' at the level of collective and individual desires of clients and users in micro-social units: neighborhood associations, informal teams, squats and other self-managed organizations, experimental institutions, alternative spaces, etc.*".[198] The current form of urban planning with strictly defined areas and functions, that does not allow appropriation or spontaneity, is more and more being questioned. As Eric Corijn and Jacqueline Groth argue urban visions should allow for things 'to happen': "*urban development needs freezones*".[199]

A good example illustrating the potential of these 'freezones' is Berlin. After the fall of the wall in 1989 a new urban development scheme was necessary, that would merge East and West Berlin into one new metropolitan area. The long years of separation of the two parts had left many undefined and undeveloped spaces throughout the city. Many people agree that this availability of undefined 'free' spaces and the decision not to make functional plans for certain parts but to leave them free instead, created the bustling metropolis of today.[200]

Verena Lenna, PhD researcher on the theme of the Commons at KU Leuven, believes that this kind of critical urbanism approach is active today, but that it has not yet reached the institutional level: "*it has dissolved in a thousand underground urbanisms, hidden in the resistant folds of our society, where space – arena of the political par excellence – still supports the performing of protest, of resistance, of alternative organization*".[201] Historian and art critic Pauline de la Boulaye writes how "*since about ten years, those who contest this kind of urban disasters meet, debate, imagine, invent other ways of living. In this homeopathic vein artists, sociologists, anthropologists, urban designers, architects take over. They organise themselves in collectives, working on a neighbourhood, a street, a wasteland*".[202]

In Brussels one of the first collectives who saw the potentiality of these initiatives was City Mine(d). This is a non-profit organization of urban activists, founded in 1997 with the aim to canalize the creative activity that was popping up in many places in the city.[203] It was born out of the first episode of urban activism in Brussels, namely the occupation of Hotel Central by a coalition of Brussels citizens in the 1990s.[204] City Mine(d) creates artistic interventions in different places in the city, preferably in 'city cracks': "*the places that are ignored or used as dumps, and are ideal to bring different groups and individuals together and play the role of neutral body*".[205]

What is striking is that many of these 'underground' groups often include professionals with a background in architecture or planning. This raises some questions about the architecture and planning field: Is it a changing? Or is simply a new field, a new branch growing, leading towards a new profession? Doina Petrescu sees the 'architect as curator' as a new future role. In this way the profession of architect would be located in between institutions, clients and users. The architect would in this way have the role of a mediator.[206]

195   CUPERS Kenny, MIESSEN Markus, *Spaces of uncertainty: extracts of the exhibition and publication*, March 2006, viewed on 10 April 2014, <http://edit-revue.com/docs/EDIT_100E.pdf>

196   CORIJN Eric, GROTH Jacqueline, 'The need for freezones: Informal actors setting the urban agenda' in: DE CAUTER Lieven, DE ROO Ruben, VANHAESEBROUCK Karel (eds.), *Art and Activism in the age of globalisation*, Nai Publishers, Rotterdam, 2011, p 156.

197   PETRESCU Doina, 'Losing control, keeping desire' in: JONES Peter Blundell, PETRESCU Doina, TILL Jeremy (eds.), *Architecture and participation*, Taylor and Francis Group, London, 2005, p 59.

198   Ibid., p 46.

199   CORIJN Eric, GROTH Jacqueline, 'The need for freezones: Informal actors setting the urban agenda' in: DE CAUTER Lieven, DE ROO Ruben, VANHAESEBROUCK Karel (eds.), *Art and Activism in the age of globalisation*, Nai Publishers, Rotterdam, 2011, p 157.

200   ROBBERECHTS Catherine, ALKINS Ted (eds.), *Cahier #3: Open baarheid: Over publieke planning en restruimte*, Team Vlaams Bouwmeester, Brussel, 2010, p 8.

201   LENNA Verena, 'Commons Josaphat: an episode of political urbanism in Brussels', *Commons Blog*, 29 October 2013, viewed on 10 April 2014, < http://commonsblog.wordpress.com/2013/10/29/commons-josaphat-an-episode-of-political-urbanism-in-brussels/>

202   DE LA BOULAYE Pauline, 'Bruxelles, en friches bienceillantes', *Stradda Magazine*, nr. 31, April 2014, p 49.

203   CITY MINED, *Forty frequently unanswered questions*, viewed on 13 May 2014, <http://www.citymined.org>

204   DE CAUTER Lieven, 'Van Hotel Central tot Picnic the Streets: Klein panorama van het stadsactivisme in Brussel', *De Wereld Morgen: Lessons in Urgency*, 25 March 2014, viewed on 10 April 2013, <http://community.dewereldmorgen.be/blog/lievendecauter/2014/03/25/van-hotel-central-tot-picnic-the-streets-klein-panorama-van-het-stadsactivisme-in-brussel>

205   CITY MINED, *Forty frequently unanswered questions*, viewed on 13 May 2014, <http://www.citymined.org>

206   PETRESCU Doina, 'Losing control, keeping desire' in: JONES Peter Blundell, PETRESCU Doina, TILL Jeremy (eds.), *Architecture and participation*, Taylor and Francis Group, London, 2005, p 56.

A good example of this curator-role is AAA, which Doina Petrescu founded, together with Constantin Petcou. The abbreviation stands for 'Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée', meaning a studio for self-managed architecture. Being at the same time a professional structure and an activist group, they define themselves as "*a collective platform, which conducts explorations, actions and research concerning urban mutations and cultural, social and political emerging practices in the contemporary city.*" [207] They have consciously chosen not to work with a real office model, but as non-profit association. Through micro-political acting – 'urban tactics' – they want to participate in making the city more ecological and more democratic. [208] Standing much closer to the different insurgent practices by the citizens, and in a way learning from them, this kind of alternative architectural practices could become a new way of 'curating' the city.

Another good example is the Brussels based 'awb' or 'Architecture Workroom Brussels'. Founders Joachim Declerck and Roeland Dudal define their office as "*a think-and-do tank for innovation in architecture, urban planning and other fields relating to spatial development*". [209] On their website they explain how their mission is to "*create a context for innovation within the practice of design, while simultaneously promoting the role and the meaning of spatial design in the formulation of an innovative response to the social problems inherent in a rapidly urbanizing world*". [210] They argue how the current globalized and urbanized condition has brought some new social problems, which require an alternative approach, compared to the established principles and fixed planning methods within architecture and urban planning. "*A number of issues that never used to feature on the agenda for urban development, such as water management, agriculture and world economic activities, have now become topical. As a consequence, not just architects and urban planners, but politicians, administrations, market players and citizens will also be required to come up with new ideas to adapt the city to its increased size and its new role*". [211] Therefore, they are operating with as complete a network of actors as possible within their several projects, such as e.g. publications, workshops and exhibitions.

IMAGE REFERENCES

p. 23   LOWINSKY Vincent, DYKMANS Ian, *Bonom, le singe boiteux*, CFC Editions, L'Iselp, Brussels, p 115.

p. 24   Graphic based on numbers from: BISA, *Wijkmonitoring: Welvaartsindex*, 2010, Viewed on 25 May 2014, <https://wijkmonitoring.irisnet.be/maps/statistieken-inkomen-brussel/fiscale-inkomens-brussels-gewest/>

p. 26   Map, based on information from: BISA, *Wijkmonitoring: Welvaartsindex*, 2010, Viewed on 25 May 2014, < https://wijkmonitoring.irisnet.be/maps/statistieken-inkomen-brussel/fiscale-inkomens-brussels-gewest/>

p. 29   Map, based on information from: IEB, *Zones leviers et Zones d'intérêt regional (ZIR)*, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.ieb.be/IMG/pdf/depliant_zonesleviers-zir-2.pdf>

p. 36   STREET ART UTOPIA, *Street art by Banksy*, Viewed on 10 April 2014, <http://www.streetartutopia.com/?p=14015>

p. 45   Map, based on information from: BIM, *Groen Brussel*, Viewed on 22 May 2014, <http://geoportal.ibgebim.be/webmap/groene_brussel.phtml?langtype=2067>

p. 45   'Molenbeek underground, Molenbeek overground', Concept and Analysis studio, Master of Human Settlements, Prof. Bruno De Meulder, KU Leuven, 2013-2014.

p. 54   Picture taken by Cobbing Nick, Reclaim the Streets, Camden Town, London, May 1995. Source: PHOTOFUSION, *Reclaim the Streets*, Viewed on 30 May 2014, <http://photofusionpictures.photoshelter.com/image/I0000vVMn6xabR3k>

p. 57   'Spaces of uncertainty', Viewed on 1 June 2014, <http://puddlesofsun.wordpress.com/tag/spaces-of-uncertainty/>

207   AAA, *Urban Tactics*, viewed on 10 april 2014, <http://www.urbantactics.org/home.html>
208   Ibid.
209   ARCHITECTURE WORKROOM BRUSSELS, *About*, Viewed on 22 April 2014, <http://www.architecture-workroom.eu/en/about/mission>
210   Ibid.
211   Ibid.

TOWARDS THE ATLAS
EPISODES OF URBAN ACTIVISM IN BRUSSELS

INTRODUCTION

In this second part we start working towards the atlas, which will give a concrete understanding of the concept of commoning. As Brussels contains many urban activist initiatives, it is impossible to pursue completeness. How can a selection of case studies be made from this wide range of Brussels 'troublemakers'?

Firstly, from the theoretical framework we can deduce some important characteristics of 'commoning', which are mainly that: acts of commoning often originate from a defect or a shortcoming in the present urban realm, (urban) commons always imply a community, commoning is about use instead of property, and commoning is not related to direct commercial interests. The case studies, which can be read as acts of urban activism, have to meet these requirements.

Secondly, some other requirements are put forward for the choice of the case studies. Both known and less known examples from Brussels should be discussed. Also, the case studies should be recent: several are still happening right now. Finally, a variety of 'communities' needs to be included, such as e.g. children, students and migrants.

The chosen case studies will be read on the basis of different 'strategies'. These strategies will be ordered according to the degree in which the citizens are transforming – or want to transform – the place spatially. This mostly also implies a rising awareness about the fact that they are 'commoning' a part of the city. We will move from very spontaneous cases without agenda, to larger scaled events, which require a well-organised collective. Five different 'strategies' will be discussed: 'Using', 'Appropriating', 'Intervening', 'Reclaiming' and 'Designing'. Each strategy will be illustrated by two case studies. Some of the case studies are events or initiatives that I encountered myself in Brussels (Parking 58, Dancing at the station, KYTKAT, Picnic the Streets, FarmParck), some initiatives were mentioned in the courses on the Commons of Professor Lieven de Cauter (Commons Josaphat, Cyclo Guerilla), and others I discovered through surfing on the Internet or because they are related to other initiatives (Bouwspeelplaats, Canal Park, Swing in the Cracks). It must be mentioned that this overview forms only a start of the 'Atlas of the Commons'. It is a common work: Other people should add new cases over time and contribute to its completion, if that would ever be possible.

1/ Using

Parking 58
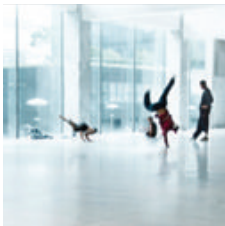
Dancing at the station

2/ Appropriating

Kytkat

Bouwspeelplaats

3/ Intervening

Cyclo Guerilla

Swing in the Cracks

4/ Reclaiming
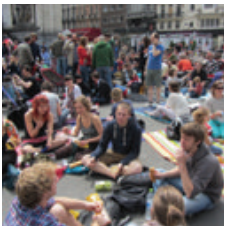
Picnic the Streets
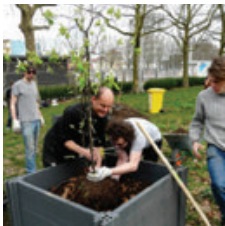
Canal Park

5/ Designing

ParckFarm

Commons Josaphat

1/ USING

A first strategy we will illustrate is 'using'. Actually it is difficult to speak of a real 'strategy', because in the case of 'using' the activity is not related to an underlying agenda. Individuals or small groups of people make use of a place, which is officially not meant for that use. They don't transform the place and they even don't intend to. When they leave the place looks exactly the same as before. However, the use originates from a certain lack or necessity. The place thus offers something, which other places don't offer. The use happens very spontaneous and without fixed organization. It is just about enjoying the place. Because the place is not the 'traditional' public space, and the use not the 'intentional' use, only certain groups of people – communities – encounter each other there.

PARKING 58

PARKING 58

Close to the Anspachlaan, in a narrow street called Zwarte Lievevrouwstraat, one finds a huge ten-story building, stretching two blocks long. The building reflects the late modernist approach. In huge letters 'Parking 58' is written above the entrance. It was the first parking tower of Brussels, built in 1957 in order to meet the extra demand of parking places generated by the Brussels World's Fair of 1958.[1] It is an important example of the aggressive post-war urban development Brussels was confronted with, also known as 'brusselization'.[2] Back then there was a firm believe in 'freedom and progress', symbolized by the car. This led to the mass construction of tunnels, car parks and motorways.[3] Therefore a large part of the historic urban tissue was demolished, as for example the beautiful market hall from 1874 in the case of Parking 58.[4]

One would not expect it from the view of the parking building outside, but it is quite known for its rooftop, because of the fantastic 360 degree view over Brussels. On his blog 'The City Geek' Laurent Vermeersch, journalist for 'Brusselnieuws', describes Parking 58 as a 'beloved urban fiasco': "*Nobody likes a parking tower, but everybody who knows Parking 58 in Brussels will mourn its demolition. That's because Parking 58 is not just a parking tower. It is also the most central, the coolest and definitely the cheapest viewpoint in the city. Everyone who knows his way into the building can take the creaky elevator to the upper parking deck on the tenth floor and see the city center in all its eclectic splendor - be it behind an electrified fence*".[5] An indeed, the people do find their way to the 'creaky elevator'. When I enter the building on a sunny Saturday afternoon in April, I encounter a group of people in front of the elevator. We enter with ten people in the small box. Only two people leave before reaching the tenth floor. It is clear that most of us have the same destination, namely the rooftop.

1   GEIB Jonathan, *The challenge of urban activism in the new neoliberal context*, Master thesis, KU Leuven, 2013, p 91.
2   VERMEERSCH Laurent, *Parking 58: Beloved urban fiasco*, Blog: The City Geek, 2 April 2013, viewed on 5 May 2014. < http://thecitygeek.tumblr.com/post/46964147650/parking-58-beloved-urban-fiasco>
3   GEIB Jonathan, *The challenge of urban activism in the new neoliberal context*, Master thesis, KU Leuven, 2013, p 91.
4   VERMEERSCH Laurent, *Parking 58: Beloved urban fiasco*, Blog: The City Geek, 2 April 2013, viewed on 5 May 2014. < http://thecitygeek.tumblr.com/post/46964147650/parking-58-beloved-urban-fiasco>
5   Ibid.

On the rooftop I encounter several groups of people: some are studying the skyline of Brussels, others are lying on the floor and enjoy the sunlight. This fantastic rooftop used to be a 'hidden secret' of Brussels, which only a limited group – especially students and young working people – were aware of. It was a place of freedom, a place where you could have a drink, a smoke or a party without disturbing anyone, and without being disturbed by anyone. Nowadays however, the panoramic rooftop has become more and more touristy. Especially since the alternative city guide 'USE-IT' included it in its alternative tourist map of Brussels.[6]

Since Parking 58 is at stake of disappearing it has even become the focus of several action groups. In September 2012 it turned out that the owner of the building, AG Real Estate, asked the city for a planning permit for a new building on the site.[7] In March 2013 more detailed plans were made public: the project – called 'Centre 58' – would contain office spaces, luxury apartments, extra parking places, some shops on the ground floor, and strikingly: no public rooftop.[8] A public outcry followed this new example of 'brusselisation'. Among others Brigitte De Pauw, Brussels parliamentary (CD&V), fervently argued against the proposal and in favour of a public rooftop on the new building. According to her "*this could be combined with a green roof, a large city park or a café with terrace. Brussels needs more places where everyone, regardless their social situation, can come to enjoy the wonderful panorama*".[9] However, we should be aware that in such a scenario the rooftop would become the objective of marketing strategies and commercial activities, and loose its value for the initial users.

Several actions have even been undertaken to put the attention on the great value of the rooftop. A first action happened in 2008. The artistic platform 'Bn Projects' created the website 'Park 58'. According to them it would satisfy to delete three letters: from 'Parking 58' to 'Park 58'. The concept of the project was to start up an imaginary re-appropriation of the parking building.[10] A few years later, in September 2012, Parking 58 was again in the spotlights. An anonymous group did spread around false plans for the future 'Parking 58' as a response to the announced project of AG Real Estate.

6   USE-IT, *Tourist info for young people: Brussels*, viewed on 5 May 2014, <http://www.use-it.be/brussels/map/>

7   GEIB Jonathan, *The challenge of urban activism in the new neoliberal context*, Master thesis, KU Leuven, 2013, p 92.

8   VERMEERSCH Laurent, 'Parking 58: Geen publiek dak en 250 extra parkeerplaatsen', *Brusselnieuws*, 7 March 2013, viewed on 5 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/parking-58-geen-publiek-dak-en-250-extra-parkeerplaatsen>

9   Ibid.

10   PARK 58, *Une utopie urbaine pour une réappropriation citoyenne*, viewed on 5 May 2014, <http://www.park58.be>

The renders on the poster showed a future building with lots of green on the rooftop. According to the poster the project would include 354 housing units, neighbourhood shops, a youth center, a community center, a bicycle parking, and a park of 5000 m² on the roof. Probably the posters were spread as a campaign to bring the issue to the attention, in the run towards the local elections of October 2012.[11]

Despite that all these initiatives clearly understand the great value of the rooftop, they somehow also contribute to its 'destruction'. The attraction of the rooftop is exactly in the mystery around it, in the fact that it was a 'secret' among a limited group of citizens. People used it to escape the control and commercialisation of the public spaces in the city. By putting attention on the rooftop and by making it more 'public', it loses this distinction from the traditional public space. As more communities start using it, it becomes less interesting for its 'original' users. It is very paradoxical in a sense: both protecting the rooftop and keeping it silent will eventually lead to its destruction. Even writing about it right now contributes to this destruction. Probably the best thing we can do is to enjoy the rooftop while it is still there – which can still take a while if the development occurs in a 'Brussels tempo'. Finally the Brussels commoners will have to look for a new place. Perhaps they already found one. Hopefully one they can remain secret.

11   VERMEERSCH Laurent, 'Onbekenden verspreiden valse plannen Parking 58', 25 September 2012, viewed on 5 May 2014, < http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/onbekenden-verspreiden-valse-plannen-parking-58>

DANCING AT THE STATION
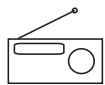
DANCING AT THE STATION

Stations do not seem to be the places where people would like to hang out, except from the times one misses a train and is obliged to. However, in the evening, after closing time of the shops, the station's entrance hall forms a popular place for hip-hop dancers. For many of the Brussels underground dance scenes (e.g. breakdance, new style, raga) training happens at the train stations. This also corresponds to the fundamental values of the hip-hop movement, namely the spirit of sharing and re-appropriating public spaces. [12] 'Upright' dancers practice mostly at the Luxemburg Station. There one of the dancers argues: "*Once I needed a room to practice, but all dance rooms were full or closed. Moreover they are quite expensive. So I came here to dance. I just do what I have to do, I don't disturb anyone*".[13] Break-dancers on the other hand assemble in the North Station. In the corner of the hall, in front of 'Brasserie North Express' they practice their moves on the smooth marble floor. Among those break-dancers is the 'Hoochen Crew'. In contrast with what you would expect from a group without a private room to practice, the Hoochen Crew dances at a very high level. They won the Benelux championship of 2011 and they represented our country three times at the World Championship for breakdance. The six member of the Hoochen Crew, aged between twenty-four and thirty, all grew up in the surrounding municipalities Anderlecht, Sint-Gillis and Brussel-Stad.[14] Since more than ten years they dance in the North Station, at least three evenings a week for about two or three hours. Dancing in a place, which is actually not equipped for it, is not always easy: "*For everything which is technical, we would actually need tatami mats. When we fall on the marble floor of the station, it's not always easy to get up again*". [15] Still, the Hoochen Crew also sees advantages in their 'alternative' dance room: "*The advantage of dancing at the station? The contact with the public. People stop, they applaud, they take pictures. Some of them even ask us if we give dance courses. That's a nice acknowledgment*".[16]

---

12   MUSHAMALIRWA Lydie, 'Freestyle au dessus des rails bruxellois', *Focus Le Vif*, 7 December 2011, viewed on 7 May 2014, <http://focus.levif.be/culture/musique/freestyle-au-dessus-des-rails-bruxellois-video/article-normal-509.html>

13   Ibid.

14   DEGLUME Pauline, 'Les B-boys de la gare du Nord', *DH-net*, 8 December 2011, viewed on 8 May 2014, <http://www.dhnet.be/regions/bruxelles/les-b-boys-de-la-gare-du-nord-51b76ed3e4b0de6db97c4feb>

15   Ibid.

16   Ibid.

Except from the Hoochen Crew, another rather famous dancer practicing at the North Station is Yassin Mrabtifi. In May 2014 a documentary about him appeared in the program 'Koppen' on the VRT, the Flemish public television broadcast.[17] Yassin was selected from an international competition to be part of the new dance production 'Talk to the demon' of choreographer Wim Vandekeybus (Ultima Vez). Yassin lives in Sint-Jans-Molenbeek. Being a Muslim and a rather corpulent man, making it as a dancer was not easy for him, as he was often confronted with prejudices. Apart from his rehearsals for the show of Vandekeybus, Yassin practices his breakdance moves in the North Station: "*In a place like this I discovered dancing, the dance of the street, breakdance. You don't need anything, except for the floor and music. Everybody gives advice to each other. It's freedom: nobody tells you what to do. Even if you're the best dancer in the world, maybe you will give your best performance ever here, in the station*".[18]

Je hebt niks nodig,
alleen de vloer en muziek.

---

17   'De dans van Yassin', Video, *De Redactie: Koppen*, 1 May 2014, Viewed on 2 May 2014, <http://www.dere-dactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/videozone/programmas/koppen/EP_140501_Koppen?video=1.1955609>
18   Ibid.

2/ APPROPRIATING

A second strategy consists of 'appropriating' a space. This happens mostly by a group of people, who make temporary use of a place. This place offers them opportunity which they can't find in other places. For a limited period it feels like 'their' place, as they form one coherent 'community'. They don't have the intention to change the place. However, they illustrate potential uses for the future. Although the meeting is organised beforehand, the use of the space happens in a flexible way, without explicit protest.

KYTKAT
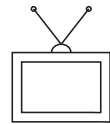
KYTKAT

In the summer of 2012, a friend asked me to go watch the EURO2012 final game at a "special location" close to the north station. Usually I am so much interested in football, but the idea of the great location appealed to me. I went, and indeed it was fantastic: A big empty plot next to the financial tower at Cité Administrative, completely abandoned, with large concrete pavers through which grass and flowers started to grow. By the half of the game a slow sunset put an orange light on the terrain and the panoramic scenery of the city. Some people were watching the game (Spain versus Italy) full excitement on the small TV-screen, others were just catching up with a bottle of beer.

This was only the final game, but during the entire three weeks of the European Championships the same event had been organized on several surprising and beautiful locations in Brussels. It is comparable with the 'Plein Open Air' project of City Mine(d), an open air cinema during summer on forgotten places in Brussels, organised since 1997.[19] This time however the initiator behind the spontaneous get-togethers was KYTKAT, a small collective of Brussels inhabitants.

KYTKAT was founded by Paul Steinbrück, a German architect living in Brussels since 2008. He had been inspired by similar events in Dresden, the city where he lived before. In 2010, during the World Cup in South-Africa, he was living on the first floor of a house on the corner in front of 'les Halles' at the Sint-Gorix Square. He decided to put some seats and his television on the sidewalk in front of the house and invited some friends to watch the game together. During the game several passersby joined, and the group easily grew to twenty people. The event was called 'Ecke' at that time, referring to both the sidewalk corner were they were sitting and to the corner kick in football terms. Hence the logo of KYTKAT with the field corner. When in 2012 the European Championship in Poland and Ukraine was coming up Paul and his girlfriend Lien Nauwelaerts, together with some other friends, wanted to repeat this initiative, be it a bit more 'professionally'.

19   DE CAUTER Lieven, 'Van Hotel Central tot Picnic the Streets: Klein panorama van het stadsactivisme in Brussel', *De Wereld Morgen: Lessons in Urgency,* 25 March 2014, viewed on 10 April 2013, <http://community. dewereldmorgen.be/blog/lievendecauter/2014/03/25/van-hotel-central-tot-picnic-the-streets-klein-panorama-van-het-stadsactivisme-in-brussel>

In the same logic as 'Ecke', 'КУТКАТ' was created, with 'КУТ' meaning corner in Ukrainian and 'КАТ' meaning corner in Polish. And now, in 2014, with the World Cup in Brazil in prospect, plans are being prepared for 'O Canto' (meaning corner in Portuguese). How many people made it to the event, depended a lot on the weather and on the importance of the game of the evening. The number of people fluctuated during those three weeks: Sometimes they were only in five to ten persons, other times, for example during the final game, about eighty people attended the event: "*We didn't know beforehand how many people would come. The only limit was the TV-screen, which is quite small for a large group*".[20]

KYTKAT as an organisation consists of a core group of eight people, a group of friends actually, of which most are architects or professionaly related with design. According to Paul this is not a coincidence: "*I think it has to do with the way in which you look at space*".[21] Also the people who come to the event are for a large part (Flemish) architects, as they mostly reach people from their own friends and environment. The organisers are aware of this 'exclusiveness': "*It is true that we attract a certain group of people. But it is difficult to avoid this, even if you really try*".[22] With their group of eight, they regularly come together to plan the events. The group works in a horizontal way: there is no hierarchy, everything is decided together. Although this kind of event seems very spontaneous, it does require quite some preparation. Therefore they divide the different tasks among each other, to avoid putting too much weight on one person.

For example ahead of the games, they go looking for nice locations, both by bike and on Google Maps. They choose locations you would normally not think about, as a way to discover Brussels. Parameters for choosing the locations are on the one hand practical considerations. For example the place should be large enough, it must be possible to transport the generator to the location, and the place should be remote enough not to disturb people with noise. On the other hand the atmosphere and spatial quality of the place are equally important. Locations where KYTKAT watched football in 2012 were: Cité Administrative, Congress Station, Roof at the Canal (Akenkaai), Palace of Justice, Park van Vorst, Monument van de arbeid, Brussel-Kapel Station and Kiosk Warandepark.[23]
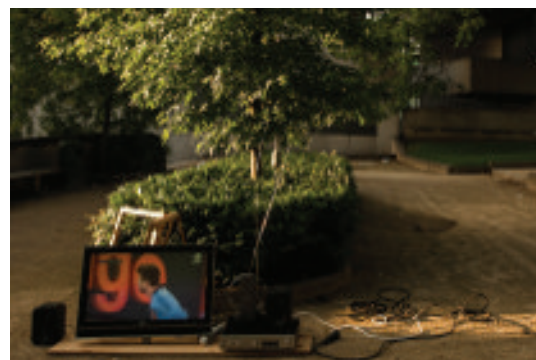
20   Interview with STEINBRÜCK Paul and NAUWELAERTS Lien, Brussels, 10 April 2014.
21   Ibid.
22   Ibid.
23   KTKAT, viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://kytkat2012.tumblr.com>

The hardware, such as the generator and the television, needs to be arranged and transported to these locations. In 2012 this happened by car, but this year they want to arrange a cargo bike, with television and generator installed on it, ready to drive to the games.Then there is also the software, among which the Facebook page and blog, which is very important for the organisation of the events. Through the website they keep the participants updated about the location, which is kept secret until a few hours before the game. By this means they also keep KYTKAT alive in people's memory, for example with the beautiful pictures that are taken each time. In 2013, when there was no championship, they maintained the page by sporadically posting something. Finally they also have to make sure that everything gets cleaned up after the event. They want to leave the place untarnished, just as if nothing happened. It is important to note that KYTKAT is an a-political and a-cultural organisation. They want to be independent from an underlying agenda. Therefore football is the perfect alibi for a get-together: nobody can be radically against it or see harm in it. Perhaps the only statement KYTKAT wants to make is one against the strong commercialisation of the public space. They want to get the people out of their houses and show them which fantastic places exist in Brussels. Actually KYTKAT is not really about football, it is about getting people together outside in the city.[24] Let's meet this year at O Canto![25]

O CANTO
Liked · 29 May

Two weeks to go, but where shall we go? We already have a list of possible locations, approved by KYTKAT in 2012 or brand-new for O CANTO.
Nevertheless we would be happy if you let us know of the secret spots, the great views, the shelters for rainy days that we don't know yet!
Brussels still needs to be discovered!

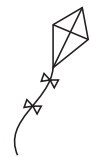Like · Comment · Share

11 people like this.

1 share

---

24   All information orginates from: Interview with STEINBRÜCK Paul and NAUWELAERTS Lien, Brussels, 10 April 2014.
25   See: FACEBOOK, *O Canto*, Viewed on 30 May 2014, < https://www.facebook.com/pages/O-CAN-TO/398286450214735?fref=ts>

BOUWSPEELPLAATS

BOUWSPEELPLAATS

'Bouwspeelplaats', meaning construction playground, is an example of an initiative in which the 'community' of citizens involved – the youngest inhabitants of Brussels – are not capable of starting up a project themselves. Therefore the members of 'Yota' did this for them. Yota is a sister organisation of non-profit youth organisation JES (Jeugd en Stad), and focuses more particularly on participation projects with children. In favour of more playgrounds in the city they organised the project 'Bouwspeelplaats' on the Tour & Taxis site during the summer of 2007, 2008 and 2009. In this way they offered a large playground in the city where children (between eight and thirteen years old) from the surrounding neighbourhoods – mostly Laken and Sint-Jans-Molenbeek – could let off steam during the month of July. [26] Every day an average of seventeen children came to the site to construct camps, towers and forts in the way they wanted.[27]

Brussels, where one on four inhabitants is younger than nineteen, is confronted with a lack of open space where children can play.[28] This is especially the case in the neighbourhoods close to Tour & Taxis, as along the whole canal area. As mentioned previously this area – known as the 'poor croissant' of Brussels – is characterized by a very dense population, and by a serious lack of green space.[29] Therefore, with 'Bouwspeelplaats', Yota wanted to create a temporary playground for children. During 'Bouwspeelplaats' the children were guided by members of Yota and by animators from the neighbourhood (for example in collaboration with BRAVVO).[30]

The children were invited to construct independently their own dream camp, but also to collaborate with each other: "*every step of the construction happened in dialogue with the other children on the playground*".[31]

26   BRAL, *Tijdelijk gebruik in volle actie*, 13 July 2007, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.bralvzw.be/fr/node/345>

27   JES, *Kinderen en jongeren creëren ruimte in Brussel*, Viewed on 8 May 2014, <http://www.jes.be/nieuwsbrief/yota/yotaNB_10_08.php#art1>

28   'Bouwspeelplaats op Thurn & Taxis', *Brusselnieuws*, 21 July 2007, viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/bouwspeelplaats-op-thurn-taxis-2>

29   TELEMANS Dieter, 'Molenbeek, de sociaal-economische toekomst van Brussel', *De Tijd*, 12 April 2014, viewed 12 April 2014, <http://www.tijd.be/nieuws/politiek_economie_belgie/Molenbeek_de_sociaal_economische_toekomst_van_Brussel.9489253-3139.art>

30   DE SMET Aurelie, 'Temporary use of voids in urban redevelopment: Bouwspeelplaats Yota', *Temorary Bxl Blogspot*, 19 December 2011, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://temporarybxl.blogspot.be/2011/12/bouwspeelplaats-yota.html>

31   'Bouwspeelplaats op Thurn & Taxis', *Brusselnieuws*, 21 July 2007, viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/bouwspeelplaats-op-thurn-taxis-1>

On the terrain a blue container was installed, containing a large collection of tools and building material. Through a loan system every child could use the material for free. [32]

"*It is clear that 'Bouwspeelplaats' is not just a playground: it's an adventurous learning environment where the children are constantly being challenged in different ways*".[33]

Moreover, the aim of Yota was also to make children in a playful way conscious of the 'blind spot' Tour & Taxis forms currently in their neighbourhood. Tour & Taxis, a former depot and customs center, was abandoned at the end of the 1980s. The huge hangars are being used for events, but large parts of the site remain often unused.[34]

However, this will change drastically in the nearby future. The site is categorised as one of the fourteen GGB's. In other words: an area of regional importance for Brussels. Furthermore, plans are being made for a huge park, the Albert II Park, on a part if the site, which will be designed by the famous landscape architect Michel Desvigne.[35] The future development of the site will have a great influence on the surrounding neighbourhoods. Therefore Yota believes it is important to involve the children in the future of the terrain. By bringing them into dialogue with the people who take the decisions, they want to make sure that also the needs and desires of the children are taken into account.

JES seats together with non-profit organization BRAL (Brusselse Raad voor het Leefmilieu) in the steering group 'Temporary use Tour & Taxis', in the framework of a participation trajectory around the plans for the site.[36] Yota wants Tour & Taxis to be a site for everyone in the city. Therefore they support the actions of BRAL, which wants to unite the inhabitants and associations from the area around Tour & Taxis and to involve them in the plans for the future of the site. They made a manifest called 'TouT Publiek' which joins their principles about the redevelopment of Tour & Taxis. Together they hope that the organization of temporary activities on the site can create positive dynamics that make clear that a huge terrain like Tour & Taxis can belong to a whole neighbourhood.[37]

32   'Bouwspeelplaats op Thurn & Taxis', *Brusselnieuws*, 21 July 2007, viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/bouwspeelplaats-op-thurn-taxis-1>

33   Ibid.

34   DE SMET Aurelie, 'Temporary use of voids in urban redevelopment: Bouwspeelplaats Yota', *Temorary Bxl Blogspot*, 19 December 2011, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://temporarybxl.blogspot.be/2011/12/bouwspeelplaats-yota.html>

35   'Michel Desvigne tekent park Thurn & Taxis', *Brusselnieuws*, 7 October 2010, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/michel-desvigne-tekent-park-thurn-taxis>

36   DE SMET Aurelie, 'Temporary use of voids in urban redevelopment: Bouwspeelplaats Yota', *Temorary Bxl Blogspot*, 19 December 2011, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://temporarybxl.blogspot.be/2011/12/bouwspeelplaats-yota.html>

37   'Bouwspeelplaats op Thurn & Taxis', *Brusselnieuws*, 21 July 2007, viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/bouwspeelplaats-op-thurn-taxis-1>

3/ INTERVENING

As a third strategy of commoning 'intervening' can be recognized. Through intervening an individual or a group of people leaves traces in the open space. They don't occupy the space, but they mark it with a critical intervention, which remains there temporary, and which puts the attention on certain issues. The message they want to bring is that something should change on that place. It is in an indirect way of protest, not only related to the specific place but often also to certain issues in general.

CYCLO GUERILLA

CYLCO GUERILLA

Many people will agree that cycling in Brussels is a perilous undertaking. Despite this, and fortunately, more and more people in Brussels use the bike instead of the car. Although compared to other Belgian cities such as e.g. Ghent or Leuven we still see few bikes, the use of bikes is rising and keeps rising: during the past five years the number of cyclists rose with 75%. Yet, there is a huge lack of cycle paths in Brussels: 51% of the regional roads does not has a cycle path, while 100% was promised by 2014.[38]

Since March 2013 a collective of bikers – called 'Cyclo Guerilla Bxl' – stands up to reclaim their rights: "*If the government won't tame the motorist, we'll do it ourselves*".[39] Therefore they are painting cycle paths in several streets in Brussels, which are dangerous for cyclists. On their Facebook page they document their actions, which according to them originate from a profound civil disobedience: "*In times of war good people are forced into the resistance. The government stubbornly refuses to do anything about the all-encompassing traffic disaster. Cyclists must force the Brussels politicians into action... non-violently yet disobediently*".[40] They strike everywhere where inhabitants are already waiting for years for a solution for the mobility node. According to the collective: "*for the time being we limit ourselves to the creation of cycle paths, but we are also considering other actions*".[41]

The actions of Cyclo Guerilla clearly follow the example of other urban activists throughout the world. For example in Guadalajara, in Mexico, a group of citizens already painted Do It Yourself Bike Lanes in 2011.[42] In New York City in 2013 a group of cyclists, called 'Right of Way', took matters into own hands, spray-painting cycle paths on Manhattan's Sixth Avenue, one of the busiest bike streets in the city.[43] The guerrilla bikers seem to be a global movement on the rise. Here follows an overview of the traces Cyclo Guerilla left behind in Brussels till now, which unfortunately have already vanished.

38 GROWFUNDING, *Geef jezelf een fietspad cadeau*, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <https://www.growfunding.be/bxl/geef-jezelf-een-fietspad-cadeau>

39 FACEBOOK, *Cyclo Guerilla Bxl*, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/cyclo.guerilla.bxl/info>

40 Ibid.

41 JCO, 'Activisten leggen fietspad aan op Poincarélaan', *Brusselnieuws*, 15 April 2013, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/activisten-leggen-fietspad-aan-op-poincarelaan>

42 GRAHAM Michael, 'Guerilla DIY bike lane created by Guadalajara citizens', *Treehugger*, 13 January 2011, Viewed on 10 May 2014, < http://www.treehugger.com/bikes/guerilla-diy-bike-lane-created-by-guadalajara-citizens-video.html>

43 GOODYEAR Sarah, 'Are guerrilla bike lanes a good idea?', *Citylab*, 25 September 2013, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.theatlanticcities.com/commute/2013/09/will-guerrilla-bike-lane-lead-real-thing/7019/>

13ᵀᴴ APRIL 2013 (10:30)

A first action was organised in the morning of 13th April 2013. On the Facebook page the plan for the action was already announced some days before, inviting people to join. The target was the Poincarélaan, between the South Station and Ninoofsepoort. The cycle path was sprayed more specifically at the Villostation at the Anderlechtsepoort.[44] In this way Cyclo Guerilla wanted to oppose the Brussels City government, who was blocking the idea of a temporary cycle path on that lane. The Brussels Region had made plans to delete one traffic lane, in favor of a temporary cycle path, in anticipation of a final solution for the lane with a seperate cycle path. However, the Brussels City government was blocking both the execution of a temporary and a permanent cycle path. Alderwoman of mobility Els Ampe (Open VLD) prefered a "*sustainable solution in stead of a temporary cycle path*".[45] Finally, some months after the intervention of Cyclo Guerilla, on 1st October the Brussels region created the temporary cycle path against the will of the Brussels City government.[46]

20ᵀᴴ JUNE 2013 (18:00)

Few months later, in June, the members of Cyclo Guerilla stroke again, this time in the municipality of Anderlecht. Although one third of the households in Anderlecht does not own a car, 75% of the road space is still reserved for cars.[47] The Emile Vandervelde Square, also known as the Kuregem bridge, is exemplary for the failing mobility policy of Anderlecht. Although the bridge forms a crucial point for mobility, it is still a hazardous undertaking for bikers to cross the canal. By painting a symbolic piece of cyle path on the square the guerilleros wanted to put pressure on the municipality to create a safe cycle path over the bridge. During this action the police even passed by, but against all expectations they simply ignored the painting activists.[48]

44   VAN DEN BLINK Daphné, 'Cyclo guerrilla in Brussel', *Blog: De Wereld Morgen*, 13 April 2013, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.dewereldmorgen.be/foto/2013/04/13/cyclo-guerilla-in-brussel>

45   JCO, 'Activisten leggen fietspad aan op Poincarélaan', *Brusselnieuws*, 15 April 2013, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/activisten-leggen-fietspad-aan-op-poincarelaan>

46   'Zuidlaan heeft plots fietspad', *Brusselnieuws*, 1 October 2013, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/zuidlaan-heeft-plots-fietspad>

47   BELGA, 'Fietsers schilderen zelf fietspad op de brug van Kuregem', *DeMorgen.be*, 20 June 2013, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/989/Binnenland/article/detail/1655700/2013/06/20/Fietsers-schilderen-zelf-fietspad-op-Brug-van-Kuregem.dhtml>

48   'Geen fietspad? Doe het zelf', Video, *Brusselnieuws*, 21 June 2013, viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/geen-fietspad-doe-het-zelf>
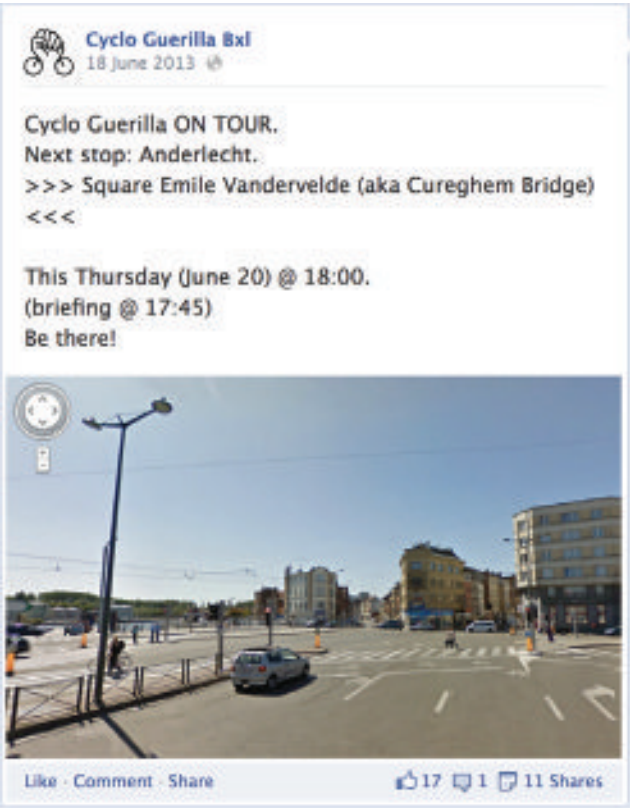
In October 2013 the first edition of 'Marché Vélo' was organized, a Brussels bike event organized by Brik (service desk for students) and Cyclo (non-profit organisation promoting bicycles) at the Beursschouwburg in the Dansaertstraat. On this event Cyclo Guerilla was invited to do a 'live' intervention in the surrounding neighbourhood.[49] Not so surprising, as both Cyclo and Cyclo Guerrilla are working towards the same goal, namely a more pleasant Brussels for cyclists. Moreover the organisations have another link: Gerben Van den Abbeele, an important force behind Cyclo Guerilla, is also the founder of the bike atelier Cyclo.[50] The intervention of Cyclo Guerilla took place at the Henri Mausstraat, next to the Beurs, where they moved the flowerpots and painted an 'illegal' cycle path. One week later the city service had already removed the the cycle path, at the request of Alderwoman of Mobility Els Ampe. She argued that "*as the street is a pedestrian area it doesn't need a cycle path*".[51] Cyclo Guerilla however stressed the problems for bikers in the Mausstraat. Gerben Van den Abbeele, member of Cyclo Guerilla, argued: "*The passage is complicated by the flowerpots and moreover the city lets cars in through the Zuidstraat. It is for example typical that recently the city gave permission to a private company to park all summer long in the pedestrian area, just for advertisement, while parking in the pedestrian area is actually prohibited*".[52]

Before

After

49   FACEBOOK, *Marché Vélo*, 9 October 2013, viewed on 10 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/events/165706866959703/>

50   Interview with VAN DEN ABBEELE Gerben, Brussels, 15 April 2014.

51   VERMEERSCH Laurent, 'Stad verwijdert 'nutteloos' guerrillafietsstrookje aan Beurs', *Brusselnieuws*, 16 October 2013, viewed on 14 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/stad-verwijdert-nutteloos-guerillafietsstrookje-aan-beurs>

52   Ibid.

17ᵀᴴ DECEMBER 2013 (12:00)

Another guerrilla action succeeded in December 2013. The action, this time at the cross point of the Generaal Jacques Laan and the Adoplhe Buyl Laan in Elsene, occurred in collaboration with bikers associations GRACQ, Fietserbond, IEB (Inter Environnement Bruxelles) and BRAL (Brusselse Raad voor het Leefmilieu), and with presence of the press. Cyclists and residents came together to express their discontent about how the government was dealing with the mobility dossier of the place: "*By their endless bickering it seems as if they are fighting the dossier like sumo wrestlers. Their attitude blocks the progress of the refurbishment of the Generaal Jacques Laan and the Adoplhe Buyl Laan, and gives them an 'immobile' image*".[53] During the action two men dressed like sumo wrestlers barricaded the self-painted cycle path, symbolizing the struggle between the governments.

3ᴿᴰ MARCH 2014 (20:00)

In March 2103, Cyclo Guerilla performed as part of an action class – entitled 'occupying everything' – of think tank and action group 'Common Grounds' from Luca School of Architecture in Brussels. Other activists present at this action class were 'London Occupy', 'Stand Up Activism' and Lieven De Cauter.[54] After a theoretical part with lectures by the different activists, the more practical part of the evening followed when the whole group – students of Luca but also other interested people – went on the street and marked two cross points at the Koninginnelaan with the symbol of Cyclo Guerilla.

26ᵀᴴ MAY 2014 (18:00)

Another intervention was brought forward in May, under the bridge at the South Station, on the Zuidlaan. The action, one day after the elections, was describes as workshop: "*How to use election posters in a functional way*".[55]

---

53   FIETSERSBOND, *Oproep: Steun het plan voor de Buyllaan en de Generaal Jacqueslaan*, viewed on 9 May 2014, <http://www.fietsersbond.be/brusselsgewest/nieuws/buyljacques>

54   FACEBOOK, *Common grounds: Action Class*, 3 March 2014, viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/commongroundsbrussels?fref=ts>

55   FACEBOOK, *Cyclo guerrilla*, Viewed on 26 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/cyclo.guerilla.bxl?-fref=ts>

SWING IN THE CRACKS

SWING IN THE CRACKS

'Swing in the Cracks' describes itself as a "*collective who up-cycles waste into parasite interventions with the aim to vitalize public spaces*".[56] The guerrilla design collective, founded in October 2013, is Brussels based but consists of architects and designers, with different international roots. With waste material they have already built seven installations in the Brussels streetscape.[57] Except from Swing in the Cracks the five members are all active in other design practices: Louisa Vermoere (Collective Disaster), Duccio Maria Gambi (Le Chapitre Zero), Giacomo Mezzadri (Mezzo Atelier), Kaveh Zolghadri and Andrea Sollazzo (Collective Disaster and Luca/KU Leuven).[58] Apart from all being architects or designers, the members of Swing in the Cracks have in common that they deplore the fact that the "*strongly hierarchical macro-structures that rule our society and cities are founded on the desire of total control and organization*".[59]

With their quick and spontaneous way of working they want to escape the long-term bureaucratic processes that often characterise building projects in the city.[60] According to them many things in society have a 'crack' inside. They see opportunities in the cracks of this over-complex society to set up a debate between the different actors of the urban space. This idea can be related with the vision of the Brussels activist organisation City Mine(d), which also prefers to work in these 'city cracks'. City Mine(d) defines them as "*the places that are ignored or used as dumps, and are ideal to bring different groups and individuals together and play the role of neutral body*".[61] In the same way Swing in the Cracks does not want to fix these cracks, but they want to enjoy them, and play with them. They also define the cracks in which they act as strategic but forgotten spaces in the city: "*public places where people just pass by, without really seeing the place*".[62]

For Swing in the Cracks it is the responsibility of all citizens to use and take care of the public spaces in the city – as something we all hold in common.[63] In their own playful way they want to provoke reactions both from citizens and from institutions. At the same time they want to revitalize blind corners in the city. Their aim is to offer "a new lens" to look at a place, and the possibility to enjoy it. Although their actions can be seen as 'illegal', they don't damage or break anything: "*Our installations are like parasites, which grow on top op the existing city*".[64]

All their installations are made with waste they find on the street, such as e.g. scrap wood or old furniture, which they want to give a new life. The fact that they only work with 'waste', of course limits the scope of possibilities. Moreover, they work in a reversed way: they first collect material on the street, and afterwards think of a project. Hereby they make sure that the installation can be built up very efficiently on site.[65] On the blog 'Open Kitchen'[66], Chris Barker and Manuel Pueyo describe the strategy of Swing in the Cracks as 'urban hacking': "*A hacker is someone who creates something smart, altering the normal functioning of a system in order to creatively raise attention about an issue*".[67] Inspiration for this 'hacker' strategy was given by the Paris based collective 'Le Chapitre Zero'. It is linked with Swing in the Cracks by member Duccio Maria Gambi. Together with Mattia Paco Rizzi he was the brain behind the foundation of Le Chapitre Zero in 2012. Swing in the Cracks later followed out of this movement as a spin-off. Its description is therefore very similar with the one of Le Chapitre Zero: "*We are a collective of architects and designers performing mainly in Paris at night, collecting materials on the streets and transforming them in public space interventions*".[68] Their "nocturnal furniture creations" have popped up throughout Paris, especially along busy city areas such as metro stations.[69]

56 FACEBOOK, *Bxl Swing in the Cracks*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/BXLswingsin-thecracks?fref=ts>

57 VAN HACHT Charlotte, 'Architecten overdag, guerillakunstenaars 's nachts', *De Morgen*, 28 May 2014, p 8.

58 'Bxl Swing in the cracks', Video, *Vimeo*, January 2014, viewed on 9 May 2014, <http://vimeo.com/79611629>

59 FACEBOOK, *Bxl Swing in the Cracks*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/BXLswingsin-thecracks?fref=ts>

60 SOLLAZZO Andrea, *The pop-up city live in Brussels: Various urban initiatives live on stage*, Hosted by Jeroen Beekman and Joop de Boer of The Pop-Up City, Beursschouwburg, Brussels, 28 May 2014.

61 CITY MINED, *Forty frequently unanswered questions*, viewed on 13 May 2014, <http://www.citymined.org>

62 'Bxl Swing in the cracks', Video, *Vimeo*, January 2014, viewed on 9 May 2014, <http://vimeo.com/79611629>

63 BARKER Chris, PEUYO Manual, 'A public space hacking manifesto', *Blog: Open Kitchen*, 8 November 2013, viewed on 9 May 2014, <http://open-kitchen.eu/the-ill-blame-cure-swing-cracks/>

64 SOLLAZZO Andrea, *The pop-up city live in Brussels: Various urban initiatives live on stage*, Hosted by Jeroen Beekman and Joop de Boer of The Pop-Up City, Beursschouwburg, Brussels, 28 May 2014.

65 VERMOERE Louisa, *The pop-up city live in Brussels: Various urban initiatives live on stage*, Hosted by Jeroen Beekman and Joop de Boer of The Pop-Up City, Beursschouwburg, Brussels, 28 May 2014.

66 'Open Kitchen' organises dinner events, taking place each time in different houses in Brussels: people share their kitchen and create artsy experiences for the benefit of the community.

67 BARKER Chris, PEUYO Manual, 'A public space hacking manifesto', *Blog: Open Kitchen*, 8 November 2013, viewed on 9 May 2014, <http://open-kitchen.eu/the-ill-blame-cure-swing-cracks/>

68 FACEBOOK, *Le Chapitre Zero*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/lechapitrezero?-fref=ts>

69 INHABITAT, *Guerilla designers upgrade Parisian streets with pop-up furniture made from trash*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://inhabitat.com/guerrilla-designers-attack-parisian-streets-with-pop-up-furniture-made-from-trash-photos/duccio-maria-gambi-nocturnal-guerrilla-furniture-paris-12/>

In July 2013 Chapitre Zero made a first 'extra muros' intervention at the metro station Horta in Brussels (Sint-Gillis).[70] Few months later, in October 2013, Swing in the Cracks was founded and continued the mission of Le Chapitre Zero in Brussels. On their Facebook page they still mention 'in collaboration with Le Chapitre Zero' next to all their interventions.[71]

A first 'built in situ' intervention of Swing in the Cracks was made on 30th October 2013 at the Palace of Justice. There they installed a kaleidoscopic viewing box on the balustrade ('Sky is the limit box'), which plays with the postcard-image of the city.[72] On the same place they also installed a swing ('Balance of Justice') and a picnic table with trash bin ('Salon de la Justice').[73]

After this they made a second intervention at the Ninoofsepoort, an important Brussels city cancer along the canal. The project 'Spy on the unstoppable' consisted of a self-made stepladder attached to the high fences around the vacant Besix site, which has already for a long time been waiting for development: "*Inside a small jungle of invasive plants was growing and thanks to that staircase people could have look at it*".[74]

Subsequently Swing in the Cracks also intervened at the Naamsepoort. There they installed 'Enthusiastic Scorpion', a rotary bench attached to a lamp pole, functioning in a similar way as the mills one can find on children's playgrounds. The bench is one of the few installations that have not yet disappeared (together with the swing at the Palace of Justice). In the same place they also installed 'generous shelve': a bookshelf where people could leave books for others to read or to take them home.[75]

70   FACEBOOK, *Le Chapitre Zero*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/lechapitrezero?-fref=ts>

71   FACEBOOK, *Bxl Swing in the Cracks*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/BXLswingsin-thecracks?fref=ts>

72   SOLLAZZO Andrea, *The pop-up city live in Brussels: Various urban initiatives live on stage*, Hosted by Jeroen Beekman and Joop de Boer of The Pop-Up City, Beursschouwburg, Brussels, 28 May 2014.
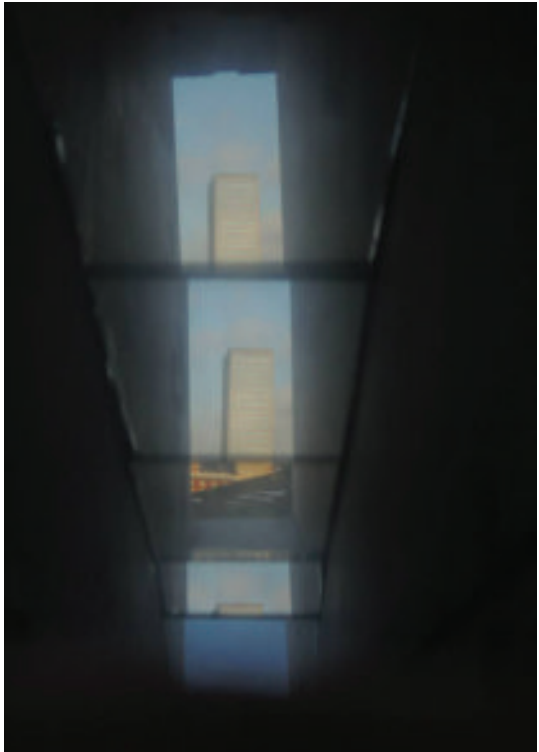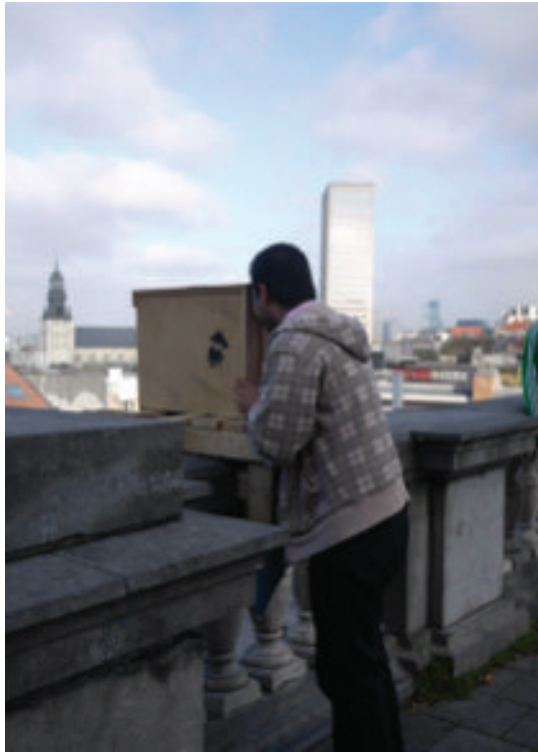
73   FACEBOOK, *Bxl Swing in the Cracks*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/BXLswingsin-thecracks?fref=ts>

74   VAN HACHT Charlotte, 'Architecten overdag, guerillakunstenaars 's nachts', *De Morgen*, 28 May 2014, p 8.

75   BARKER Chris, PEUYO Manual, 'A public space hacking manifesto', *Blog: Open Kitchen*, 8 November 2013, viewed on 9 May 2014, <http://open-kitchen.eu/the-ill-blame-cure-swing-cracks/>
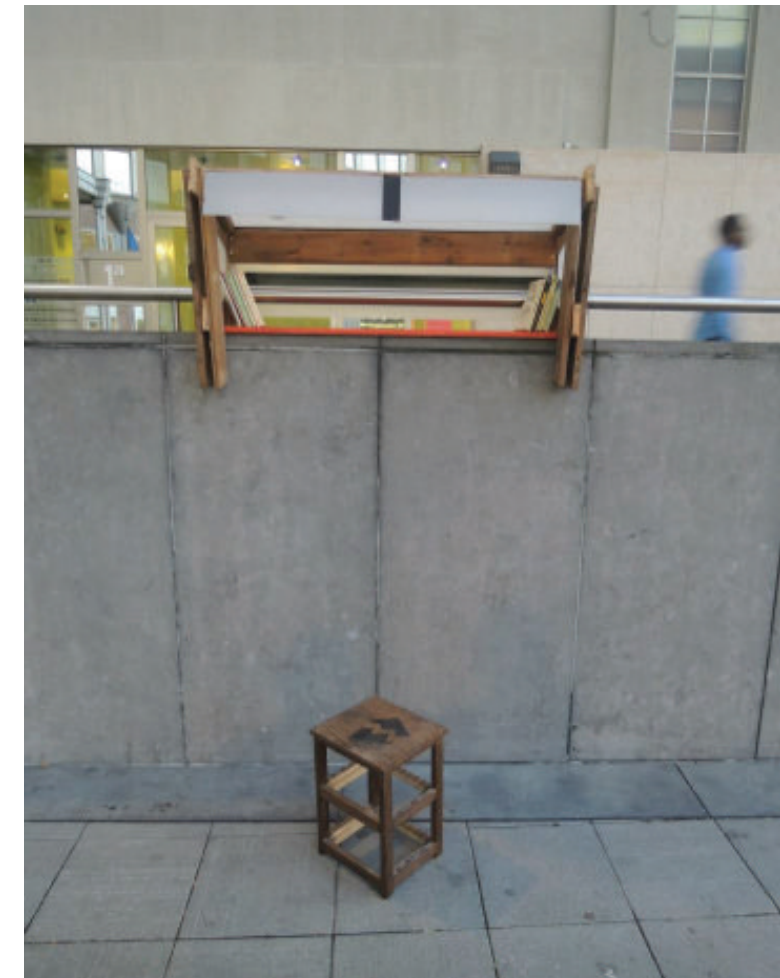
The most recent guerrilla project was 'Let yourself be the river', which they installed in February 2014 in the Anneessensstraat during the launch of the second edition of 'Shht' Magazine. This magazine wants to give a voice to the 'untold architecture': "*to unfold the hidden, to explore the unknown places, even in very know environments like big cities*".[76] It is a network of people based in Milan linked with other 'rooms' in Brussels, Lisbon, Limassol and Paris. During the event Swing in the Cracks made an intervention, in collaboration with Shht Magazine, Nightscape Productions and Recylcart Art Center. As a performance act during the event Swing in the Cracks built 'Let yourself be the river', a bench with different levels, inspired by the shape of a waterfall. It offered a small staircase in order to go over the fence, placed around the small greenery square.[77] As most of the projects is has already been removed. Yet, in contrast to the expectations of the members of Swing in the Cracks, the installations often do last for three to six months. They believe this is typical for a city like Brussels, which somehow allows a degree of 'illegality'.[78]

76   SHHT, *The magazine of untold architecture*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/shht-international-network-of-culture>

77   FACEBOOK, *Bxl Swing in the Cracks*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/BXLswingsin-thecracks?fref=ts>

78   VERMOERE Louisa, *The pop-up city live in Brussels: Various urban initiatives live on stage*, Hosted by Jeroen Beekman and Joop de Boer of The Pop-Up City, Beursschouwburg, Brussels, 28 May 2014.

4/RECLAIMING

As a fourth strategy citizens are 'reclaiming' urban space. Similar with the strategy of 'appropriating' a place is being used by a group of people for a certain activity. However, here the aim of the use is to put explicitly the attention on an important issue. As a 'common' has been denied, people gather for protest. A small group of people usually hereby takes the lead. The aim is to change the space spatially, temporary or sometimes with the aim to find a permanent solution.

PICNIC THE STREETS
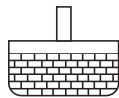
PICNIC THE STREETS

Probably one of the most famous examples of urban activism in Brussels is 'Picnic the Streets'. The movement is known for its protest picnics in favour of a car-free Beurs Square. However, they struggle in general for a more liveable city, as Brussels is still strongly determined by the aggressive car-centered planning of the post-war period. As Laurent Vermeersch, journalist for Brusselnieuws and blogger on 'The City Geek', argues "*Many measures to reduce vehicle traffic have been promised, but time and again ruling politicians have failed to deliver. The busy north-south avenue bisecting the city center, once compared to Moscow in the 1970s, is one of the symbols of this inertia*".[79]

The inspiration to organize the picnics was given by philosopher and professor at Oxford University and ULC Philippe Van Parijs. On 24th May 2012 he bundled the common frustration in a protest letter, which was published in several local newspapers. Herein he did put the attention on the importance of public space in the city. He explained how, seen the rising population, future houses will necessarily be much smaller. Therefore the availability of open space in the city becomes increasingly important.[80] In his letter he made a call for civil disobedience among the Brussels inhabitants: "*Why not, now that the weather is getting better, organise a picnick every Sunday over the entire width of the Anspachlaan between the Beurs and the Brouckère square? It will suffice to explain politely to the drivers that for once it's not up to them to impose the law. A touch of civil disobedience is more than justified as answer on this irresponsible lethargy*".[81]

Van Parijs referred to 1971, when a large picnic was organised on the Grote Markt as a sit-down protest. Cars could not access the Grote Markt anymore and a few months late mayor Lucien Cooremans gave recognition to the protest and decided to make the market completely car-free, as we still remember it today.[82] In 2012 Van Parijs wanted to repeat this gesture, this time on the Anspachlaan, a few steps away from the Grote Markt.

79   VERMEERSCH Laurent, 'To picnic or not to picnic', *Blog: The City Geek*, 15 May 2014, Viewed on 17 May 2014, <http://thecitygeek.tumblr.com>
80   VAN PARIJS Philippe, 'Onleefbare stad? Philippe Van Parijs roept op tot ongehoorzaamheid', *Brusselnieuws*, 24 May 2012, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/onleefbare-stad-philippe-van-parijs-roept-op-tot-ongehoorzaamheid>
81   Ibid.
82   Ibid.

Moreover, this place had already been the focal point of protest in 2000, during several 'Street Sharing' Parties, which were also reclaiming the street, organised by Cyclo and BRAL.[83] Now however, Van Parijs let the organization of the picnics over to the citizens, as he believed that "*some Twitter-virtuosi or Facebook-adepts could do better than an old philosopher*".[84] Immediately several events appeared on Facebook, independently from each other. Gerben Van den Abbeele was involved in one of them: "*Quite fast we heard from each other and we contacted each other. We decided to make one big event out of those seven smaller ones. On the evening we made the event public, we were sitting all together behind the computer screen*".[85]

The first picnic was already organised on 10th June 2012. Few days before, the city announced they would allow the picnic (although the protesters did not had asked for a permission) and moreover that the police would 'escort' the picnic. The picnic was allowed between 12:00 and 14:00 on the Anspachlaan between the Bisschopstraat and the Verversstraat. Mayor Freddy Thielemans (PS), even argued that "*the idea behind the manifestation was in line with the vision and policy of the city, namely to create public spaces and cosy places on the central lanes*".[86] The picnickers however reacted that Thielemans' argument was fundamentally incorrect. Anyway, the picnic assembled more than 2000 people in front of the Beurs.[87]

Also after 10th June this part of the Anspachlaan was held car-free on Sundays during noon starting from 24th June till the end of September.[88] On 24th June a second big picnic was organized. This time the organisers hoped to reach a more diversified public, compared to the first time when the picnic attracted a rather Flemish middleclass public of adults with young children.[89] Gerben Van den Abbeele is aware of this lack of a social mix, which forms the most important weakness of the event. "*On the other hand*" he argues, "*you could say*

83   Interview with VAN DEN ABBEELE Gerben, Brussels, 15 April 2014.

84   VAN PARIJS Philippe, 'Onleefbare stad? Philippe Van Parijs roept op tot ongehoorzaamheid', *Brusselnieuws*, 24 May 2012, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/onleefbare-stad-philippe-van-parijs-roept-op-tot-ongehoorzaamheid>

85   Interview with VAN DEN ABBEELE Gerben, Brussels, 15 April 2014.

86   'Stad laat picknick toe: In de lijn van ons beleid', *Brusselnieuws*, 6 June 2012, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/stad-laat-picknick-toe-de-lijn-van-ons-beleid>

87   VERMEERSCH Laurent, HENDRICKX Kris, 'Ruim 2000 protestpicknickers op Anspachlaan', *Brusselnieuws*, 10 June 2012, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/ruim-2000-protestpicknickers-op-anspachlaan-beelden>

88   'Anspachlaan elke zondag in de zomer autovrij', *Brusselnieuws*, 15 June 2012, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/anspachlaan-elke-zondag-de-zomer-autovrij>

89   'Picknick breidt uit naar Luik en Namen', *Brusselnieuws*, 14 June 2012, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/picknick-breidt-uit-naar-luik-en-namen>

that if even those people start to protest, something must be seriously wrong".[90] However, in order to avoid this exclusiveness the organisation did set up 'open discussion meetings', to which everyone was welcome (again via Facebook).[91] Unfortunately, the second picnic, on 24th June, in the pouring rain, attracted only 150 participants. Yet, in this period the Picnic became more and more popular and was even imitated in other cities. In Luik, 'Pic Nic The Cité Ardente' was organized in front of the Opera building on 17th June, which reached almost 500 people. In Namen a smaller group of 70 picnickers came together on 23rd June on the Leopold Square to protest against the removal of the trees on the square.[92]

Also in Brussels several new 'Picnic the Streets' were announced. On 9th September the movement tried to counter the 'political recuperation' of the event by inviting people to come after 14:00, in other words after the permitted period.[93] A next picnic was planned for 7th October, but was cancelled, as the issue finally dominated the political agenda: all political parties had expressed their willingness for a car free Beurs Square. Therefore the movement waited what the new majority after the elections would do with the traffic situation.[94]

However, as expected in 2013 still no concrete decisions were made, so the citizens stroke again. In the beginning of June 2013, they launched the app 'Fix My City': a parody on the initiative 'Fix My Street' of the Brussels Region, where citizens could inform the government about defects on the roads. In this way they wanted to show that the challenges for the public space and mobility in Brussels are way bigger than "some small defects".[95]

Then, on 9th June 2013, exactly one year after the first picnic, more than 2000 people assembled again in front of the Beurs. In the same month the picnics also extended to other (problematic) parts of the city, under the slogan 'Pic Nic More Streets'.

90   Interview with VAN DEN ABBEELE Gerben, Brussels, 15 April 2014.

91   FACEBOOK, *Picnic the Streets*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/PicnicTheStreet?-fref=ts>

92   'Picknick breidt uit naar Luik en Namen', *Brusselnieuws*, 14 June 2012, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/picknick-breidt-uit-naar-luik-en-namen>

93   'Picnic the Streets: Kom buiten toegestane uren', *Brusselnieuws*, 3 September 2012, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/picnic-streets-kom-buiten-toegestane-uren>

94   'Protestpicknick zondag afgelast: Alle partijen willen autovrij beursplein', *Brusselnieuws*, 5 October 2012, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/protestpicknick-zondag-afgelast-alle-parti-jen-willen-autovrij-beursplein>

95   'Picnic the Streets lanceert app Fix My City', *Brusselnieuws*, 4 June 2013, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/pic-nic-streets-lanceert-app-fix-my-city>

Spokesman David Leyssens of the collective explained: "*With our action in September we want to show that Picnic the Streets is not just organizing events as a goal in itself, but that it is a broader citizens platform of people who want change, even if they do not make part of our collective*".[96] On 15th September two hundred picnickers collected on the Fernand Cocqsquare in Elsene and four hundred at the Ninoofsepoort in Sint-Jans-Molenbeek.[97]

Finally, on 31st January 2014, the city government decided to make the Beurs Square one hundred percent car-free. Concretely the Anspachlaan would become car-free between the Beurs and De Brouckère. There would also be constructed five new underground car parks to compensate the deleted parking places. The works would start in 2015 and should be finished in 2017.[98] The published plans remained rather vague about the exact execution of the project. Once the initial euphoria died out, the picnic movement realized that the plans did not match the car-free street they had imagined.

In May 2014 they started making plans for a new picnic on the Anspachlaan. The opinions were divided: some argued that they should finally be happy with the proposal for a car-free Beurs Square, others argued that it will not solve the core problem. Among those latter is Vlaams Bouwmeester (Flemish Master Architect) Peter Swinnen. He believes that the creation of a new traffic loop around the area will end up very badly, as the surrounding streets are too narrow to cope with all this traffic: "*In principle they just relocate the traffic problems 250 meters out of the center*". Swinnen advocated for a much larger car-free zone, one that includes the whole pentagon. Moreover, he considers the plan as a 'declaration of intent' and is still waiting for a more specific plan. Swinnen hopes that it will be used as an opportunity to rethink the whole city, and not only mobility.[99]

- existing car-free zone
- extra car-free zone
- existing public car parks
- extra car-parks
- - - parking route

100 m

96   DEGREEF Christophe, 'Picnic the Streets aan Ninoofsepoort', *Brusselnieuws*, 26 June 2013, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/picnic-streets-aan-ninoofsepoort>

97   BELGA, 'Picnic the Streets in Elsene en Molenbeek', *De Redactie*, 15 September 2013, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/regio/brussel/1.1730040>

98   VERSTRAETE Alexander, HUYGHEBAERT Pieterjan, 'Beursplein in Brussel wordt verkeersvrij', *De Redactie*, 31 January 2014, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/regio/brussel/1.1855225>

99   'Brusselse plannen zijn onhaalbaar en onrealistisch', Video, *De Redactie*, 3 February 2014, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/regio/brussel/2.31776?eid=1.1859339>

Therefore on 5th May 2014 'Picnic the Streets' announced a new picnic 8th June 2014. Gerben Van den Abbeele argues: "*The fact that the Beurs Square is becoming car-free is the only positive news. The environment around the square however will become less liveable. The Picnic-movement is about quality, and the current plan is turning for example the Arteveldestraat and the Fontainas Square into catastrophic places*".[100] Moreover the organisers think that the idea to build five new underground car parks is not a suitable strategy for the era in which we are living: "*Fifty years after the first car free street in Europe, one should be thinking about closing underground car parks*".[101] On that same day Yvan Mayeur, the new major of Brussels since December 2013, already replied. According to him the parking loop is a necessary condition for the pedestrian area. The mayor does not share the fear of attracting more car traffic: "*We are happy when more people want to come to the city to experience the cultural scene, to consume, etc. They must be able to do this by car and to park their car*".[102] On the Facebook page the organisers of the picnic concluded that "*the debate has been opened*".[103]

As the concept of the picnics – being fun and effective at the same time – was gaining popularity, more and more imitations by other collectives started appearing. On 14th May 2014 'Pick nick sans traffic' was organised on the Warmoesberg, at only eight hundred meters distance from the Beurs. The picnic was organised by students social work from the HUB (Hogeschool Universiteit Brussel). They protested against the new mobility plan of the city, in which the Warmoesberg will be part of the parking route along the car-free Beurs Square. "*The street will be suffocated by all the cut-through traffic,*" argued their docent Frederik Lamote.[104] Few days later, on 17th May Philippe Van Parijs, the man behind the Picnic actions on the Beursplein, organised an action at the Schuman Square in the European Neighbourhood, which was attended by a few hundred people.[105] Van Parijs this time strived for the refurbishment of the Schuman Square: "*How can one expect that Europeans keep the EU and its capital close to their harts, if the public space that symbolises it is just a featureless roundabout along a banal city highway*"?[106]

On 20th May another picnic was organised, in the Merchtemsesteenweg in Sint-Jans-Molenbeek. About five hundred children, teachers and parents from the elementary schools Vier Winden and Sainte-Ursule assembled for a picnic. They demanded a safer street, something they had already been asking for years. Director of the Vier Windenschool Dirk Letens argued: "*Next to our school there is a small park, so it would be nice to extend this car-free space till the school, and to make a square out of it. In this way it could become an extended walk- and playspace, as there are few in Molenbeek*".[107] These three protest picnics in one week clearly show that the 'picnic strategy' has become a real trend. Also the picnic on 8th June was again a succes. More than thousand people attended the picnic under a burning sun, animated with concerts and street acrobacy. All these picnics are putting more and more pressure on the government, to finally do something respectable with the Brussels mobility and public space.

100   'Nieuwe picknick op Beursplein op 8 Juni', *Brusselnieuws*, 5 May 2014, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/nieuwe-picknick-op-beursplein-op-8-juni>

101   Ibid.

102   'Mayeur: Zonder parkeerlus geen voetgangerszone', *Brusselnieuws*, 5 May 2014, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/mayeur-zonder-parkeerlus-geen-voetgangerszone>

103   FACEBOOK, *Picnic the Streets*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/PicnicTheStreet?-fref=ts>

104   'Studenten HUB picnicken voor autovrije Warmoesberg', *Brusselnieuws*, 12 May 2014, Viewed on 23 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/studenten-hub-picknicken-voor-autovrije-warmoesberg>

105   'Paar honderden mensen ijveren voor heraanleg Schumanplein', *Brusselnieuws*, 17 May 2014, Viewed on 23 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/paar-honderd-mensen-ijveren-voor-heraanleg-schumanplein>

106   'Piazza Schuman: En nu vooruit!', *Brusselnieuws*, 23 April 2014, Viewed on 23 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/piazza-schuman-en-nu-vooruit>

107   'Molenbeekse scholen picknicken voor veilige straat', *Brusselnieuws*, 20 May 2014, Viewed on 23 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/molenbeekse-scholen-picknicken-voor-veilige-straat>

2012

24/05 Call for civil disobedience
by Philippe Van Parijs

10/06 'Picnic the Streets'

17/06 Picnic in Luik

23/06 Picnic in Namen

24/06 'Picnic the Streets'

9/09 'Picnic the Streets'

7/10 ~~'Picnic the Streets'~~

2013

4/06 Organisers Picnic the Streets launch
app 'fix my city'

9/06 Picnic the Streets

15/09 Picnic More Streets
at Ninoofsepoort & Fernand Cocq

2014

31/01 Government approves
car-free Beurs Square

5/05 Announcement new picnic

14/05 Pick nick sans traffic

17/05 Picnic at Schuman Square

20/05 Picnic at Merchtemsesteenweg

8/06 Picnic the Streets

CANAL PARK

CANAL PARK

As mentioned the Ninoofsepoort forms an important city cancer in Brussels. The large piece of no man's land is located only one and a half kilometer from the Grote Markt and at the intersection of three municipalities: Sint-Jans-Molenbeek, Brussels and Anderlecht.[108] Already eleven years ago the city government promised to do something about the sad condition of the place.[109] Moreover, already in 1995 the government promised the inhabitants to construct a large park on the site, but still nothing has happened. Obviously there is a lot of frustration among the inhabitants, but also a lot of engagement. This becomes clear in the case of 'Canal Park Bxl', a group of citizens, which started the creation of a park by themselves, as protest against the inertia of the government.

The construction of a park in this neighbourhood is very important as it lacks – in the same way as the other old industrial neighbourhoods along canal area – large green public spaces. Half of the Brussels population lives at only two kilometers distance from the canal. It is the most densely populated area of the region. Yet, there is only a half square meter of public green space per inhabitant in this area.[110] The construction of a large park would be very positive for the neighbourhood; for health reasons, but also to support the social function of the neighbourhood.

In 2008 it was announced that a park would be realised by 2011. In 2011 this was postponed to 2013, and today we are 2014, there is still no park in sight. Several other projects have been anounced, such as housing projects and even a museum. Architecture office XDGA has developed a master plan for the area, but all these projects finally end on the waiting list [111]. Of course, making decisions is extremely difficult in this area: besides the three municipalities also the Brussels Region, Beliris and the Brussels Port have something to say.[112]

108   'Buurt over Ninoofsepoort: Geef ons een park van minstens vier hectare', *Brusselnieuws*, 26 April 2012, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/buurt-over-ninoofsepoort-geef-ons-een-park-van-minstens-vier-hectare>

109   'Buurtbewoners gaan Ninoofsepoort opruimen', *Brusselnieuws*, 7 December 2013, Viewed on 13 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/buurtbewoners-gaan-ninoofsepoort-opruimen>

110   GROWFUNDING, *Koop een pop up park in de Brusselse kanaalzone*, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <https://www.growfunding.be/bxl/canalpark>

111   VERMEERSCH Laurent, 'Ondergronds museum en torens aan Ninoofsepoort, *Brusselnieuws*, 31 December 2013, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/ondergronds-museum-en-torens-aan-ni-noofsepoort>

112   'Ninoofsepoort: Wanneer komt nu eindelijk dat park?', Video, *Brusselnieuws*, 6 January 2014, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/video/tvbrussel/ninoofsepoort-wanneer-komt-nu-eindelijk-dat-park>

Although there have been initiatives on the part of the government, they often run ashore: every time the Brussels Region proposes something, the municipalities are obstructive, and vice versa. Yet, Gerben Van den Abbeele, member of Canal Park, is being pragmatic: "*Constructing a park per se is not that difficult, and it does not cost that much either*".[113]

In 2011 a public consultation committee took place in the town hall of Sint-Jans-Molenbeek to have a closer look at the plans for the Ninoofsepoort. The reactions of the inhabitants on the plan were predominantly negative. The plan proposed a park, which had to share the space with two large real estate projects, a road and a tramline, which would cut straight through the park. In this way the park would have the size of one hectare, which is ridiculously small: "*Officially we talk about a park starting from a size of five hectares of continuous green space*".[114] Moreover, the inhabitants were disappointed that they had not been included in the design process.

Out of this common frustration the 'Comité Porte de Ninove/Ninoofsepoort' was created in April 2012, with the aim to strive for a park of minimal four hectares at the Ninoofsepoort.[115] Later, in September 2013, with 'Pic Nic More Streets' a protest picnic was organised at the Ninoofsepoort. Inhabitants had asked for a picnic in their neighbourhood to protest against the sad condition of the area. During the picnic the idea came up to create a park by themselves. 'Canal Park' thus came to existence as spin-off from 'Picnic the Streets'. A new platform was created: under the name 'Canal Park' several organisations, such as JNM Brussels, Soft Revolution and Stand Up Activism, and the residents committee of Ninoofsepoort, joined forces.[116]

Gerben Van den Abbeele argues that "*nowadays the city is creating all these little parks here and there in small corners, but in a concrete way, only a real large park can serve as a lung for a neighbourhood. Large parks are necessary to avoid frustrations and conflict and to make a neighbourhood functioning*". Moreover, he argues: "*together with Tour & Taxis, the Ninoofsepoort is one of the only places where it is still possible to build such a large park*".[117] It is therefore crucial that the citizens keep reminding the government about this 'promised park' at the Ninoofsepoort.

25 m

113   'Buurtbewoners voeren actie aan de Ninoofsepoort: 'Een park is niet zo duur', Video, *Brusselnieuws*, 13 January 2014, Viewed on 9 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/video/tvbrussel/buurtbewoners-voeren-ac-tie-aan-ninoofsepoort-een-park-niet-zo-duur>

114   'Buurt over Ninoofsepoort: Geef ons een park van minstens vier hectare', *Brusselnieuws*, 26 April 2012, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/buurt-over-ninoofsepoort-geef-ons-een-park-van-minstens-vier-hectare>

115   Ibid.

116   Interview with VAN DEN ABBEELE Gerben, Brussels, 15 April 2014.

117   Ibid.
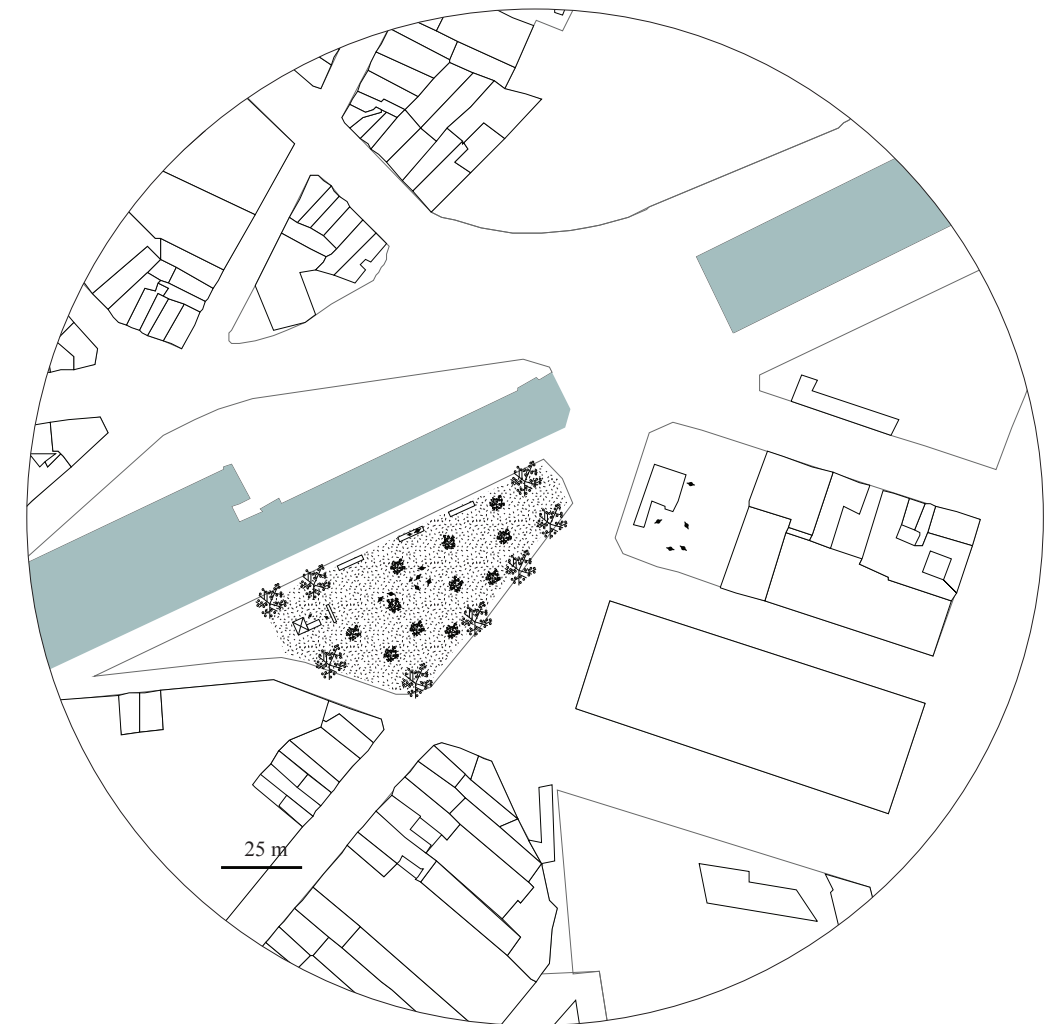
THREE PHASES TOWARDS A POP-UP PARK

The first phase towards the pop-up park consisted of a big clean-up of an unused hangar and a vacant lot. On 15th December 2013 a group of inhabitants came together with garbage bags, gloves and all the necessary cleaning materials. The clean-up was organized through a Facebook event, on which for example participants could 'share' which material they would bring. [118]

A second phase was the new years drink on that same terrain on 12th January 2014. At the new years drink the participants were invited to take their old christmas tree, if it still had roots. The christmas trees were replanted during the drink, as a symbolic gesture of the start of a small park.[119]

Then, the third phase consisted of an 'active brainstorm' on 23rd February 2014 in which the group made working arrangements for the future construction of the Pop-up Park. The attendees could inscribe themselves in different working groups that each had their specific task for the organization of the park. By the beginning of April they wanted to come to a coherent and feasible plan, ready for execution. They also made use of this meeting to clean the place up once again.[120]

CONSTRUCTION OF THE POP-UP PARK

These previous phases formed the preparation of the construction of a pop-up park on the small site at the Nijverheidskaai along the Canal. The 'squat park' consists of a grass field, fruit trees, benches and a small playground for children. They worked as much as possible with recycled materials from the neighbourhood.[121] It is important to underline the temporary character of the park, because it should serve as a signal for the government to start the execution of the 'real' park.

Between 31rd January and 28th February 2014 financial means were collected for the park through crowdfunding, organised by 'Growfunding' in Brussels. Growfunding forms a social and economic support platform for small-scaled city initiatives. Via the website sympathizers could donate money and become co-owner of the park. For example one could 'buy' a flower carpet (10 Euro per m²), a square of grass (25 Euro per 2m²), a vegetable tray (50 Euro), a fruit tree (250 Euro) or a toy for the playground (750 Euro). In exchange the donors received a certificate, made by a Brussels artist. In only one month the target amount of 5000 euro was easily crossed by the final amount of 6650 Euro.[122]

On 18th February the grass field had already been laid out, in order to give it enough time to grow. Then on 16th March the park finally took form when about ten fruit trees were planted.[123] In April things around Canal Park got more silent again for a while. The plants of the park started to grow, but did not look very maintained. Therefore on 18th May Canal Park shared the question on its Facebook page if people were interested to become godmother or godfather of one of the trees. In this way they want to make sure the park is being maintained.[124]

Although it is sometimes difficult to keep everyone motivated, Canal Park is clearly still full of ideas. On 15th May they performed another guerilla action, namely an 'artistic intervention at the Ninoofsepoort': with several pieces of grass they gave the busy mobility node a more green color.[125] Furthermore, they plan to do more actions in the future if the government does not respond on their demand.[126]

---

118   FACEBOOK, *Canal Park Bxl*, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/canal.park.bxl?-fref=ts>

119   'Ninoofsepoort: Wanneer komt nu eindelijk dat park?', Video, *Brusselnieuws*, 6 January 2014, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/video/tvbrussel/ninoofsepoort-wanneer-komt-nu-eindelijk-dat-park>

120   FACEBOOK, *Canal Park Bxl*, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/canal.park.bxl?-fref=ts>

121   GROWFUNDING, *Koop een pop up park in de Brusselse kanaalzone*, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <https://www.growfunding.be/bxl/canalpark>

122   Ibid.

123   FACEBOOK, *Canal Park Bxl*, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/canal.park.bxl?-fref=ts>

124   Ibid.

125   Ibid.

126   Interview with VAN DEN ABBEELE Gerben, Brussels, 15 April 2014.

5/ DESIGNING

With the fifth strategy we arrive at 'designing'. Here the act of commoning is organised by a (more or less) fixed group or organisation, sometimes even in collaboration with the government. Through 'research by design' future possibilities are tested to make a space more common. Similar with the strategies 'intervening' and 'reclaiming', the action originates from a shortcoming or injustice. A relative long design process precedes the execution of the design. Even if the design remains only temporary, it has the ability to show the potential of a place.

PARCKFARM

PARCKFARM

ParckFarm constitutes the 2014 edition of the biennial 'Parckdesign'. This Brussels initiative uses temporary design installations to explore the role of green space in the Brussels region, and was initiated in 2006 by BIM (Brussels Instituut voor Milieubeheer). The first editions were mostly questioning the approach of design through urban furniture in different parks and gardens in the city.[127] Hereafter the edition of 2012, entitled 'Garden', focused on proposing interventions on wastelands in Sint-Jans-Molenbeek and Anderlecht and was curated by Architecture Workroom Brussels, Atelier le Balto and Eric Troussicot.[128]

The edition of 2014, currently ongoing, revolves around the concept 'ParckFarm' with 'From the landscape to the plate' as its *leitmotiv*.[129] The festival runs from May to September 2014 on the site of Tour & Taxis. It forms the first chapter of the evolving park at Tour & Taxis (Albert II Park), which will be designed by landscape architect Michel Desvigne. At ParckFarm a new model for a public space, combining the characteristics of a park and farmland, is being tested. ParckFarm runs from the bridge in the Jubelfeestlaan to metrostation Pannenhuis. However, the final park will stretch from Sainctelette to Bockstael and at last offer a large park to the canal area.[130]

The curatorial team consists of design offices Taktyk and Alive Architecture.[131] After a phase of reflection and discussion the curators made up a masterplan for the site, which defined the general characteristics of the park, such as paths and entrances, and the locations of the different installations. The descriptions of the installations were kept rather vague to leave open all possibilities for the final design of the projects, which were appointed to different studios by a design competition. Residents of the neighbourhood, artists, students, gardeners and city beekeepers were invited to invent projects that integrate elements from food production into the creation of a new city park.[132]

127   BIM, *Festival Parckdesign 2014 in Thurn & Taxis*, 4 April 2014, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://www.leefmilieubrussel.be/Templates/news.aspx?id=39998&langtype=2067>
128   ARCHITECTURE WORKROOM BRUSSELS, *Garden Parckdesign 2012*, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://www.architectureworkroom.eu/en/work/g_a_r_d_e_n_parckdesign_2012/>
129   BIM, *Festival Parckdesign 2014 in Thurn & Taxis*, 4 April 2014, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://www.leefmilieubrussel.be/Templates/news.aspx?id=39998&langtype=2067>
130   PARCKDESIGN, *FarmParck*, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://www.parckdesign.be/en/content/parckde-sign>
131   PARCKDESIGN, *Curatorial team*, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://www.parckdesign.be/en/content/cura-torial-team>
132   BIM, *Festival Parckdesign 2014 in Thurn & Taxis*, 4 April 2014, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://www.leefmilieubrussel.be/Templates/news.aspx?id=39998&langtype=2067>

ParckFarm consists of two main projects: 'FarmParck' and 'FarmTruck'. FarmParck offers a park with several installations and moments of exchange, such as workshops (e.g. cooking, gardening, composting), debates, film projections and concerts. FarmTruck on the other hand forms the mobile part of ParckFarm and consists of a van, driving around the city and offering diverse interventions in the public space.[133]

The pre-opening of the park, for the locals of the neighbourhood, was organised on 3rd May 2014.[134] The sunny weather attracted many people. Some even spontaneously installed food stands, where self-made waffles, quiche and typical Moroccan food were sold. One week later, on 8th May, the official inauguration of the park was celebrated. About two thousand people were expected, but due to the typical Belgian weather on that evening the number of participants was much smaller.[135] Everyone gathered for a dry spot under the bridge, where concerts and food stands were concentrated. Unfortunately the park looked rather sad in the rain, also because several the installations were not yet finished. However, people seemed very enthusiastic about the park, for which they had been waiting for such a long time. After the inauguration, the participants of ParckFarm continued the work and gradually a real park evolved.

133   PARCKDESIGN, *FarmParck*, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://www.parckdesign.be/en/content/parckde-sign>
134   FACEBOOK, *Parckdesign*, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/Parckdesign?fref=ts>
135   Ibid.

As we want to focus on design as a strategy, we will have a closer look at some of the projects of FarmParck. As mentioned, eight projects were assigned to different studios and collectives by means of a design competition: Kot Kot, L'Usine du Trésor Noir, Electric Rainbow FarmFair, Bee Car, Landscape Table, Cubious, Recipe Garden, and Farmhouse. The project 'Kot Kot' for example, forms the animal farm of the park. It was assigned to two local residents, Ruth Plaizier and Alba Oriano Bufo, who live literally adjacent to the park. Together with a group of residents they decided how to organise the care of ten hens, two geese and two sheep on a daily basis, and how to build a shelter for the animals. Hereby they received help from architect Ewoud Saey and veterinary Maya Langenaekens.[136] The shelter was completely auto-constructed by the group, from clay covered with thin tree trunks.

Another installation is 'L'Usine du Trésor Noir' or 'The Black Treasure Factory', which is a public waste installation based on the principle of the compost toilet. Its objective is to transform organic waste into 'terra-preta' (black earth, a rich and fertile soil) for the park and the surrounding area.[137] The installation also incorporates a small stage for concerts and two slides at the back to exit the toilets. It was designed by Collective Disaster, a team composed of three architects, two artists and a graphic designer. Among them are architects Louisa Vermoere and Andrea Sollazzo, familiar names which we recognize from the guerrilla designers 'Swing in the Cracks'.[138]

The central meeting point of the park is 'Farmhouse', which was conceived as a greenhouse. It forms the place where people can e.g. cook, eat and drink together. Residents from the neighbourhood will be able to ask the key to the responsible to organise e.g. a movie night, a dinner, or watching football together à la KYTKAT. The competition for the farmhouse was won by architecture office 1010 a+u, composed of Bert Gellynck, Nadia Casabella and Ruta Valiunaite.[139] Seen the limited amount of time and financial means, the architects mostly had to rely on the enthusiasm of volunteers for the construction of the farmhouse. They also received help from youth organisation JES (Jeugd en Stad), which involved a group of youngsters from the neighbourhood in the construction of the farmhouse.[140]

Next to the farmhouse one finds the Landscape Table, a long picnic table with edible and medicinal plants inserted into it. It was initiated by two members of the commission, namely landscape architect Jacsques Abelman and Cultural Manager Eric Dil.[141]

Also some 'spontaneous' projects appeared at the park. For example the very enthusiastic resident Abdel designed and constructed a bread oven by himself. Every Saturday and Sunday during summer he will light and manage the oven, so people are invited to come and bake their bread or pizza.[142]

However, as Parckdesign is a temporary initiative, it is not yet certain if the projects will remain at the park after September. This will strongly depend on how they will be used this summer. As it was necessary to make clear rules about the management of the park, several locals, who were involved during the construction, were baptized as 'Farmers' of the park. They take responsability over certain elements of the park.

Since the inauguration, the site of FarmParck has been very alive: people come picnicking, children are playing, and movie screenings are being planned. Definitely the start of a more green and vivid public space in Molenbeek!

136   PARCKDESIGN, *Installations*, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://www.parckdesign.be/en/activities/kot-kot>
137   Ibid.
138   COLLECTIVE DISASTER, *Collective Disaster*, viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://collectivedisaster.tumblr.com>
139   Ibid.
140   PARCKDESIGN, *Network and partners*, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://www.parckdesign.be/en/content/network-and-partners>

141   PARCKDESIGN, *Installations*, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://www.parckdesign.be/en/activities/farm-house>
142   PARCKDESIGN, *Farmers*, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://www.parckdesign.be/en/content/farmers>
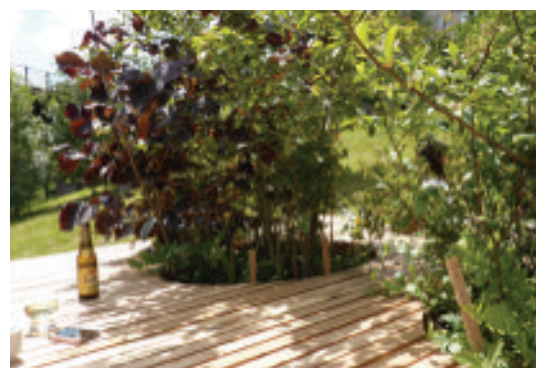
COMMONS JOSAPHAT

COMMONS JOSAPHAT

'Commons Josaphat' is formed by a group of Brussels citizens with a great interest in the idea of the commons. The collective finds its origins in the initial idea of a small group to organise a 'Festival d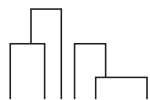es Biens Communs' or a 'festival of common goods' in Brussels. However, soon they realized they should start with a specific project to substantiate this idea.[143] In August 2013 a brainstorm weekend was organized, to which a broader group of about forty people was invited. From that day onwards they started dreaming about the future of the Josaphat site, a twenty-four hectare wasteland in Brussels: the collective Commons Josaphat was officially created. During that weekend they nominated the Josaphat site as 'common good' for the whole city.[144] Five thematic workshops were organised, which treated different important challenges of Brussels, such as e.g. housing, education, and environment.[145]

Currently Commons Josaphat is still occupied with these issues. The collective consists of citizens with different backgrounds. What connects them is the idea that the city could potentially be governed as a common good, with the Josaphat site as a first experiment. Commons Josaphat functions in a horizontal way: everybody contributes according to his or her capabilities. Therefore six different 'Groups de Travail' (GT) or working groups were created: GT Transversal, GT Occupation, GT Diagnostique, GT Sustainable Neighbourhoods, GT Communication, and GT Residents. Except from the GT's, the whole group regularly meets to evaluate the progress and to make important decisions.[146] Further they also organize alternatingly 'jam sessions' and 'ateliers'. The first one consists of debates and lectures, while during the latter they sit together to imagine the future of the site.

The Josaphat site is located northeast of the pentagon, in Schaarbeek. It is surrounded by residential areas and located next to the equally named Josaphat Park. This huge area, an ancient railroad yard left abandoned since almost twenty years, has the size of thirty-two football fields or twenty-four hectares.

---

143   DE LA BOULAYE Pauline, 'Bruxelles, en friches bienceillantes', *Stradda Magazine*, nr. 31, April 2014, p 49.

144   LENNA Verena, 'Commons Josaphat: An episode of political urbanism in Brussels', *Commons Blog*, 29 October 2013, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://commonsblog.wordpress.com/2013/10/29/commons-josaphat-an-episode-of-political-urbanism-in-brussels/>

145   Ibid.

146   Interview with LENNA Verena, Leuven, 5 May 2014.
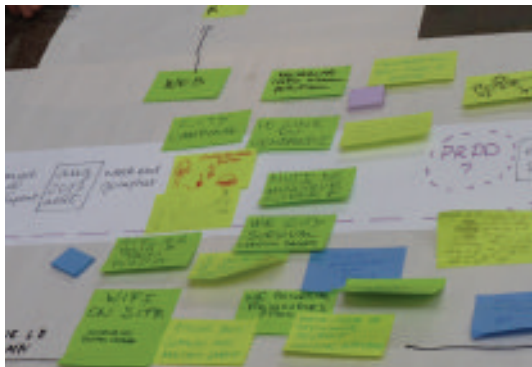
Verena Lenna, member of Commons Josaphat describes: "*The dimensions and the opportunity this terrain offers push people's imagination. Its emptiness is probably more required than the full functionality of many public spaces*".[147] The huge site is divided in two parts by the railway: one part covered by sand, the other by flowers, planted within a cleaning operation. There is still a train stop on the site, namely the Evere Station, where currently a train leaves three times an hour. However, with the future plans of the GEN (Gewestelijke ExpresNet) the number of trains should double by 2022.[148] As the Brussels Region faces several big challenges, the Josaphat Site, with its huge surface and strategic location, could contribute to meet some of these challenges, if it is developed in a smart way.[149]

That is exactly why Commons Josaphat wants to exploit the great potential of the site to elaborate an alternative mode of living.[150] As the huge site is public property – owned by the Brussels Region – the members of Common Josaphat believe it should be treated as a common, belonging to all Brussels inhabitants.[151] As Verena Lenna argues: "*Commons Josaphat has been developed based on the belief that taking action is the best option to change the course of things: it moved the minds and the hands of people towards a common goal of a reclaimed bio-authoriality[152], of a reclaimed space and time*".[153] Of course hereby the question raises how to implement the idea of the commons in a concrete physical terrain. According to Commons Josaphat several existing juridical models such as CLT (Community Land Trust), which enables people possessing twenty-four hectares as collective ownership, and certain financial models, that allow urban agriculture, offer concrete possibilities.[154] They also see that the potential and the engagement among the citizens are already there: "*Everywhere in the city people come together to experiment with new ways of community living. Food teams, cohousing projects, self-managed nurseries, community land trusts,*

147   LENNA Verena, 'Commons Josaphat: An episode of political urbanism in Brussels', *Commons Blog*, 29 October 2013, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://commonsblog.wordpress.com/2013/10/29/commons-josaphat-an-episode-of-political-urbanism-in-brussels/>

148   WIKIPEDIA, *Station Evere*, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Station_Evere>

149   COMMONS JOSAPHAT, *Call for ideas: Commons Josaphat*, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://commonsjosaphat.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/130428-appelaideeannexe_en_-final.pdf>

150   COMMONS JOSAPHAT, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://commonsjosaphat.wordpress.com>

151   Ibid.

152   The term refers to the possibility of individuals, dispossessed by the Post-Fordist regime of production and its regulating devices, to re-gain control over the biological and organizational rhythms.

153   LENNA Verena, 'Commons Josaphat: An episode of political urbanism in Brussels', *Commons Blog*, 29 October 2013, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://commonsblog.wordpress.com/2013/10/29/commons-josaphat-an-episode-of-political-urbanism-in-brussels/>

154   COMMONS JOSAPHAT, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://commonsjosaphat.wordpress.com>

community gardens, sustainable neighbourhoods, LETS-communities, energy cooperatives, groups of people that consider alternatives and work on various themes such as water management, food production, money, labour, or software". [155] The concept of the commons connects them all together: "They emphasize use rather than ownership, common ownership and sharing rather than individual property. They try to handle the limited resources of our planet with care, rather than assuming unlimited growth".[156] Commons Josaphat wants to bring all these small initiatives together in one big project.

The government – more precisely MVV (Maatschappij voor de Verwerving van Vastgoed) – owns the site, so they have the power to decide about the future of the site. Also they have recognized the great potential of the site. The Josaphat terrain is classified as one of the fourteen GGB's (Gebieden van Gewestelijk Belang) among others such as e.g. West Station, Tour & Taxis, Louizalaan and Heizel.[157] The western part of the Josaphat site is one of those GGB's. The eastern part on the other hand is categorized as SIG (Stedelijk Industrie Gebied), an urban industrial area, and will be reorganized in such way. The MVV has already given the assignment to elaborate a "functional program and a definition of a sustainable city project" to a team of urban planners from MS-a and Idea Consult.[158]

However Commons Josaphat describes the most probable scenario as following: "It is very likely that it will work like we're used to in Brussels: the plans are being made behind closed doors (this is already going on), then the terrain will be sold to the highest bidder, in the best case with here and there a concession to the neighbours, some leftover green and some public housing to appease the conscience".[159] In March 2014 the project 'Josaphat: working and living in a park area' was approved by the Brussels government. The proposal consists of a continuous green space of (only) four hectares, 1800 housing units (of which 27% public social housing), a French and a Flemish school, two nurseries, a sports hall and some neighbourhood shops. The industrial area would gradually be revalued and densified. Also some offices and a hotel would be erected. The construction works should be completed by 2023.[160] Indeed a quite typical, not very innovative scenario we could say.

155   COMMONS JOSAPHAT, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://commonsjosaphat.wordpress.com>

156   Ibid.

157   LENNA Verena, 'Commons Josaphat: An episode of political urbanism in Brussels', *Commons Blog*, 29 October 2013, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://commonsblog.wordpress.com/2013/10/29/commons-josaphat-an-episode-of-political-urbanism-in-brussels/>

158   ADT ATO, *Josaphat: Gemengde wijk*, Viewed on 15 may 2014, <http://www.adt-ato.be/nl/strategische-zones/josaphat>

159   COMMONS JOSAPHAT, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://commonsjosaphat.wordpress.com>

160   ADT ATO, *Josaphat: Goedkeuring van het project*, 28 March 2014, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://www.adt-ato.be/nl/news/josaphat/goedkeuring-van-het-project>

Therefore Commons Josaphat wants to elaborate an alternative proposal. Their vision for a neighbourhood inspired by the idea of the commons rests on five important pillars: 'shared added value', 'shared decision', 'redistribution', 'respect for the environment', and 'open source economy'. The first one – shared added value – means that added values gained through the terrain, for example by renting work spaces or selling houses, will be shared and invested again in the community. The second pillar – shared decision – indicates that decisions will be taken together, both with the residents, the users of the services and the government. According to the third pillar – redistribution – the site should remain accessible for the entire population. Therefore nobody can become owner of the ground on which his or her house is built. Fourth pillar is respect for the environment, which should be managed as a common. Finally the economic activities should represent local, open source principles. Therefore information technology and new forms of material and immaterial value production could be developed together with the local community.[161]

The members of Commons Josaphat clearly know what kind of future they imagine for Josaphat, and in extension for Brussels. In May 2012 they participated in the design competition 'Quartiers durable' for the Josaphat site, organized by the Brussels Region.[162] In order not to provoke from the start they presented their concept in a very light form and they passed the first selection.

However, at a certain moment they were held back by the government. They received a letter in which they were "kindly invited" to quit the competition, as "*the Region could not give money to a project that was competing against it*".[163] The team quitted the competition, but never stopped its activities. According to Commons Josaphat a small group of politicians and experts cannot have enough insight to decide everything by themselves. They want to empower the citizens and give them a voice to decide about the future of this 'common good'. Therefore at the end of April 2014 they set up an open call for ideas, with the slogan: "*In case of emergency: Make your own city*". The call is open to everyone: to architects and urban planners of course, but as well to any citizen, without requirements of specific knowledge or background. With this open call they want to collect ideas in order to elaborate an alternative proposal. They launched the call for ideas during the election period to instigate a public debate on the commons and the right to the city.[164]

The call consists of two phases. During the first phase as much ideas as possible are collected, while in the second phase concrete proposals must be elaborated.[165] It will result in the constitution of an alternative bill of specifications, which will be presented to the public and to executive officials in January 2015.[166]

However, the members of Commons Josaphat are being realistic: "*Actually we can expect the worst possible ending. As the site is crucial for the city they are probably not going to listen to a bunch of people talking about the commons*".[167] Still, as Verena Lenna argues, the process of bringing citizens together and discussing the potential of a commons-based system, is already great in itself. Moreover it would be a smart marketing move for Brussels to give a small part of that huge site to test a prototype of a new kind of living. "*The city should experiment with new forms of housing. Why not use the effort that citizens are doing for you – for free, by the way*".[168]

161   COMMONS JOSAPHAT, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://commonsjosaphat.wordpress.com>
162   Interview with LENNA Verena, Leuven, 5 May 2014.
163   Ibid.
164   COMMONS JOSAPHAT, *Call for ideas: Commons Josaphat*, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://commons-josaphat.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/130428-appelaideeannexe_en_-final.pdf>

165   COMMONS JOSAPHAT, *Call for ideas: Commons Josaphat*, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://commons-josaphat.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/130428-appelaideeannexe_en_-final.pdf>
166   Ibid.
167   Interview with LENNA Verena, Leuven, 5 May 2014.
168   Ibid.

IMAGE REFERENCES

p. 79   VERMEERSCH Laurent, 'Onbekenden verspreiden valse plannen Parking 58', *Brusselnieuws*, 25 September 2012, viewed on 5 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/onbekenden-verspreiden-valse-plannen-parking-58>
breakdancers

p. 83   Screenshots from: De dans van Yassin', Video, *De Redactie: Koppen*, 1 May 2014, Viewed on 2 May 2014, <http://www.deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/videozone/programmas/koppen/EP_140501_Koppen?video=1.1955609>

p. 85   KYTKAT, viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://kytkat2012.tumblr.com>

p. 91   Interview with STEINBRÜCK Paul, NAUWELAERTS Lien, Brussels, 10 April 2014.

p. 92   KYTKAT, viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://kytkat2012.tumblr.com>

p. 95   FACEBOOK, *O Canto*, Viewed on 30 May 2014, < https://www.facebook.com/pages/O-CANTO/398286450214735?fref=ts>

p. 97   BOUWSPEELPLAATS, 2009, Viewed on 1 June 2014, <http://tourentaxisbouwspeelplaats.blogspot.be>

p. 101   FACEBOOK, *Cyclo guerilla*, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/cyclo.guerilla.bxl?fref=ts>

p. 109   Ibid.

p. 111   Ibid.

p. 113   Ibid.

p. 115   Ibid.

p. 121   FACEBOOK, *Bxl Swing in the Cracks*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/BXLswingsinthecracks?fref=ts>

p. 122   Ibid.

p. 123   Ibid.

p. 125   Ibid.

p. 133   FACEBOOK, *Picnic the Streets*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/PicnicTheStreet?fref=ts>

p. 135   FACEBOOK, *Picnic the Streets*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/PicnicTheStreet?fref=ts>

p. 137   personal drawing, based on: HENRICKX Kris, VERMEERSCH Laurent, 'Beursplein 100 procent autovrij', *Brusselnieuws*, 31 January 2014, Viewed on 2 June 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/beursplein-100-procent-autovrij>

p. 138   FACEBOOK, *Picnic the Streets*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/PicnicTheStreet?fref=ts>

p. 148   FACEBOOK, *Canal Park Bxl*, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/canal.park.bxl?fref=ts>

p. 150   Ibid.

p. 157   PARCKDESIGN, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://www.parckdesign.be/en/content/parckdesign>

p. 162   small pictures: FACEBOOK, *Parckdesign*, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/Parckdesign?fref=ts>

p. 163   Ibid.

p. 167   Collage, based on: BING MAPS, Viewed on 4 June 2014, < http://www.bing.com/maps/>

p. 168   COMMONS JOSAPHAT, Viewed on 15 May 2014, < http://commonsjosaphat.wordpress.com>

p. 171   Ibid.

PART 3

REFLECTIONS & CONCLUSIONS

1/ CHARACTERIZING COMMONING

The case studies provided us with concrete and real-life examples of urban activism as a practice of commoning. In the different case studies, several similarities and key elements, which seem to characterise these practices, were identified. Based on the knowledge we have built up from the Brussels examples, we can thus complement and deepen the characteristics we already retrieved from the theoretical framework in 'Part 1'.

1/ Disagreement

Commoning originates from a profound disagreement with one or more aspects of the current situation. In other words, there is a shortcoming, something is lacking. Therefore the commoners want to emphasize this shortcoming, or even to solve it. Important shortcomings from the Brussels context were the lack of green space (more specifically in the West), the lack of space for children to play, and the bad conditions for cyclists and pedestrians.

2/ Civil disobedience

As the government is reacting too slowly on these issues, citizens refuse to wait for permission to do things differently, so they start to take matters into own hands. For this a certain degree of civil disobedience is required. The action often contradicts the established rules, or implies the use of a space in a way it was not intended for. It thus starts with breaking the rules or the established norms. For example spaces need to be accessed illegally or the 'normal' use of the space needs to be blocked. However, the actions are often tolerated by the government and police. This civil disobedience was very obvious in the actions of Cyclo Guerilla and Picnic the Streets.

3/ About use

Although rules have to be broken, the intentions of the commoners thus remain very innocent, also because commoning is about use and not about property. What is important is the possibility to use a space, in a free and just way by the citizens. For example, private spaces can sometimes feel more 'common' than public spaces, which indicates that the status of ownership is not necessarily guaranteeing nor restricting the use of a space. We have seen this unintended use in the case of Parking 58, the football gatherings of КУТКАТ and the dancers at the train station.

4/ Social practice

Besides use, commoning is also about being together and about celebrating the community. It is a social practice, as it brings citizens closer together and creates networks between them. Sometimes the social aspect is even more important than the final result. In the case of Commons Josaphat for example it is very plausible that the final goal will never be reached. However, the process of bringing people together and imagining an alternative future is in itself very valuable. Also ParckFarm contributes, besides offering a park, to the social cohesion of the neighbourhood. The objective is to bring people in touch, for example by involving young and unemployed residents in the project.

5/ Inevitably exclusive

Although commoning is a social practice, it remains somehow exclusive. Even if efforts are made to reach a large public, the notion of community remains strongly present. As the activity is 'bottom-up', a limited public is reached. One needs to hear it from a friend, or a friend of a friend. People who don't belong to the involved 'community' often don't feel addressed or invited to participate. We encountered different communities throughout the case studies, such as the underground dance scenes at the stations, the children at Bouwspeelplaats, the residents of the Ninoofsepoort and the confined collective Commons Josaphat.

6/ Common sense

Even if being exclusive, commoning mostly consists of low threshold activities within the boundaries of the 'common sense'. Therefore the action is often integrated into an 'ordinary' activity such as e.g. eating, playing, sports, cooking or gardening. We can recognize this for example in the farming at ParckFarm and the children playing at Tour & Taxis. Moreover, often this activity is not what the action is 'really' about, but a way to cover the underlying agenda. In this sense for example Picnic the Streets is not really about picnicking, but about striving for qualitative public space in Brussels.

7/ Decommodification

The main purpose behind the activities is by no means commercial, as it does not originate from a private interest, but is intended to sustain a community. It places use value above exchange value. It is possible that goods are sold, however hereby the gain is used in direct relation with the activity, and not to make profit. This was the case for example at Canal Park, where donors could contribute by buying a (symbolic) piece of the park through Growfunding. Some activities even originate as a reaction against the commercialisation of public space, such as the visits to Parking 58 and the gatherings of КУТКАТ.

8/ Few means

The commoners have little financial means, but they easily compensate this with their high amount of energy, enthusiasm and commitment. An important resource is their social and professional network. The activities often do not require much infrastructure, such as the breakdancers at the station, who only need a floor and their music. In other cases innovative ways of fundraising are used, such as Growfunding in the case of Canal Park. Another strategy is to use waste or recycled materials, as in the nightly performances of Swing in the Cracks.

9/ Temporary

The acts of commoning often have a temporary character. As the action is sustained by citizens, who can only contribute with limited time and energy, it becomes difficult to maintain it for a long period. Moreover, the process in itself prevails over the final result. The temporary occupation of a place serves especially to put the attention on a certain issue and to put pressure on the government. Therefore, the action is repeated as long as necessary, as in the case of the picnics, which keep coming back until concrete results are visible. Moreover, the notion of 'pop-up' becomes increasingly popular in cities. Think of the many pop-up bars and pop-up stores, but also for example the pop-up park at the Ninoofsepoort.

10/ Importance of the Internet

Because of this temporary character, documenting the action becomes particularly important. This preserves a memory of the action for people who could not make it at that time. The 'virtual' infrastructure is thus very important, as it enlarges the influence of the (temporary) action. Documenting happens mostly through the Internet, and more specifically via social media such as Facebook and Twitter. With little effort an event can be made public and can be updated very quickly. Examples, which make very strong use of for example Facebook are Canal Park, Picnic the Streets and ParckFarm.

2 / LINKS BETWEEN EPISODES

When encountering these commoning initiatives in the city, we can ask ourselves which links exist between them. Do they form an underground network of urban activists, or separate entities working individually? In 'Empire' Negri and Hardt argue that it would be misleading to think that they will end up by forming a network, because they all originate from different perspectives and different contexts. They also argue that exactly this individuality enforces their intensity: as they don't reinforce themselves horizontally, they are forced to advance vertically and achieve immediately a high level of creativity and intensity.[1] Also Verena Lenna has argued how "*several groups, working alone, retain more originality and avoid making one homogenous blend*".[2] Diversity is thus seen as a positive characteristic.

However, the case studies have shown that there do exist some links between the different episodes of urban activism in Brussels. Clear links exist for example between the collectives Picnic the Streets and Canal Park, as the latter is a spin-off from the picnic movement, founded during the picnic at Ninoofsepoort in September 2013. Both examples are also related with Cyclo Guerilla. An important link between these three is Gerben Van den Abbeele, very engaged citizen and one of the leading powers behind the three collectives. Another link can be seen between ParckFarm and Swing in the Cracks as Louisa Vermoere and Andrea Sollazzo, members from Swing in the Cracks, designed the installation L'Usine du Trésor Noir at ParckFarm, be it under the name 'Collective Disaster'. Moreover, ParckFarm is also linked with Bouwspeelplaats, not only because of its location at Tour & Taxis, but also because of the collaboration with youth organisation JES.

1 km

Case study network-map

---

1   NICOLAS-LE STRAT Pascal, 'Interstitial multiplicity' in: AAA (ed.), *Urban Act: A handbook for alternative practice*, Aaa-peprav, Paris, 2007, p 317.

2   Interview with LENNA Verena, Leuven, 5 May 2014.

Important to note is that in a city as Brussels language is a much discussed 'issue'. To avoid making 'linguistic' barriers many collectives make the effort of being multi-lingual, for example by posting messages on their webpages both in Dutch, French and English. In the case of ParckFarm the name – with 'ck' – is even adapted to a multi-lingual use. Yet, it is possible that the dominating language forms an obstruction for other citizens to join. This shows the importance of communities regarding the urban commons.

In any case, with or without solid network, the different initiatives and collectives show a great solidarity towards each other. They show support, for example by posting pictures and messages from each other on their webpages.

Moreover, recently more and more platforms and events are coming up, which support this kind of initiatives. In May 2014 the Amsterdam-based collective 'The Pop-Up City' organised 'The Pop-Up City live in Brussels' in the Beursschouwburg. Different initiatives such as e.g. Swing in the Cracks, Canal Park, Urban Stories, Alledagen Honger and Les Boulistes Bruxellois were presented.[3] This kind of events offers the opportunity for collectives to encounter each other, which could gradually lead to a stronger 'commoning network'.

The Pop-Up City live in Brussels

---

3   *The pop-up city live in Brussels: Various urban initiatives live on stage*, Hosted by Jeroen Beekman and Joop de Boer of The Pop-Up City, Beursschouwburg, Brussels, 28 May 2014.

Besides links between the members of different collectives, throughout the case studies also several key-locations in Brussels appeared. If we have a look at the map with the different case studies, we see that they are especially concentrated in the city center and along the canal. This is of course partly depending on the choice of the case studies. But without doubt the characteristics of these areas, such as scarcity of public green, busy car traffic and strong presence of commercial activities are an important trigger.

First, important locations are the stations. Stations are beloved non-places in the city, the places of passage, located on strategic areas. Several examples appeared throughout the case studies of both train- and metro stations, such as e.g. North Station, Congres Station, Brussel-Kapel Station, Naamsepoort, Beurs and Schuman.

Second, other important locations are the large wastelands, such as Tour & Taxis, Josaphat and Ninoofsepoort. They form an important topic within the public debate on the city's development and are often already appointed by the city as strategic locations, for example as GGB or Leverage area.[4] Also the citizens have understood that these sites are crucial to meet the city's challenges. They want to make sure the sites end up in the right hands, so they started initiatives themselves, such as the construction of a playground and park at Tour & Taxis, the open call for ideas for the Josaphat site and the pop-up park at the Ninoofsepoort.

Third, the street is another important location. There is a rising awareness that the street as a public space is crucial for a city to function well. Seen the sharp demographic rise, cities will become increasingly densely inhabited.[5] Therefore open spaces become very important. However, the citizens feel that the government has been too neglectful, and has abandoned these spaces in the city. The city has been developed according to the demands of the automobile, and has pushed pedestrians and cyclist into a marginal position. For this reason initiatives like Cyclo Guerilla and Picnic the Streets stand up to reclaim their rights. Finally, there are still many other (smaller) interstitial places in the city, which have not yet become the subject of a wide public debate. It is exactly this kind of places in the city that for example KYTKAT looks for to organise their get-togethers, as a means of discovering the beauty of Brussels.

railway ------
GGB's & ◇
leverage areas
metro stations ○
case studies ■

1 km

Locations for commoning

4   CORIJN Eric, VLOEBERGHS Eefje, *Brussel! Urban notebooks*, VUB Press, Brussels, 2009, p 265.
5   BURDETT Ricky, SUDJIC Deyan (eds.), *Living in the endless city*, Phaidon, London, 2011, p 10.

3/EPILOGUE: LEARNING LESSONS

Citizens make, each in their own way, parts of the city more 'common'. Places are claimed by different 'communities', which are sometimes very open, sometimes rather exclusive. In the case studies we moved from very spontaneous actions, to more complex, organized initiatives.

Examples of spontaneous actions we saw especially within the first two strategies 'using' and 'appropriating'. In these cases the actors are actually barely aware of the fact that they contribute to commoning. The actions originate from a necessity or arise simply for fun. In a peaceful way, citizens claim parts of the city, and are mostly not prevented to do so (we have hardly seen examples of confrontation with the police).

Within the strategies 'intervening', 'reclaiming' and designing' on the other hand, it is clear that the actors have an underlying agenda. The process often surpasses the actual output. This constitutes an 'intellectual' kind of commoning, as the actors are very aware of the act of commoning. Actors are mostly middleclass citizens, who are rather highly educated, and take up responsibility for the citizens in general. The dialogue with the government is clearly very important. In the context of Brussels we should even speak about governments. The city has been awarded with a very complex administrative structure. This complicated system is often at the basis of disputes and long waiting lists, to the dismay of the citizens. Consequently bottom-up initiatives, take matters into own hands. Several initiatives have achieved concrete results, within a limited timeframe and with little financial means. Therefore they are sometimes supported by the government and even seen as an important tool for the future. However, following Eric Corijn we should be critical: they cannot be considered 'the' solution for the city's problems. They form an answer on the deficiencies of the government, but it remains the responsibility of the government to take care of its citizens.[6] We can relate this with the vision of Peter Linebaugh, who has argued that the law is fundamental in order to protect the commons.[7]

However, it must also be mentioned that so-called 'bottom-up' initiatives are often not only guided by 'regular' city-users. They are often accompanied – or instigated – by people with a professional background regarding such issues. It even happens that projects were initiated by associations in collaboration with the government. This was the case for example with ParckFarm, an initiative of BIM (Brussels Instituut voor Leefmilieu), the public service for environment and energy of the Brussels Region. In the case of Bouwspeelplaats it was start off by youth participation association Yota, a side project of non-profit association JES (Jeugd en Stad). Also the call by philosopher Philippe Van Parijs was first needed to transform the frustration about the Anspachlaan into a picnic movement.

Gerben Van den Abbeele, member of Cyclo Guerilla, Picnic the Streets and Canal Park, previously worked for non-profit associations BRAL (Brusselse Raad voor het Leefmilieu) and Curieus (Progressieve Cultuur Fabriek). This can be related with the fact that many actors of the 'first turn' – protesting against the aggressive urban development policy in the post-war period – such as e.g. BRAL, ARAU and IEB, became more or less part of the institution after the institutionalisation of the Brussels Capital Region in 1989.[8] The people working in the cabinets of the city or sometimes thus the same people who go on the streets to claim them back. The advantage is that these associations receive subsidies from the government.

However Gerben Van den Abbeele prefers an approach without subsidies, as this allows more freedom. Moreover, he believes people should contribute from a personal engagement, and not to earn money.[9] The key for the initiatives remains namely that they only work if people participate. The instigators have the important task to organise everything, but what actually happens on the action depends mainly on the participants. Herein sees Doina Petrescu the difference between 'transversal participation' and 'organised participation'.[10]

6   CORIJN Eric, *Debatavond: Brussel, laboratorium voor creatie en sociale innovatie*, Debate organised by Yamila Idrissi and Rik Baeten, Rits café, Brussels, 19 May 2014.

7   See LINEBAUGH Peter, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and commons for all*, University of California Press, London, 2008, 352 p.

8   VAN CRIEKINGEN Mathieu, 'Brussel: De kloof door de navel van België', *Tiens Tiens*, 19 January 2009, viewed on 14 April 2014, <http://www.tienstiens.org/tt16/p26>

9   Interview with VAN DEN ABBEELE Gerben, Brussels, 15 April 2014.

10   PETRESCU Doina, 'Losing control, keeping desire' in JONES Peter Blundell, PETRESCU Doina, TILL Jeremy (eds.), *Architecture and participation*, Taylor and Francis Group, London, 2005, p 50.

Another 'professional', who is often involved in commoning initiatives, is the architect-designer. It is striking to see how architects seem to love this kind of initiatives. The collectives KYTKAT and Swing in the Cracks for example, consists mainly of architects and designers. Also Gerben Van den Abbeele has a background as interior architect. Obviously also the case studies with 'designing' as strategy – Commons Josaphat and ParckFarm – involve many architects, designers and urban planners.

What is interesting to note is that these initiatives, besides giving personal satisfaction, can also be meaningful and instructive for their professional life. The commoning activity namely forms a real-life testing ground, with the ability of showing the potential of a site. In a relative short time it shows which (spatial) strategies work and don't work in a certain place. Moreover, by working together with the local inhabitants – commoning is a social process – a solid base is formed. This is particularly important for example to combat the ongoing phenomenon of gentrification in the Brussels canal area. The challenge is to revalue the old industrial neighbourhoods, without pushing away the current population. Bottom-up projects have the benefit to originate from the needs of the current inhabitants and thus propose projects on the size of the neighbourhood. *De facto* use of a terrain by the residents can thus offer a reflection of the future situation.

In this sense practices of commoning can offer valuable knowledge to architects and planners, complementary to other tools such as drawings and models. As German publisher and curator Jesko Fezer has argued, the crisis of the neoliberal ideology offers an opportunity to imagine alternative urban practices. There could arise a new design, namely a design for a post-neoliberal city.[11] To a certain extend architects are already using this knowledge, and are putting forward innovative ideas. However, these ideas are often blocked in bureaucracy and regulations. As social geographer Mathieu Van Criekingen puts it, "*their discourse is not getting further than the architecture discourse. They live in their own small world, in which there are no power relations and social battles present*".[12]

In any case, the practices of commoning are very valuable to contribute to the city's development. As Kurt Iveson has argued, such practices have the potential to establish democractic rights to the city.[13] An important facet is that they help to construct and strengthen the social capital of a community, neighbourhood, or city. As we have seen, the commoners compensate their little financial means with a high amount of social and cultural capital.[14] We can link this with Negri and Hardt, who see the common as something, which needs to be produced through collective social practices.[15]

As Christiaan Grootaert already argued in 1998: "*Social capital is recognized as one of the five vital capitals for sustaining people's livelihoods (together with natural, human, physical and financial capital). It is argued that social capital contributes significantly to sustainable development and that without it there can be no human well-being. Social capital is the glue that holds society together*".[16] This social capital becomes particulary important in cities, where populations are becoming more heterogeneous and multi-cultural.[17] Brussels is characterised by an incredible diversity of communities, but every day the city's duality increases more and more.[18] Practices of commoning have the ability to bring all these citizens together and to strenghten the social capital in the city. This is a crucial aspect to keep the focus on the creation of a city, according to the needs of all citizens, to the many different challenges and to – what else – the idea of the commons.

11   FEZER Jesko, 'Design for a Post-Neoliberal City', *E-Flux*, nr. 17, June 2010, viewed on 18 April 2014, < http://www.e-flux.com/issues/17-june-august-2010/>

12   Originally quoted in: VAN CRIEKINGEN Mathieu, 'Brussel: De kloof door de navel van België', *Tiens Tiens*, 19 January 2009, viewed on 14 April 2014, <http://www.tienstiens.org/tt16/p26>

13   IVESON, Kurt, 'Cities within the city: Do-It-Yourself Urbanism and the Right to the City', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 37.3, May 2013, p 954.

14   OSWALT Philipp, OVERMEYER Klaus, MISSELWITZ Philipp, *Urban Catalyst: The power of temporary use*, DOM Publishers, Berlin, 2013, p 55.

15   HARDT Michael, Antonio NEGRI, *Commonwealth, Harvard University Press*, Cambridge, 2009, p 120.

16   GROOTAERT Christiaan, 'Social Capital: The missing link?', *Social Capital Initiative Working Paper*, Nr. 3, Washington, April 1998, Foreword. Quoted in: KONING Juliette, 'Social sustainability in a globalizing world: context, theory and methodology explored' in: VAN RINSUM Henk, DE RUIJTER Arie (eds.), *More on MOST*, National Unesco Commission, The Hague, p 71.

17   HOU Jeffrey, *Insurgent public space: Guerilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities*, Routledge, London, 2010, p 15.

18   INTER-ENVIRONNEMENT, 'Jeunes en ville, Bruxelles à dos? L'appropriation de l'espace urbain bruxellois par des jeunes de différents quartiers', Brussels, 2008, p 7.

IMAGE REFERENCES

p. 184   FACEBOOK, *The Pop-Up City*, 30 May 2014, Viewed on 1 June 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/popupcity.net?fref=ts>

p. 185   FACEBOOK, *Picnic the Streets*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/PicnicTheStreet?fref=ts>

FACEBOOK, *Canal Park Bxl*, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/canal.park.bxl?fref=ts>

FACEBOOK, *O Canto*, Viewed on 30 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/O-CANTO/398286450214735?fref=ts>

REFERENCES

BOOKS

AAA (ed.), *Urban Act: A handbook for alternative practice*, Aaa-peprav, Paris, 2007, 358 p.

AURELI Pier Vittorio, PATTEEUW Véronique, DECLERCK Joachim, TATTARA Martino (eds.), *Brussels: A manifesto: Towards the capital of Europe: A theory on the city*, NAi, Rotterdam, 2007, 239 p.

BURDETT Ricky, SUDJIC Deyan (eds.), *Living in the endless city*, Phaidon, London, 2011, 430 p.

CORIJN Eric, GROTH Jacqueline, 'The need for freezones: Informal actors setting the urban agenda' in: DE CAUTER Lieven, DE ROO Ruben, VANHAESEBROUCK Karel (eds.), *Art and Activism in the age of globalisation*, Nai Publishers, Rotterdam, 2011, pp. 146-159.

CORIJN Eric, VAN DE VEN Jessica (eds.), *The Brussels Reader: A small world city to become the capital of Europe*, VUB Press, Brussels, 2013, 399 p.

CORIJN Eric, VLOEBERGHS Eefje, *Brussel! Urban notebooks*, VUB Press, Brussels, 2009, 312 p.

CUPERS Kenny, MIESSEN Markus, *Spaces of uncertainty*, Verlag Müller und Busmann, Berlin, 2002, 191 p.

DE CAUTER Lieven, DEHAENE Michiel (eds*.), Heterotopia and the city: Public space in a Postcivil Society*, Routledge, London, 2008, 360 p.

DE CAUTER Lieven, *The capsular civilization: On the city in the age of fear*, Nai Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, 200 p.

DE CERTEAU, Michel, *The practice of everyday life*, University of California Press, London, 229 p.

FRANCK Karen, STEVENS Quentin (eds.), *Loose space: Possibility and diversity in urban life*, London, Routledge, 2007, 303 p.

HARDT Michael, Antonio NEGRI, *Commonwealth, Harvard University Press*, Cambridge, 2009, 434 p.

HARVEY David, *Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*, Verso, London, 2012, 187 p.

HOU Jeffrey, *Insurgent public space: Guerilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities*, Routledge, London, 2010, 276 p.

KONING Juliette, 'Social sustainability in a globalizing world: context, theory and methodology explored' in: VAN RINSUM Henk, DE RUIJTER Arie (eds.), *More on MOST*, National Unesco Commission, The Hague, pp. 63-89.

LINEBAUGH Peter, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and commons for all*, University of California Press, London, 2008, 352 p.

LOW Setha, SMITH Neil, *The politics of public space, Routledge*, New York, 2006, 185 p.

MARX, Karl, *Capital: A critical analysis of capitalist production (Vol. 1 and 2)*, Wordsworth Editors, Hertfordshire, 2013, 1136 p.

MITCHELL Don, *The right to the city: Social justice and the fight for public space*, The Guilford press, New York, 2012, 270 p.

OSWALT Philipp, OVERMEYER Klaus, MISSELWITZ Philipp, *Urban Catalyst: The power of temporary use*, DOM Publishers, Berlin, 2013, 384 p.

PETRESCU Doina, 'Losing control, keeping desire', pp. 43-63 in JONES Peter Blundell, PETRESCU Doina, TILL Jeremy (eds.), *Architecture and participation*, Taylor and Francis Group, London, 2005, 304 p.

ROBBERECHTS Catherine, ALKINS Ted (eds.), *Cahier #3: Open baarheid: Over publieke planning en restruimte*, Team Vlaams Bouwmeester, Brussel, 2010, 269 p.

SHEPARD Benjamin, HAYDUK Ronald (eds.), *From Act Up to the WTO: Urban protest and community building in the era of globalisation*, Verso, London, 2002, 429 p.

ARTICLES

'Activisten leggen fietspad aan op Poincarélaan', *Brusselnieuws*, 15 April 2013, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/activisten-leggen-fietspad-aan-op-poincarelaan>

'Anspachlaan elke zondag in de zomer autovrij', *Brusselnieuws*, 15 June 2012, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/anspachlaan-elke-zondag-de-zomer-autovrij>

BARKER Chris, PEUYO Manual, 'A public space hacking manifesto', *Blog: Open Kitchen*, 8 November 2013, viewed on 9 May 2014, <http://open-kitchen.eu/the-ill-blame-cure-swing-cracks/>

BELGA, 'Fietsers schilderen zelf fietspad op de brug van Kuregem', *DeMorgen.be*, 20 June 2013, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.demorgen.be/dm/nl/989/Binnenland/article/detail/1655700/2013/06/20/Fietsers-schilderen-zelf-fietspad-op-Brug-van-Kuregem.dhtml>

BELGA, 'Flageyplein wil zelf uitzicht bepalen', *De Standaard*, 9 August 2003, viewed on 10 April 2014, <http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dexr09082003_009>

BELGA, 'Jeugdraad roept op om massaal GAS-wet te overtreden', *De Standaard*, 1 April 2014, viewed on 8 April 2014, <URL: http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20140401_01049923>

BELGA, 'Picnic the Streets in Elsene en Molenbeek', *De Redactie*, 15 September 2013, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/regio/brussel/1.1730040>

BERNARD Nicolas, ZIMMER Pol, SURKIN Johan, 'Housing, control over land use and public space', *Brussels Studies*, Synopsis nr. 6, January 2009, 12 p.

'Bouwspeelplaats op Thurn & Taxis', *Brusselnieuws*, 21 July 2007, viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/bouwspeelplaats-op-thurn-taxis-2>

'Buurtbewoners gaan Ninoofsepoort opruimen', *Brusselnieuws*, 7 December 2013, Viewed on 13 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/buurtbewoners-gaan-ninoofsepoort-opruimen>

'Buurt over Ninoofsepoort: Geef ons een park van minstens vier hectare', *Brusselnieuws*, 26 April 2012, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/buurt-over-ninoofsepoort-geef-ons-een-park-van-minstens-vier-hectare>

COOLS Stijn, 'Invasie Europa overspoelt Brusselse wijken', *De Standaard*, 27 January 2014, viewed on 14 April 2014, <http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20140126_00948103>

COUDRON Yves, 'Nieuwe bomen voor 'park' aan Ninoofsepoort', *Nieuwsblad*, 22 March 2014, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <http://www.nieuwsblad.be/article/detail.aspx?articleid=dmf20140321_01035278&_section=61607204&utm_source=nieuwsblad&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_campaign=regio-nb&M_BT=664732750988>

CUYVERS Wim, 'Musea voor actuele kunst, van het bordeel via school naar Ikea', *De Witte Raaf*, nr. 128, July – August 2007, viewed on 4 April 2014, < http://www.dewitteraaf.be/artikel/detail/nl/3206>

DEBOOSERE Patrick, EGGERICKX Thierry, VAN HECKE Etienne, WAYENS Benjamin, 'The population of Brussels: A demographic overview', *Brussels Studies*, Synopsis nr. 3, March 2009, 20 p.

DE ANGELIS Massimo, 'Reflections on alternatives, commons and communities or building a new world from the bottom up', *The Commoner*, nr. 6, Winter 2003, viewed on 18 April 2014, < http://www.commoner.org.uk/deangelis06.pdf>

DE CAUTER Lieven, 'Common Places: Preliminary notes on the (spatial) commons', *Weblog De Wereld Morgen: Lessons in Urgency*, October 2013, viewed on 12 April 2014, <http://community.dewereldmorgen.be/blogs/lievendecauter/2013/10/14/common-places-preliminary-notes-spatial-commons>

DE CAUTER Lieven, 'Van Hotel Central tot Picnic the Streets: Klein panorama van het stadsactivisme in Brussel', *De Wereld Morgen: Lessons in Urgency,* 25 March 2014, viewed on 10 April 2013, <http://community.dewereldmorgen.be/blog/lievendecauter/2014/03/25/van-hotel-central-tot-picnic-the-streets-klein-panorama-van-het-stadsactivisme-in-brussel>

DEGREEF Christophe, 'Picnic the Streets aan Ninoofsepoort', *Brusselnieuws*, 26 June 2013, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/picnic-streets-aan-ninoofsepoort>

DEGREEF Christophe, VILEYN Danny, 'De bevolkingsboom: het wordt (misschien) dringen', *Brusselnieuws*, 25 April 2012, viewed on 14 April 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/de-bevolkingsboom-het-wordt-misschien-dringen>

DEGLUME Pauline, 'Les B-boys de la gare du Nord', *DH-net*, 8 December 2011, viewed on 8 May 2014, <http://www.dhnet.be/regions/bruxelles/les-b-boys-de-la-gare-du-nord-51b76ed3e4b0de6db97c4feb>

DE LA BOULAYE Pauline, 'Bruxelles, en friches bienceillantes', *Stradda Magazine*, nr. 31, April 2014, p 49.

DE SMET Aurelie, 'Temporary use of voids in urban redevelopment: Bouwspeelplaats Yota', *Temorary Bxl Blogspot*, 19 December 2011, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://temporarybxl.blogspot.be/2011/12/bouwspeelplaats-yota.html>

EERDEKENS Eddy, NOLF Jan, 'Top 100 van de absurdste GAS-boetes: een klucht zonder weerga, *Knack*, 21 December 2013, viewed on 8 April 2014, <http://www.knack.be/nieuws/belgie/top-100-van-de-absurdste-gas-boetes-een-klucht-zonder-weerga/article-opinion-120656.html>

FEDERICI Silvia, 'Feminism and the politics of the Commons', *The Commoner*, January 2011, viewed on 18 April 2014, <http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=113>

FEZER Jesko, 'Design for a Post-Neoliberal City', *E-Flux*, nr. 17, June 2010, viewed on 18 April 2014, < http://www.e-flux.com/issues/17-june-august-2010/>

GOODYEAR Sarah, 'Are guerrilla bike lanes a good idea?', *Citylab*, 25 September 2013, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.theatlanticcities.com/commute/2013/09/will-guerrilla-bike-lane-lead-real-thing/7019/>

GRAHAM Michael, 'Guerilla DIY bike lane created by Guadalajara citizens', *Treehugger*, 13 January 2011, Viewed on 10 May 2014, < http://www.treehugger.com/bikes/guerilla-diy-bike-lane-created-by-guadalajara-citizens-video.html>

HARDIN Gerrit, 'The Tragedy of the commons', *Science*, Vol. 162, No. 3859, December 1968, pp. 1243-1248.

HUBO Bettina, 'Architect Ward Verbakel: Picnic the Streets was hoogtepunt van 2012', *Brusselnieuws*, 3 January 2013, viewed on 10 April 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/architect-ward-verbakel-picnic-streets-was-hoogtepunt-van-2012>

IVESON, Kurt, 'Cities within the city: Do-It-Yourself Urbanism and the Right to the City', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 37.3, May 2013, pp. 941-956.

LENNA Verena, 'Commons Josaphat: An episode of political urbanism in Brussels', *Commons Blog*, 29 October 2013, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://commonsblog.wordpress.com/2013/10/29/commons-josaphat-an-episode-of-political-urbanism-in-brussels/>

'Liga voor mensenrechten: GAS schenden scheiding der machten', *Brusselnieuws*, 28 November 2014, viewed on 21 April 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/liga-voor-mensenrechten-gas-schenden-scheiding-der-machten>

LLESHI Bleri, 'Criminaliteit in Brussel: perceptie en werkelijkheid', *Knack*, viewed 9 January 2014, <viewed 10 February 2014, < http://www.knack.be/nieuws/belgie/criminaliteit-in-brussel-perceptie-en-werkelijkheid/article-opinion-123240.html>

'Mayeur: Zonder parkeerlus geen voetgangerszone', *Brusselnieuws*, 5 May 2014, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/mayeur-zonder-parkeerlus-geen-voetgangerszone>

'Michel Desvigne tekent park Thurn & Taxis', *Brusselnieuws*, 7 October 2010, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/michel-desvigne-tekent-park-thurn-taxis>

MUSHAMALIRWA Lydie, 'Freestyle au dessus des rails bruxellois', *Focus Le Vif*, 7 December 2011, viewed on 7 May 2014, <http://focus.levif.be/culture/musique/freestyle-au-dessus-des-rails-bruxellois-video/article-normal-509.html>

'Nieuwe picknick op Beursplein op 8 Juni', *Brusselnieuws*, 5 May 2014, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/nieuwe-picknick-op-beursplein-op-8-juni>

'On the Commons: A public interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides', *An Architektur*, nr. 23, June – August 2010, viewed on 10 April 2014, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-the-commons-a-public-interview-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/>

'Paar honderden mensen ijveren voor heraanleg Schumanplein', *Brusselnieuws*, 17 May 2014, Viewed on 23 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/paar-honderd-mensen-ijveren-voor-heraanleg-schumanplein>

'Picknick breidt uit naar Luik en Namen', *Brusselnieuws*, 14 June 2012, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/picknick-breidt-uit-naar-luik-en-namen>

'Picnic the Streets: Kom buiten toegestane uren', *Brusselnieuws*, 3 September 2012, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/picnic-streets-kom-buiten-toegestane-uren>

'Picnic the Streets lanceert app Fix My City', *Brusselnieuws*, 4 June 2013, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/pic-nic-streets-lanceert-app-fix-my-city>

'Protestpicknick zondag afgelast: Alle partijen willen autovrij beursplein', *Brusselnieuws*, 5 October 2012, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/protestpicknick-zondag-afgelast-alle-partijen-willen-autovrij-beursplein>

RENARD Han, ZUALLAERT Jeroen, 'De paradoxen van de hoofdstad', *Knack*, nr. 16, April 2014, pp. 26-32.

'Stad laat picknick toe: In de lijn van ons beleid', *Brusselnieuws*, 6 June 2012, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/stad-laat-picknick-toe-de-lijn-van-ons-beleid>

'Studenten HUB picnicken voor autovrije Warmoesberg', *Brusselnieuws*, 12 May 2014, Viewed on 23 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/studenten-hub-picnicken-voor-autovrije-warmoesberg>

TELEMANS Dieter, 'Molenbeek, de social-economische toekomst van Brussel', *De Tijd*, 12 April 2014 , viewed 12 April 2014, <http://www.tijd.be/nieuws/politiek_economie_belgie/Molenbeek_de_sociaal_economische_toekomst_van_Brussel.9489253-3139.art>

VAN CRIEKINGEN Mathieu, 'What is happening to Brussels' inner-city neighbourhoods? Selective migration from areas undergoing gentrification', *Brussels Studies*, Issue 1, December 2006, 21 p.

VAN CRIEKINGEN Mathieu, 'Brussel: De kloof door de navel van België', *Tiens Tiens*, 19 January 2009, viewed on 14 April 2014, <http://www.tienstiens.org/tt16/p26>

VAN DEN BLINK Daphné, 'Cyclo guerrilla in Brussel', *Blog: De Wereld Morgen*, 13 April 2013, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.dewereldmorgen.be/foto/2013/04/13/cyclo-guerilla-in-brussel>

VAN HACHT Charlotte, 'Architecten overdag, guerillakunstenaars 's nachts', *De Morgen*, 28 May 2014, p 8.

VAN PARIJS Philippe, 'Onleefbare stad? Philippe Van Parijs roept op tot ongehoorzaamheid', *Brusselnieuws*, 24 May 2012, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/onleefbare-stad-philippe-van-parijs-roept-op-tot-ongehoorzaamheid>

VERMEERSCH Laurent, 'Parking 58: Geen publiek dak en 250 extra parkeerplaatsen', *Brusselnieuws*, 7 March 2013, viewed on 5 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/parking-58-geen-publiek-dak-en-250-extra-parkeerplaatsen>

VERMEERSCH Laurent, 'Onbekenden verspreiden valse plannen Parking 58', 25 September 2012, viewed on 5 May 2014, < http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/onbekenden-verspreiden-valse-plannen-parking-58>

VERMEERSCH Laurent, 'Stad verwijdert 'nutteloos' guerrillafietsstrookje aan Beurs', *Brusselnieuws*, 16 October 2013, viewed on 14 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/stad-verwijdert-nutteloos-guerrillafietsstrookje-aan-beurs>

VERMEERSCH Laurent, 'To picnic or not to picnic', *Blog: The City Geek*, 15 May 2014, Viewed on 17 May 2014, <http://thecitygeek.tumblr.com>

VERMEERSCH Laurent, HENDRICKX Kris, 'Ruim 2000 protestpicknickers op Anspachlaan', *Brusselnieuws*, 10 June 2012, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/ruim-2000-protestpicknickers-op-anspachlaan-beelden>

VERSTRAETE Alexander, HUYGHEBAERT Pieterjan, 'Beursplein in Brussel wordt verkeersvrij', *De Redactie*, 31 January 2014, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://www.deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/regio/brussel/1.1855225>

VON OSTEN Marion, 'Editorial – In search of the Postcapitalist self', *E-Flux*, nr. 17, June 2010, viewed on 18 April 2014, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/editorial—"in-search-of-the-postcapitalist-self"/>

WINCKELMANS Wim, 'Wachtlijst voor sociale woning piekt', *De Standaard*, 17 November 2012, viewed on 21 April 2014, <http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20121116_00371777>

RESEARCH & THESES

BISA, 'De conjunctuurbarometer van het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest nr. 19: Armoede in Brussel: vaststellingen en evoluties', January 2011, viewed on 21 April 2014, <http://www.bisa.irisnet.be/bestanden/publicaties/dossiers-van-de-conjunctuurbarometer/BD19_armoede_in_Brussel_vaststellingen_en_evoluties.pdf>

DE MEULDER Bruno, RYCKEWAERT Michael, 'De alledaagse ruimte van armoede en uitsluiting in het stadslandschap: Onderzoek naar de ruimtelijke dimensie van armoede en de architectonische invulling van minimumgrenzen voor een kwaliteitsvol leven', Final Report OSA Research, KU Leuven, Leuven, 2002, 97 p.

GEIB Jonathan, *The challenge of urban activism in the new neoliberal context*, Master thesis, KU Leuven, Leuven, 2013, 124 p.

INTER-ENVIRONNEMENT, 'Jeunes en ville, Bruxelles à dos? L'appropriation de l'espace urban bruxellois par des jeunes de différents quartiers', Brussels, 2008, 72 p.

MINTON Anna, 'What kind of world are we building? The privatisation of public space', RICS, London, 2006, 38 p.

USE IT, 'Marokkaanse jongeren in Molenbeek: Hun gebruik van de ruimte in het Brussels hoofdstedelijk gewest', Brussels, 2011, 57 p.

WEBSITES

AAA, *Urban Tactics*, viewed on 10 april 2014, <http://www.urbantactics.org/home.html>

ACTIRIS, 'Statistieken van de Brusselse arbeidsmarkt', 2013, viewed on 21 April 2014, <http://www.actiris.be/marchemp/tabid/211/language/nl-BE/Statistieken-van-de-Brusselse-arbeidsmarkt.aspx>

ADT ATO, *Josaphat: Gemengde wijk*, Viewed on 15 may 2014, <http://www.adt-ato.be/nl/strategische-zones/josaphat>

ADT ATO, *Josaphat: Goedkeuring van het project*, 28 March 2014, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://www.adt-ato.be/nl/news/josaphat/goedkeuring-van-het-project>

AHIDAR Fuad, *Leegstand Brussel*, viewed on 21 April 2013, <http://www.leegstandbrussel.be/actie/Bienvenue_3.html>

ARCHITECTURE WORKROOM BRUSSELS, *Garden Parckdesign 2012*, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://www.architectureworkroom.eu/en/work/g_a_r_d_e_n_parckdesign_2012/>

BIM, *Festival Parckdesign 2014 in Thurn & Taxis*, 4 April 2014, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://www.leefmilieubrussel.be/Templates/news.aspx?id=39998&langtype=2067>

BIM, *Groen Brussel*, Viewed on 22 May 2014, <http://geoportal.ibgebim.be/webmap/groene_brussel.phtml?langtype=2067>

BISA, *Bevolking: leeftijdsstructuur*, 2013, viewed on 21 April 2014, <http://www.bisa.irisnet.be/themas/bevolking/bevolking#.U1Unm9wxHlI>

BISA, *Sint-Jans-Molenbeek*, viewed on 21 April 2014, <http://www.bisa.irisnet.be/bestanden/publicaties/bru19/St-Jans-Molenbeek.pdf>

BRAL, *Tijdelijk gebruik in volle actie*, 13 July 2007, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.bralvzw.be/fr/node/345>

BRAL, *Tour & Taxis: Toujours pas de grand parc urbain en vue*, 29 August 2013, viewed on 15 April 2014, <http://bralvzw.be/tour-taxis-toujours-pas-de-grand-parc-urbain-en-vue>

CITY MINED, *Forty frequently unanswered questions*, viewed on 13 May 2014, <http://www.citymined.org>

COLLECTIVE DISASTER, *Collective Disaster*, viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://collectivedisaster.tumblr.com>

COMMONS JOSAPHAT, Viewed on 15 May 2014, < http://commonsjosaphat.wordpress.com>

CUPERS Kenny, MIESSEN Markus, *Spaces of uncertainty: extracts of the exhibition and publication*, March 2006, viewed on 10 April 2014, <http://edit-revue.com/docs/EDIT_100E.pdf>

FACEBOOK, *Bxl Swing in the Cracks*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/BXLswingsinthe-cracks?fref=ts>

FACEBOOK, *Canal Park Bxl*, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/canal.park.bxl?fref=ts>

FACEBOOK, *Common grounds: Action Class*, 3 March 2014, viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/commongroundsbrussels?fref=ts>

FACEBOOK, *Cyclo guerilla*, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/cyclo.guerilla.bxl?fref=ts>

FACEBOOK, *Le Chapitre Zero*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/lechapitrezero?fref=ts>

FACEBOOK, *Marché Vélo*, 9 October 2013, viewed on 10 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/events/165706866959703/>

FACEBOOK, *Parckdesign*, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/Parckdesign?fref=ts>

FACEBOOK, *Picnic the Streets*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/PicnicTheStreet?fref=ts>

FACEBOOK, *O Canto*, Viewed on 30 May 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/O-CANTO/398286450214735?fref=ts>

FIETSERSBOND, *Oproep: Steun het plan voor de Buyllaan en de Generaal Jacqueslaan*, viewed on 9 May 2014, <http://www.fietsersbond.be/brusselsgewest/nieuws/buyljacques>

GROWFUNDING BXL, *Geef jezelf een fietspad cadeau*, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <https://www.growfunding.be/bxl/geef-jezelf-een-fietspad-cadeau>

GROWFUNDING BXL, *Koop een pop up park in de Brusselse Kanaalzone*, viewed on 7 April 2014, <https://www.growfunding.be/bxl/canalpark>

IEB, *Zones leviers et Zones d'intérêt regional (ZIR)*, Viewedon 10 May 2014, <http://www.ieb.be/IMG/pdf/depliant_zonesleviers-zir-2.pdf>

INHABITAT, *Guerilla designers upgrade Parisian streets with pop-up furniture made from trash*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <http://inhabitat.com/guerrilla-designers-attack-parisian-streets-with-pop-up-furniture-made-from-trash-photos/duccio-maria-gambi-nocturnal-guerrilla-furniture-paris-12/>

JES, *Kinderen en jongeren creëren ruimte in Brussel*, Viewed on 8 May 2014, <http://www.jes.be/nieuwsbrief/yota/yotaNB_10_08.php#art1>

KYTKAT, viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://kytkat2012.tumblr.com>

PARCKDESIGN, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://www.parckdesign.be/fr>

PARK 58, *Une utopie urbaine pour une réappropriation citoyenne*, viewed on 5 May 2014, <http://www.park58.be>

SHHT, *The magazine of untold architecture*, Viewed on 11 May 2014, <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/shht-international-network-of-culture>

USE-IT, *Tourist info for young people: Brussels*, viewed on 5 May 2014, <http://www.use-it.be/brussels/map/>

VERMEERSCH Laurent, *Parking 58: Beloved urban fiasco*, Blog: The City Geek, 2 April 2013, viewed on 5 May 2014. < http://thecitygeek.tumblr.com/post/46964147650/parking-58-beloved-urban-fiasco>

Wat zijn GAS, Gemeentelijke administratieve sancties, viewed on 8 April 2014, <http://www.gasboetes.be/>

WIKIPEDIA, *Station Evere*, Viewed on 15 May 2014, <http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Station_Evere>

WORLDPRESS: THE CITY SPACE, *Guerila Urbanism: Vandalism or Activism?*, August 2013, viewed on 24 April 2014, <http://thecityspace.wordpress.com/2013/08/12/guerrilla-urbanism-vandalism-or-activism/>

ZENNE, *Intervention Zenne Square*, 25 January 2014, viewed on 9 May 2014, <http://www.zsenne.be/artists/artists-2014/119-bxl-swings-the-cracks/225-bxl-swings-the-cracks>

VIDEO

'Brusselse plannen zijn onhaalbaar en onrealistisch', Video, *De Redactie*, 3 February 2014, Viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/regio/brussel/2.31776?eid=1.1859339>

'Buurtbewoners voeren actie aan de Ninoofsepoort: 'Een park is niet zo duur', Video, *Brusselnieuws*, 13 January 2014, Viewed on 9 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/video/tvbrussel/buurtbewoners-voeren-actie-aan-ninoofsepoort-een-park-niet-zo-duur>

'Bxl Swing in the cracks', Video, *Vimeo*, January 2014, viewed on 9 May 2014, <http://vimeo.com/79611629>

'De dans van Yassin', Video, *De Redactie: Koppen*, 1 May 2014, Viewed on 2 May 2014, <http://www.deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/videozone/programmas/koppen/EP_140501_Koppen?video=1.1955609>

'Geen fietspad? Doe het zelf', Video, *Brusselnieuws*, 21 June 2013, viewed on 10 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/nieuws/geen-fietspad-doe-het-zelf>

'Ninoofsepoort: Wanneer komt nu eindelijk dat park?', Video, *Brusselnieuws*, 6 January 2014, Viewed on 12 May 2014, <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/nl/video/tvbrussel/ninoofsepoort-wanneer-komt-nu-eindelijk-dat-park>

LECTURES/DEBATES

Debatavond: Brussel, laboratorium voor creatie en sociale innovatie, Debate organised by Yamila Idrissi and Rik Baeten, Rits café, Brussels, 19 May 2014.

The pop-up city live in Brussels: Various urban initiatives live on stage, Hosted by Jeroen Beekman and Joop de Boer of The Pop-Up City, Beursschouwburg, Brussels, 28 May 2014.

INTERVIEWS

LENNA Verena, Leuven, 5 May 2014.

STEINBRÜCK Paul, NAUWELAERTS Lien, Brussels, 10 April 2014.

VAN DEN ABBEELE Gerben, Brussels, 15 April 2014.

APPENDIX

1/INTERVIEW PAUL STEINBRUCK & LIEN NAUWELAERTS 10TH APRIL 2014, BARBETON, BRUSSELS

On its Facebook page КУТКАТ *describes its activities as following: "КУТКАТ in 2012 was watching the EURO2012 under the Brussels blue sky, for free and at different amazing places around the city. КУТКАТ will be back for the World Cup 2014!" A concise but perfect summary of a great initiative. When I contacted Paul for a talk about the activities of* КУТКАТ*, he was surprised but also excited: "Waw, now* КУТКАТ *is already the subject of a research, fantastic to hear"! We met in the bar 'Barbeton' in Brussels, together with his girlfriend Lien. Together they are the main organizers of* КУТКАТ*.*

How did КУТКАТ come to life?

Paul: I lived in Dresden till 2007, and similar initiatives were already being organised there. The difference with КУТКАТ was that the events were always on the same spots in the city, on 3 or 4 fixed locations, mostly parks or squares. In 2008 I moved to Brussels. In 2010 there was the World Cup in South-Africa. At that time I lived on the first floor of a house on the corner in front of 'les Halles' at Sint-Gorix. I put my coaches on the sidewalk of the corner, and my television, connected with a cable inside. I invited some friends, we were about ten I think, but during the games often passersby joined us to watch the game, so we could easily end up with a group of twenty people.

Lien: Two policemen walked by, but they didn't say anything, they just checked the game for some minutes to see what the score was. For EURO2012 we had, together with some friends, the idea to organise something similar, on different locations in Brussels.

Where does the name КУТКАТ come from?

Paul: During the World Cup of 2010, I called the events 'Ecke', which means 'corner' in German, as we watched it on the corner of the street. Moreover, 'Ecke' also means the corner kick in football terms. Hence the logo of КУТКАТ with the field corner. EURO2012 was being organised in Poland and Ukraine. 'Kyt' means corner in Ukrainian and 'kat' mean corner in Polish, therefore: 'КУТКАТ' . You can see in our logo that the K and the У have a bit a different shape, that is because in Ukraine they use the Cyrillic alphabet. In the same logic, the events for the World Cup 2014 will be named 'O Canto', meaning corner in Portuguese.

How did you choose the different locations for watching EURO2012?

Lien: Well, in advance we went looking for nice spots in Brussels, by bike and on Google Maps. It was really interesting, because then you start looking at places with a different view. Places that normally you would never think about. For us it is a way to discover Brussels.

Paul: We choose locations based on practical considerations on the one hand. For example the place should be large enough, it must be possible to transport the generator to the location, and the place should be remote enough not to disturb people with noise. On the other hand we also choose places based on their atmosphere. We select nice locations that people don't know yet, because it is more exciting, and you get to know Brussels in that way. Brussels is a convenient place to do this, it allows this kind of events easily. The city is not so strictly organised, you have some places that are very strict, but in between you have also a lot of places which are messy, or undefined, that fall in between all the rest, also in the city center. In a city as Antwerp for example it would be more difficult I think. Maybe you could organise something near the harbour or at Linkeroever, but in the city center would be difficult, because everything is very defined and neat there.

Why football?

Paul: Football is ideal as an activity because it is completely apolitical and acultural. Nobody can be really 'against' it, and for this reason you can reach many different people.

Lien: We already thought about organising movie nights or music concerts, but that would not have the same effect. Some people could like or dislike the movie or the band, and people would have to be quiet to listen to it, and we don't want this. Football is perfect for it: you can watch it everywhere and with everyone.

Is there a certain protest behind the events or is it just for fun?

Lien: КУТКАТ doesn't has a political agenda, we are really an apolitical group. Sometimes that is even hard to maintain. For example something very banal as flyers. In which language do you give the information? In Dutch? In French? We thought English was the most neutral, because everyone understands it, but actually that is not true. And if you put the information in three languages it seems immediately as if you want to organize something huge… So we have to think carefully how to stay as neutral as possible.

Paul: But maybe, the only statement we want to make is one against the strong commercialisation of the public space. More and more you have for example private traders who would organise an event to watch football on a big screen on a square, with the intention to make money. They sell drinks and food, so it becomes something commercial. This kind of events make public spaces, like a square, less public, they become private for one evening. We don't have the intention to make money by organizing these events. In 2012 we rented a generator, so we asked people to donate 1 or 2 Euro, just to cover our costs. What just want to get the people out of their houses and to show them the many fantastic places that exist in Brussels, sometimes even not far away from their house. We want to open their eyes. Many inhabitants of Brussels are migrants, they just live here since some years, just like us, so they don't know the city very well, that is why we want to show them

these places. Actually КУТКАТ is not really about football, that is not the most important thing, it is about getting people together in the public space.

How do you organise the events?

Paul: Our core group consisted initially of 5 people, and this year we are with 8 people. We come regularly together, every month more or less. Most of the time not everyone is there, but that is not a problem. As long as we keep talking about it, or sending ideas to each other. КУТКАТ is a democratic organisation. Everyone has the chance to give his or her opinion. We decide everything on the meetings or via email. The weeks before the UEFA or FIFA football matches start, we meet more often to organise everything. This year our deadline is first of June, because on that day there is a friendly foodball match between Sweden and Belgium. During that game we will test all our material. This year we bought a generator, so we have to make sure everything functions.

Lien: Within this group of 8, we try to devide the tasks, to make sure that not one person has to do everything, because that can sometimes be tough during the UEFA weeks. For example we have to look again for possible locations. We don't want to use the same ones as previous time, so we have to find new ones.

Paul: Then there is basically the hardware and the software that needs to be organised. The hardware consists basically of the television set and the generator. So somebody has to arrange the transport to get this hardware at the location. The software consists of the Facebook page and the blog, which needs to be maintained and updated regularly. Also there is someone who makes a graphic design for the flyers and makes sure that they get spread throughout Brussels. Finally we also have to make sure that everything is cleaned after the game. We bring garbage bags, to make sure the place looks the same as before when we leave. But actually we don't have a lot of problems with this, it has always been a quick clean-up.

Lien: Some years ago almost every Sunday during summer there was 'piknik electronik' in different parks in Brussels. They had a lot of problems with

rubbish in the parks. But those events were much bigger than ours, it was more like a festival. We don't want to do something like that. For example we don't want to promise to bring drinks and food, but we ask people to bring something themselves. Because otherwise you create expectations among the people who participate, and it easily gets something commercial. We think to make cocktails sometimes this year. But that would be something extra, and only if we have time to do it. It should not become something fixed.

Did you ever have trouble with the police?

Lien: With the police we never got into trouble. When we were watching the finals of EURO2012 on a empty plot close to the north station a guard came to ask us what we were doing there. When we told him we were watching football it wasn't a problem, he even watched a part of the game with us. The only time that we were 'chaised' away was when we were watching in a hangar along the canal, that was one of our few rain-locations, so we were there for the third time. But at that time some people were setting up things for 'Brussel Bad', and we had to leave. So suddenly this public place was privatised for a certain period, very strange.

Paul: Once there was also a problem at the Congres Station. That night there was a vernissage going on in the same place as we wanted to watch the games. We didn't think that was a problem, but they came to ask us if we could go somewhere else, they were scared that the visitors would confuse us with art, or something... At the end we went sitting a bit further away, on the concrete staircase, and actually that was a great location. It was like an amphitheatre, with wide covered ramps. It was one of our best rain-locations.

How many people attend the events?

Paul: Actually we don't have a clear idea about that. The locations were we go are always spacious enough. The only limit is the size of the tv-screen. On a little screen like that it is hard to watch with 200 people. The number of people fluctuated a lot during those four weeks. In the beginning, or when it was not an important game, we were sometimes with 5 to 10 people.

Lien: Then everybody was really watching the game. But when it was good weather or an important game, we could reach 70 to 80 people, for example at the finals. But then maybe only half of the people were actually watching the games. At those moments it becomes more a meeting event.

How important do you estimate the use of social media for КУТКАТ? Would it be possible without them?

Paul: Yes, I think it would be possible. The events in Dresden for example were still organised via email. Yet, Facebook does has a lot of advantages. The good thing about it is that you can easily keep people updated. We only reveal the location around noon on the day of the game. We want to keep it exciting. Moreover, we have to watch the weather, so we have different options for that day, dependent on the weather.

Lien: Also the day after the game we put the pictures immediately online, and very often the pictures are really nice, so people go to the page to have a look at it. Via email you could not do this. Furthermore, you can reach people you don't know at all, but who come across КУТКАТ via other friends. And you don't need everyone's email address. The good thing about the Facebook page and blog is that it remains there after the events so people can still have a look at it. In 2013 for example we almost didn't hear anything about it, we just occassionly posted something every six months or so, just to keep it a bit alive. And people do remember it, many people are already asking us if КУТКАТ will be back this year.

Paul: On the Facebook page we can see some statistics, and it is funny to note that the followers are more or less 50/50 male and female, despite of the fact that it concerns football games.

Are you aware that the event still always remains somehow exclusive?

Lien: It is true that we attract a certain group of people, mostly flemish architects actually. But it is difficult to avoid this. We are open for everyone, but it is logic that we mostly reach the people from our own circle of friends and environment. We

have our own way of making publicity for it and that only attracts a limited group. But we also don't want it to get too big, we couldn't handle that.

You are both architects. Do you think the activities of КУТКАТ **are somehow linked to this?**

Paul: Half or even more of our core group is architect or has a background in designing. We have one graphic designer and someone who works at 'Namahn', which is an agency for human centered design in Brussels. Actually there's only one guy who works really out of the design field. I don't think that is a coincidence. It has to do with the way in which you look at space. Also the people who come to the event are for a large part architects, partly because many of them are our friends of course.

Lien: We don't have the intention to change the spaces where we go. But we do try to improve the infrastructure of the invent. For example the graphic designer in our group makes the flyers in a way he likes. And – while last year we used a small car to transport the generator – this year we are looking for a cargo bike, on which we could install everything in a proper way. It would be nice if we could just cycle to the location with everything already installed. Compared to our table on trestles of last year, which was quite amateurish it would be a great improvement. In those small things you can notice our background as designers.

Do you think the architecture discipline can learn something from these spontaneous events?

Paul: Yes, I do think so. In that way citizens can for example show which spaces they like to use and way, or the ways in which they like to use them.

Is КУТКАТ connected with other Brussels collectives?

Lien: No, we actually work alone. Maybe it sounds a bit poshy, but we don't feel the need to collaborate with those other groups. Also because what we do is really something different, compared to for example Parckdesign or Picnic the streets. We don't have an underlying agenda.

Paul: I know some people who are in these kind of organisations, but we don't necessarily work together with them. I think these kind of initiatives are very interesting and usefull, but it is not what КУТКАТ is. Actually КУТКАТ is a lazy organisation. We want as much effect as possible for as little effort as possible.

2 / INTERVIEW GERBEN VAN DEN ABBEELE
15TH APRIL 2014, BARBETON, BRUSSELS

During my research one name constantly came up, namely Gerben Van den Abbeele. Picnic the Streets, Canal Park, Cyclo Guerilla, City Mine(d): It seems as if he is part of all the important 'commoning' initiatives taking place in Brussels. This is clearly a Brussels' citizen with great engagement for his city and its public space. He seems thus the suitable person for a conversation about these different projects, and about commoning in Brussels.

Picnic the streets, Cyclo guerilla, Canal Park, and earlier City Mine(d): You are part of many initiatives in Brussels. Does this emanate from your professional life or from a personal concern?

Well, I would call it a personal engagement instead of a concern actually. As a student I studied interior architecture at Sint-Lucas, and quite soon I discovered that this wasn't really something for me. Then, about twenty years ago, I got involved in some projects, at that time about vacant buildings in the city, and since then I've always been occupied with projects around public space. What I started doing as a profession later was a consequence of this. For a while I worked for BRAL, the 'Brusselse Raad voor het Leefmilieu'. Later I founded 'Cyclo', a bike atelier, comparable with 'Villo!'. The difference is that with Cyclo we are more occupied with the action of cycling itself. The first occupation of the Beurs Square, in 2000, as a precedent of the current Picnic movement, originated actually from Cyclo, in collaboration with BRAL. It was called 'Street Sharing' at that time. We wanted to point at the fact that it is incomprehensible that the car was that dominant in the city center that you could just drive your car to the 'Grote Markt'. Since 2009 I'm doing a lot of different things at the same time, always related to public space. Currently I am even busier with all these different projects, and less with my 'real' job.

Could we say that these 'guerrilla' practices have now become your job?

Yes, it is my job. The only problem is that I don't make money with this job… (laughs). That is why I have to look for something else as well. I always try to find an additional job that is related to these activities, although that is not always easy. Currently, I am looking for a new job, as the subsidies for the project I worked for ('Curieus') got cancelled. This means I am temporary unemployed, but I assume that won't take too long. At this moment I have plenty of time to work on my other projects.

Are the different initiatives you are part of interconnected or individual entities?

They are individual groups, but of course some links exist between them. You regularly meet the same people or people you already know. Also, some projects are the consequence of others. 'Canal Park' for example is actually a spin-off of 'Picnic the Streets'. In September 2013 we organized a picnic at the Ninoofsepoort and at the same time at the Elsensesteenweg. During the picnic at Ninoofsepoort the demand came up about the park, something that has been promised for a very long time. In collaboration with the local inhabitants committee, we decided to create a small park ourselves. You see that often these things are linked. Yet, new people get involved, for example with different backgrounds.

Does 'Canal Park' focus specifically on Ninoofsepoort, or also on the canal area in general?

It is a group in favour of the area around the canal in general, but the Ninoofsepoort is the most pressing subject now. It is perfectly possible that similar actions will arise along the canal. Actually, there already is a similar initiative, namely 'Parkdesign'

in the area of Tour & Taxis. However, that is a subsidized project. While I try to keep the projects separated from subsidization. I think that is very important.

Because this allows more freedom?

Yes because you have the freedom to make your own decisions. Also because I noticed that subsidized action groups often water down, or in the worst case start fighting about money (although I have only seen this once, but still, it happens). I try to keep things separated from money. For example, nowadays if you do volunteer work, many people assume they will get a compensation for the work they do, which is a completely wrong assumption. You have to do things from a personal engagement, not for money. I also think this engagement is often missing in the current generation of politicians. It has become mere a job instead of an engagement, I regret that. Of course there are still some politicians who do work from an engagement, which I try to support. Still, I find it striking how everything is being expressed in terms of money, even an engagement. I don't think that is a good evolution.

Do you live at the Ninoofsepoort, or does your participation in 'Canal Park' originated from this personal engagement?

I don't live there, but I do pass along there every day because it is on my cycle route. Ninoofsepoort lies on the border between Brussel-Stad, Anderlecht and Sint-Jans-Molenbeek. I am living in Anderlecht, so I am somehow a bit involved. But, more importantly, it is a crucial place, which surpasses the local level. It is one of the last spots in Brussels where it is possible to create a large park that close to the city center. Parks should have a certain size. Nowadays they're creating all these little parks here and there in small corners, but only a real large park can serve as a lung for a neighbourhood. Ninoofsepoort is the last spot close to the center where that is possible, together with Tour & Taxis. Actually, we arrive at the theme of the commons here. In Brussels there is a strong imbalance, regarding green public space, between the East – with e.g. the Zoniën Woud and Woluwepark – and the West, also described as the 'poor croissant'. The neighbourhoods within this

'croissant' offer almost no green open spaces to its inhabitants. It is even statistically proved that health conditions are worse in these areas than in the East for example. This is partly due to this lack of green space. However, parks not only serve to keep us healthy, but also to avoid frustrations and conflict. To make a neighbourhood functioning, you need enough room to breathe, and to meet people from different social layers. I always say public space should be the 'living room' of the city. It is important to claim the right for this open space for all people, as a common.

By the way, with Citymine(d) we also once constructed a park, a little one though, in Schaarbeek in a neighbourhood without any green spaces. Our park was the first one, and after a while the municipality took over the management of the park. In the end the site was being built upon, and the municipality constructed a bigger park on another site in the neighbourhood instead. This shows how you can trigger certain things with this kind of projects.

Is there not the risk of gentrification with a park at Ninoofsepoort in prospect?

Gentrification – the revitalization of a neighbourhood – is not necessarily something harmful. The problem is that it is often accompanied by social displacement. So indeed the risk exists. However, in this area there is already quite some social housing, and they talk about adding more housing next to the future park. I think this new housing should be social. You already have a large complex of GOMB with middle class housing. By establishing a good mix, the government can try to counter the social displacement. Moreover, the alternative would be to do 'nothing', but then you would create a zone of the city, which is being simply given up. That cannot be the purpose. Revitalisation of the city should try to bring the whole population on a higher level. The government should provide different dwelling types, for different lifestyles and with different atmospheres. If this social mix can be established, I think you can temper the social displacement. But also the reverse movement is possible. But also the other way around, social housing should be built in Sint-Pieters-Woluwe or in Dilbeek for example.

How many pressure can a collective as 'Canal Park' exercise on the government?

It can put quite some pressure, but you have to make sure to create a basis for it. I think in the future this basis will constantly grow. As more and more people are being left out, you get more people who understand that alternative methods need to be elaborated. "*Every disadvantage has its advantage*", as Johan Cruijff once said. Initiative should come from bottom up, from the people. Too many people still think the government has the power to solve everything. That is not true, they are also dependent on bigger powers. For example the Rothschild family is a ridiculously rich family, which established an international banking dynasty. I read that if we would redistribute its capital, every person on earth would receive 70 million dollar. This kind of people has so much power, that they stand above the law. The government cannot do whatever they want. I always say that the government should be the mediator between the people, and such big powers.

Do you feel the protest is being heard by the government?

I notice that the support basis, for example to create a park at the Ninoofsepoort, is getting larger and larger. Already twenty years ago the decision was made to build a park there, and ten years ago the actual plans for the park were made. Still, now we are 2014, the park is not there yet. Now that the people themselves are putting more and more pressure, they have to respond soon. The Beurs square is now finally going to be made car free. Without Picnic the Streets this would never have been executed. So it does has an influence, even if it works quite slow sometimes.

Are you satisfied with the plans for the refurbishment of the Beurs Square?

No, absolutely not. Even if it is good that the Beurs Square is becoming car free, the plan will not transform the Beurs in the kind of place we had imagined. They have especially focused on tourism, and on commercial profit.

Are you planning to protest against the new plan?

Yes, we are planning something, but it is not out there yet. We are still discussing with the core group of Picnic the Streets what to do. Probably we will organize some picnics in the streets around the Beurs, where they plan to create a small ring road, which is actually just moving the cars 200 meters away of the Beurs.

Do you think that the 'sympathy' for the Picnics, brought up by the previous major Freddy Thielemans , affected the influence of the protest?

Thielemans was a very smart politician. He did not realize a lot during his period as a major, but he was a master politician. Also the idea to allow the picnic was, from a political point of view, a very smart move. Accordinto us it was very cowardly of course, to neutralize our protest like that. We have long thought about what to do with this reaction of Thielemans, but at the end we decided not to go into it and to keep the picnic as it was. We did not want to participate in this political game as that is not what Picnic the Streets is about. Thielemans also emphasized a lot on the picnic itself, but that is also not where it is about. Or goal is not to make a picnic spot at the Beurs Square, but a place where people can meet and relax, without being suffocated by cars.

How important are social media such as Facebook or Twitter for this kind of events? Would it have been possible without them?

Yes, I think without social media it would also be possible. In 2009 for example, when Facebook and Twitter were still coming up, with 'Stichting Winterhuis' we squatted the Christmas market at the Beurs Square. We organized the event via mail and a website. About 50 people participated. Ok, that is not the great mass of the picnics, but it is still something. The idea to squat the market came up by a combination of circumstances. First of all we got to hear that in 2008 only 12 new social housing units had been built in all of Brussels. Further, the inhabitants of a squatter house in Etterbeek were expelled, and in the same period Jeroen Peters

was being put out of the squatter house in the Vlaamsesteenweg. He even immured his foot in the floor to avoid his expulsion. The combination of these different events triggered us to do something. We squatted 12 cabins on the Christmas market, symbolically representing the 12 built social houses. Besides, already in the 1970s there was once a large picnic on the 'Grote Markt'. So it is clear that social media are not absolutely necessary. However, they are very useful because everything can go much faster. After the call by Philippe Van Parijs in May 2012 the first picnic was already held after two weeks. That is particularly fast. Without Facebook it would have taken at least a month to organize it and to mobilize people.

Despite the wide range of people social media can reach, the picnic remained somehow exclusive. How do you feel about that?

Indeed, the comment which 'Picnic the Streets' got most often is the lack of a social mix. The people who came to the event were mostly middleclass people in their thirties, like myself, with children. This is often seen as the weakness of the event. On the one hand I understand this, but on the other hand you could say that if even those people start to protest, something must be seriously wrong. Moreover, you cannot expect everyone to be occupied with this kind of initiatives. In Brussels there are many people who are struggling every day to survive and to get a roof above their head. You cannot expect them to be occupied with a picnic. Somehow we – the middleclass people – have the luxury to put our energy into this kind of things. It is up to the ones who have this luxury to take responsibility and to reclaim public space, for the sake of everyone.

How did the first 'Picnic the Streets' get started? Did an already existing group organize it?

No it was not an existing group. The tension was already in the air at that moment. Philippe Van Parijs wrote the right text on the right moment, and after that everything went very fast. After the publication of his opinion piece, seven different groups went independently from each other over to action to organize a picnic. Quite fast we heard from each

other and we got into contact. We decided to make one big event of those seven smaller ones. On the evening we made the event public, we were sitting all together behind the computer. I really enjoyed that.

Did it ever come to a confrontation with the police in one of the projects?

All our actions originate from civil disobedience, but actually, no, it never really came to a confrontation. I think that is because we have a positive work atmosphere, which does not provoke such confrontations. However, we are always prepared for different scenarios within the different actions, for example within Cyclo guerilla and Picnic the Streets. Each one gets a specific task: e.g. somebody blocks this street, someone else the other one, someone talks to the police when they come. But actually we never have to use these strategies. The only time we were really expelled was when we squatted the Christmas market with 'Stichting Winterhuis'. The police arrived within one hour. The city earns 3000 Euro per cabin on that market. If you touch their money, they come get you very fast. Within 'Canal Park' we think about occupying the parcel next to our current 'Pop up park' as well, which is private property. We will do this if the government does not quickly responds to our demand for the promised park. I think that at that moment we will see who gets the preference of the city.

Do you believe the architecture and planning discipline could learn something from these insurgent initiatives?

Absolutely, I think architects and planners should learn from this. I always argue in favour of a more multidisciplinary way of working. Leaving decisions over to only architects and politicians is never a good idea. I am also trained as an architect so I can say such things (laughs). The teams working on city planning should be much more multi-disciplinary, with also sociologists, philosophers, social workers, etc. It would give a much broader view. Now for example, even 'Beliris' can also make the designs for city projects. It is not a good thing that all this power is given to one organ.

How does the future Brussels looks like according to you?

Brussels has a lot of potential. There is a lot of space in the city. Yet, I think it is not normal that the car still gets 75% or even more of the open space. If the presence of the car would be lowered to a normal level, something like 25%, plenty of public space would become free. I always assume that the goal should be that children can play outdoor again and that elderly can sit relaxed on a bench: then you know you are going in the right direction. I think we need this kind of reclaiming activities, to create a common basis. We see more and more such initiatives coming up. That is a good thing. The initiative should come from the people. Together we can get a lot done. Everybody should take its responsibility and contribute. Then I think then the public space of Brussels can become a very nice 'living room'.

2 / INTERVIEW VERENA LENNA
5TH MAY 2014, DE MOLEN, LEUVEN

When studying the commons Verena Lenna is undoubtedly the person to talk to. She is currently doing PhD research about the commons, part of it concerning Brussels, with for example CLT (Community Land Trust). Moreover, she is one of the driving forces behind Commons Josaphat. This Brussels collective is imagining a future for a huge 24-hectare 'terrain vague' in the heart of Brussels, inspired by the idea of the commons.

Who came up with the idea of Commons Josaphat, and how?

At the end of 2012 I met Geert De Pauw, who is currently working for the CLT (Community Land Trust). I knew him already before, because of my PhD research. He contacted me again and told me about this idea of a 'festival of the commons'. Within a small group of people – all interested in the commons – he was already discussing about this idea. They already had some meetings before I joined the group. Out of this small group 'Commons Josaphat' was later born. Already during one of the first meetings we started talking about the Josaphat site and its future.

Are the members of Commons Josaphat professionally involved in the commons?

Let's say that many of us are interested in the commons, both personally and professionally. For example Geert (De Pauw) was initially working for Maison du Quartier Bonnevie in Molenbeek, and worked later for the CLT. There is also someone who is working for an organization that works with water as a common, and someone who is part of a political party, who of course has some ideological ideas about the commons. And I am working on the theme of the commons within my PhD research. But the rest of the group is not necessary involved in the commons on a professional level. They are just interested and attached to the theme. But many of them are working in community-based associations, so maybe that is also somehow related to the idea of the commons.

How is a collective as Commons Josaphat organised?

We started in 2012, from the start till August 2013 the meetings were just based on contacting other people we knew. So we were not very open to the public. We did this consciously because we wanted to ensure that only truly interested and motivated people joined the group. We wanted to keep the group rather closed until we had a better definition of what exactly we wanted to do. In August 2013 we decided to open the debate and we organized a two-days workshop. Although it was not yet completely public, we became a wider group of about forty people. The first day we visited the site together and explained what we had done the previous months. The second day we collected ideas from everyone. We had a huge sheet of paper on which the people could put their ideas. We also divided the people around different tables. Each table was working on a theme, for example housing, public space, education, environment, and mobility. Every table was putting forward a wide range of ideas: from auto-construction models, to car sharing, or the idea of a continuous education. Different working groups were made for the topics that resulted from the wide range of ideas: 'Transversal', 'Diagnostique', 'Quartiers Durable', 'Occupation', 'Communication' and 'Habitants'.

How do these working groups function exactly?

The group, which is organizing everything, is the GT 'Transversal'. This group decides about the strategic moments for the activities and tries to create a dialogue with the other groups. Then there is the GT 'Occupation', which is concerned with the procedures you need in order to do something

on the site. From the start we noticed that you need authorization for everything. We also have the GT 'Diagnostique'. This group is oriented to collect information about the site, previous project proposals, and data as e.g. the level of pollution on the site. The GT 'Quartiers durables' is related to the competition 'Quartiers Durables' of the Region in which we participated starting from May 2012.

In which GT's are you involved?

I was involved in the GT 'Diagnostique', 'Transversal' and 'Quartiers durables'. However it was impossible to attend all the meetings. Everybody has many other things to do apart from Commons Josaphat. So after a while we noticed that it was not feasible. We decided to re-organize the groups: we reshaped them and put some groups together to make them more efficient. This was a good thing. Considering the fact that everything is auto-organized, that there is no real authority pulling the strings, it works quite well now.

Was the GT 'Quartiers Durable' already proposing a design for the site?

No, we did not propose a design so far. Within the competition we made a presentation introducing the site and vaguely the concept we wanted to develop. We presented our concept in a very light form, because we knew that the idea of the commons would be somehow provoking. We were not enough prepared to make the idea so public immediately from the start. We passed the first selection, but at a certain moment the Region stopped us. We received a letter in which we were kindly invited to quit the competition. They said: "*We can not give money to a project that is going to compete with the Region*".

Why was your project seen as competing 'against' the Region?

The official competition 'Quartiers durables' was conceived for smaller and more specific projects. While in our case we wanted to cover the whole area. When we were working on the project during this first phase we had a kind of 'coach', who was guiding us through all the steps of the competition, so she knew our projects. Then, you never know exactly how information gets transmitted and

diffused. The Region probably realized that our goal was to propose something alternative compared to what they were working on. They were already collaborating with MASS Architects, who were developing a master plan for the site. Suddenly they realized that our proposal was going to compete with this plan. As the competition was almost going to become public, they tried to stop us there. But they did not know we were already thinking about launching the 'open call for ideas'…

Should the proposals be made by 'real' architects or designers?

Well, the 'Call for ideas' is open for everyone. You can be an artist, economists, sociologist, or any kind of citizen. Of course we are talking here about a concrete physical site, so you cannot stay on an abstract level, such as e.g. a text or manifesto. This is why the call for ideas consists of two phases. In the first phase one can still play with for example concepts or prototypes. While in the second phase, one is required to be more specific and to address the 24 hectares of terrain in the city. The proposal for this huge terrain should deal with the main challenges of the city, such as the sharp demographic rise and lack of housing. Therefore at the end we need concrete design proposals. In this second phase we reshuffle the groups, to make sure one can meet other people, with another background. When you for example wrote a manifesto text about the site, you can look for an architect who would like to work together with you on that idea. The call for ideas will hopefully lead to a good project, or several good projects and ideas. Then – in the most utopic scenario – it is going to be confronted with politicians and institutions.

How do you make sure to reach all layers of the population with the 'Appel-à-idées'?

Yes, we are aware of the risk that it becomes to exclusive. As the current open call is quite long and conceptual, somebody proposed to make a more 'accessible' version. So now we are working on a shorter, easier version of the open call. On the one hand I agree with this, because it is true that when you talk about the 'commons' many people don't understand what you are talking about. But

at the same time I find it a rather snobbish thing to make a 'less difficult' version. In the experiences I had, I noticed how quick people can be informed about something and how many things they already know. Moreover now, in 2014, almost everyone has a computer: you just check it on the Internet and you find the explanation immediately. I think making things easier is not necessarily better.

What do you see as the act of 'commoning'? The process you're in right now or the final construction of a common neighbourhood?

I believe the process in itself is a nice way of commoning. The act of bringing people together who are interested in the commons is already a very good thing, even if the project does not succeed. We don't know what is going to happen and what the answers are going to be from the political level. Actually we can expect the worst possible ending. As the site is crucial for the city they are probably not going to listen to a bunch of people talking about the commons. However, I think, given the situation in which cities are right now, it would be strategic for Brussels to give a small part of that huge site to test a prototype of a new kind of living based on the concept of the commons. It would be a smart marketing move, as currently many people are talking about the subject. The city should experiment with new forms of housing. Why not use the effort that citizens are doing for you – for free, by the way? Yes, I think the process in itself is already making the commons, because you propose, you make ideas, you re-invent things. Let's say one thing are the natural commons, which are given. But something new are the urban commons, which can be everything and which are waiting to be experimented with. I think this is a huge realm to explore.

To which degree is Commons Josaphat related with other 'commoning' collectives in Brussels?

Many people in our group work for a kind of association, but don't join Commons Josaphat as a representative of this association. It is something separate from that. Of course they bring in the knowledge they have from their professional life. But honestly I cannot say we really work in

collaboration with other associations, which is a pity for sure. But at the same time I think that several groups, working alone, retain more originality and avoid making one homogenous blend. Because at a certain point you start sharing everything: e.g. approaches, projects, tools. Keeping a bit of diversity and originality is good. But what could be interesting – and would be possible for example with a festival of the commons – is to bring to the light all these different possibilities to make the city in an alternative way. Actually, what the 'Atlas of the commons' is doing in way.