

Resisting gentrification. Socio spatial dynamics of three work places in Brussels

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PLANNING FOR TRANSITION

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Planning for Transition

Contemporary cities and territories face significant challenges – natural disasters due to climate change impacts, ecological crises, growing socio-economic unrest, global migration, political rifts including a rise of right wing factions, ambitious public works and mega-projects – all of which require new capacities in dealing with such individual and multiple groupings of such challenging and profound changes.

It is a matter of fact that at international level a discourse if not a condition of transition is pervading sectors and societies. This discourse points to alternative patterns and solutions to many of the challenges faced. A quickly changing scenario requires forms of planning, both locally and globally, which bear the capacity to support and manage mutable urban and environmental conditions. In fact, although cities do incessantly change, policy-makers and institutions are never fully prepared to respond to complex and risky situations, as well as relying on planning and policy tools which are often outdated; in addition, also existing theoretical frameworks, concepts, cognitive abilities and approaches become ineffective or outmoded.

Each unintended or unanticipated change comes as a break to existing social, political, and administrative routines and yet it may be anticipated that mechanisms of collective reflection and action will be generated. The congress invites scholars and practitioners to present and discuss case-studies of cities and projects that have engaged in meeting challenging situations – supporting transitions in urban contexts.

Specifically, it is aimed at offering an understanding of the forms of knowledge, concepts, tools, and skills needed to plan and address transition. Furthermore, it seeks to explore whether (and how) managing such changes has brought any overall reconsideration of the city design model and towards more general institutional reconfigurations.

The book collects all the papers presented at the Aesop Venice 2019 conference. It is articulated in chapters that correspond to the tracks (16) and special sessions proposed (23).

Tracks

1. Transforming built heritage and landscapes
2. Urban design for multilevel planning
3. Teaching planning for the transition
4. Institutional change and regional transition
5. Methods and technologies for transformative planning
6. Community-based planning and social innovation
7. Theorizing urban change: complexity and ethics
8. Transition paths and urban futures
9. Climate proof cities and resilient societies
10. Urban metabolism and circular economy
11. Housing, gentrification and socio-spatial dynamics
12. Food, planning and healthy cities
13. Planning for accessibility and sustainable mobility
14. Planning, Law and Property Right: facing urban transitions
15. Tourism, spaces and urban cultures
16. Urban and Regional economics for transition

Special Session

1. Transition Histories
2. Urban Tourism, Neighborhood Change and Social Conflicts
3. Innovative Agriculture for Healthy Cities
4. Towards Post-Growth Planning Theory and Practice
5. Planning and Designing Green Infrastructures
6. Land Development and Management in Post-Socialist Countries
7. Home Sharing. Short-Term Rentals Affecting Local Housing Markets
8. Dynamic Change, Uncertainty and Planning for Adaptivity
9. Space, Citizenship and Identity: The Eu-Mena Region
10. The Role of The Local in Improving Cohesion and Spatial Justice
11. Friendly Spaces and Mobility for Ageing
12. Emerging Spatialities and Eu Policy Instruments: Cases and Perspectives
13. Facing Migrants Exclusionary Urban Policies
14. Learning Loops in The Public Realm. Enabling Social Learning in Communities to Tackle the Challenges of Cities in Transition
15. Planning and Biodiversity
16. Acsp-Aesop Special Session: Morsels of Hope: Migration and Urban Planning
17. Spatial Tensions: Urban Microgeographies for Changing Cities
18. Affordable Housing in Developing Countries: a Comparative Perspective
19. Acsp-Aesop Special Session: Learning from Arnstein's Ladder: from Citizen Participation to Public Engagement
20. Smart Cities and Regions Informing the Energy Transition
21. Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) In Europe: Challenges in Transition
22. Shrinking Cities and Sustainability
23. Regional Design: Impacts on Territorial Governance and Planning Practice



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SP34

Spatial tensions:
urban microgeographies
for changing cities

Resisting gentrification. Socio-spatial dynamics of three work places in Brussels.

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Abstract: An association working around the production of a biannual parade. A polyvalent organisation operating at the crossroads of culture and economy. A cooperative for entrepreneurs and precarious workers. The three of them being situated in some of the poorest neighbourhoods of Brussels and implying the renovation of former productive sheds. Their contribution looks crucial to bring back work in the city and in those areas that have been mostly affected by the deindustrialization processes started by the end of the 60s. While in the long term they may engender a gentrification process, the three of them are aware of this risk. Despite not defining themselves as social operators, they nevertheless could allow to resist it, by embedding in the local urban fabric, reshaping and renewing urbanity, although in very different ways and as part of very different strategies, in the case here observed mostly centred on redefining the relationship between work and life. Based on a research-by-design exercise, the paper will explore under which conditions new forms of working, a new approach to productivity and the related spatial dynamics could counterbalance potential gentrifying effects related to the improvement of problematic parts of the city.

Keywords: work-and-life, gentrification, governance, urban ecosystems

Introduction

The contents of this paper are based on the exercise of design developed in occasion of the workshop *Designing Brussels Ecosystems*, organised by Metrolab Brussels¹. The workshop explored the concept of urban ecosystem, looking at the condition of the Brussels Capital Region (BCR) through four lenses: agriculture, density, work and circularity. Together with other participants, we have been involved in the group dealing with topic of work². Three case studies were proposed, supposedly juxtaposed to the concept of third places. Purpose of the

¹ Metrolab Brussels is a transdisciplinary and inter-university laboratory for applied and critical urban research, funded by the Brussels Capital Region through the ERDF program 2014-2020. The workshop was held between the 28th of January and the 8th of February 2019. The results and reflections of the workshop will be published by Metrolab by the end 2019.

² We deem that exercise meaningful in relation to the topic of the urban tensions dealt with in the occasion of this special session. It is rather a beginning of potential future researches on how a new approach to the life-work balance and productivity can affect contemporary urban ecosystems and the related tensions. Given the short amount of time we had, it was not possible to enlarge our theoretical understanding of the themes; in that sense, the contents of this paper would need further inquiries. We rather used design as an envisioning practice, researching on the local socio-spatial potentials and prospecting how the tension between processes

two weeks was to explore the related urban ecosystems, in either descriptive or designerly terms. Three examples of urban renovation concerning different vacant spaces of production, transformed –at different stages- by three different actors: Recyclart, an organisation assembling cultural and creative production with work based insertion programs; Zinneke, a centre of artistic production, operating at the scale of the city; Smart LaVallée, a cooperative having the mission to support on many different levels the small scale entrepreneurial activities, free-lance and other precarious working conditions.

Being situated in different spots along the post-industrial corridor of Brussels, where the concentrations of poverty, unemployment and of the youngest and immigrant individuals coincide, these cases have the potential to engender gentrification processes. On the other hand, the kind of urban ecologies possibly generated by these initiatives could in fact contribute to resist gentrification, under specific conditions that the design exercise allowed to explore in projective terms. How could a project of renovation improve the living conditions of a neighbourhood, at the same time resisting gentrification and the collateral expulsion and privatisation processes? This paper would like to reflect on this sort of tension, thus further elaborating on the design-based scenarios developed in occasion of the workshop. A tension ultimately solvable –we argue- at the level of governance and ownership approach of the concerned assets, in relation to which design is called to play a crucial role.

We will first describe the three cases into detail. For each of them we identified a core concept, which seem to be coherently at work both at a spatial and at an operational level. But how do they actually relate to the concept of third places? To question that framework, in relation to the workshop purposes and starting assumptions, will allow to critically seize their pertinence as case studies and their *modus operandi*, thus identifying the aspects around which to intervene as designers. Moving from the architectural to the urban scale, in all the three cases the leading actors are aware of their spatial and urban impact of the activities they organise. In one case, Zinneke, they have an explicit agenda concerning the neighbourhood where the building is situated, and that agenda concerns in fact the very governance and use of the building. In other words, Zinneke seems interested in what we could describe as an ecosystemic approach to the organisation of their environment and their activities, which goes beyond the walls of the building and involves the larger ecology in which they embed. It is by referring to this case that our group decided to develop a design proposal, given the clarity and pertinence of their approach in relation to the workshop purposes. By analysing the local potentials -morphology, existing programs and actors, vacancies, unexplored synergies and other local and non-local potentials-, we imagined how temporary uses and long-term strategies could result in a lively urban environment, sustained by the engagement of the local communities around a different approach to work and productivity, from the individual to the collective level.

The thesis we suggest here, further elaborating on the results of our designerly explorations, is that these urban renovations interventions could in fact represent an occasion to resist gentrification only when triggering the appropriation by the locals and recognizing their role in their way of functioning. In this perspective, the morphology of the building and surrounding neighbourhood would have to serve the interweaving of the pre-existent and the new, the community based and the regional scales, the vacant and the occupied, the individual and the collective. In the cases here observed, possibly happening because of a different approach to the work-life balance, performed in between the individual and the collective. This would also mean the implementation of a different approach to the use of resources -in this case vacant plots and buildings and pre-existing local initiatives- based on patterns of exchange, coexistence and collaboration, care and responsibility. Not necessarily without conflicts. If one of the consequences of the dispossession of the city and the expulsions provoked by increasing privatisations is the loss of urbanity (Sassen, 2015), the urban ecosystems designed during the Metrolab workshop allow to imagine how urbanity could be in fact recreated and reclaimed: on the

of improvement and expulsion could be dealt with. So in fact, the paper brings a research by design-based contribution to the theme of the Special Session.

grounds of a community based approach to work and productivity, reinventing the individual within the collective realm.

A magnet, a bubble, a project of doors.

The three initiatives described in the following lines are expression of a different approach to work and work conditions, experimenting around emancipation, the expression of the self and new forms of protection. The spaces they shape reflect and make possible those attitudes.

Recyclart is a polyvalent centre, assembling cultural and artistic production, an atelier for the production of wood and metal artefacts called Fabrik and a restaurant. The cultural centre was established in 1997, by occupying the railway station La Chappelle, one of the secondary railway stations of Brussels, rarely used. For twenty years the site has hosted a variety of cultural programs and artistic projects, developed in collaboration with the Region. As a result, this neglected part of the city could enjoy a vibrant atmosphere, which contributed to keep under control episodes of criminality, while offering some form of support to fragile individuals relying on the solidarity and sympathy of the artists and organisers. As explained during the visit of the site, today the whole area surrounding the railways shows the signs of gentrification and the land values have risen. Not far from La Chappelle Station, Bar Recyclart is a restaurant where fragile and problematic individuals –because of their income, life path, education, health issues, etc- have the chance to take part to programs of work based insertion. Work, in other words as the first step towards their emancipation. Similar programs are also hosted at Fabrik, another initiative of Recyclart. Situated not very far from the station and the restaurant, people there can learn how to craft metal and wood, realising commissioned objects or their own creations. After more than twenty years of successful artistic and cultural production, at the beginning of 2018, SNCB and Infrabel, the companies responsible for the functioning and the management of the station, announce Recyclart will have to quit the place, for safety issues related to the renovation works of La Chappelle. After the mobilisation of civil society and the intervention of a few politicians, a new site has been identified in the municipality of Molenbeek, big enough to concentrate the different parts of the Recyclart program: a former typography in Rue de Manchester, composed by a few buildings disposed around a courtyard. Both the morphology of the building and the new location will redefine the conditions of accessibility, both in terms of space and of public. The capacity of Recyclart to work as a magnet, by attracting people from any part of the city, will be tested in the new location: a centre of artistic production and emancipation operating in a municipality severely affected by the end of the industrial productivity, for many reasons stigmatised.



Figure 1. The new site of Recyclart, in the dense urban fabric of Molenbeek.

The establishment of LaVallée as a co-working space in Brussels has been possible thanks to the initiative of Smart, one of the biggest cooperatives in Europe providing not only a co-working space, but also training programs, juridical, and financial assistance to entrepreneurs of the creative industry. While maintaining friendly relationships with the neighbourhood, LaVallée is introvert, working as a bubble of protection but also encounter and exchange, offering spaces and an the possibility of an alternative welfare to flexible and precarious workers, otherwise often working in isolation. The building occupied by LaVallée is a former industrial laundry whose spaces are distributed around two main courtyards. Different kinds of spaces foster daily interactions and encounter: the kitchen, relaxing sofas for a coffee and a break, courtyards, terraces. The atmospheres are often domestic, mixed with different kinds of working spaces: from the small individual rooms to the larger co-working spaces. All of them customised and appropriated according to the needs of the designers and artists. Other bigger spaces are used to organise events, by the workers of LaVallée as well as by external users. Among others, the European Union, their delegates and politicians often enjoying the rawness of post-industrial, non-formal spaces. The assemblage of different publics and situations triggers the emergence of collaborations and allows to share not only the costs, but also the expertise.



Figure 2. Space and spatial appropriations at LaVallée.

Zinneke asbl is an organisation working mostly around the artistic production of the biennial Zinneke Parade, established in 2000, as part of the initiatives organised for Brussels as European Capital of Culture. In addition to that however Zinneke hosts other projects, such as *Atelier Metal*, for the training of those interested in the realisation of metal artefacts, especially large scale objects. Or *Matos*, for the recollection and the recycling of waste materials. Zinneke is an initiative celebrating solidarity and cultural diversity and triggers the use of the public space for the expression of collective and individual selves. The Parade is made of more or less twenty performances, interpreting a main theme and realised by artists and creatives in collaboration with local actors. Each performance is called *zinnode*. The activities and practices leading to the realisation of the *zinnodes* are realised occupying the spaces available in the concerned neighbourhoods and involving the local actors. In this way, different parts of the city are re-activated though all the whole process of realisation. After a long time of nomadism, during which Zinneke occupied different available buildings in the city, the organisation finally managed to occupy a former imprimerie in the Masui neighbourhood, in Schaerbeek, in the framework of a

FEDER³ project. At present Zinneke has the project to transform the imprimerie in a polyvalent space, hosting not only the activities related to the production of the Parade and the mentioned other initiatives, but also any kind of event or regular program organised by any other actor in the neighbourhood or in the Region. The transformation of the building is conceived as a pilot project under many respects: the renovation should make possible the reuse and recycling of existing materials and structures, possibly in collaboration with other initiatives in the city, while respecting the existing structures. But most importantly, the re-organisation of the spaces should on the one hand increase the accessibility of the building, allowing other actors in the neighbourhood to use it; related to that, on the other hand, it should make possible the coexistence of different practices, with their compatible and incompatible aspects. The articulation of the needs of different actors within the same building is a matter of rhythms and choreographies, in time and space and requires what at Zinneke has been defined as a project of doors.

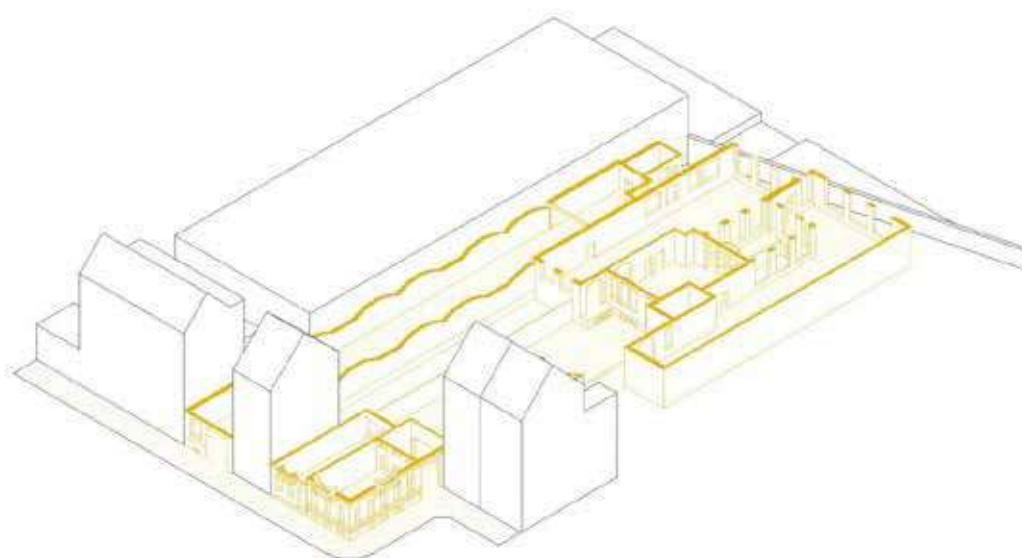


Figure 3. Section of the former imprimerie, where Zinneke is located.

Individuals, beyond individualism: emancipatory approaches to work.

Concerning our group, purpose of the workshop was to question the notion of third place in relation to work dynamics. Taking advantage of the reflexive opportunity of this paper, we believe it would be first necessary to frame the meaningfulness of the proposed cases. How do the three cases position themselves in a global city such as Brussels? What do they represent in relation to the work market characterised by a polarisation of highly skilled and low skilled? The three situations here considered at present do not represent neither classic, nor prevailing work domains. Nevertheless, they could indeed have the potential to address a variety of individuals, from the highly educated or strongly experienced, ready to take the risk of an entrepreneurial condition. To the low skilled or fragile individuals, to which the opportunities of a manual job or service related position could look more appealing to increase their capacities and start new work paths. Though at this moment these initiatives may be still marginal, they indeed represent an innovative approach to work, not very far from that in

³ Fonds européen de développement régional

fact presented at the design biennale of Saint Etienne, in 2017, *Working Promesse – Les Mutations du travail*. What was showcased was the possibility for individuals to reclaim themselves through their work activities, thus moving from a condition of dispossession of the self (Castel & Haroche, 2001) and hyper-fragmentation of their work capacities –the atomisation of work (Berardi, 2004) – to a condition where they reclaim authorship and try to conquer back their capacities of doing, meaningfully. The mentality of the do-it-by –yourself, as a result of the insufficiency of what is being provided –by both publicly and privately organised services, welfare and administrations- but also as an occasion of empowerment and joyful experiencing of life and leisure⁴. At the same time, increasingly often the re-appropriation of the self happens through the collaboration and cooperation with others. Group works, platforms, cooperatives, different forms of co-working promote encounter and collaboration as ways of overcoming isolation and learning from other people experiences. This is for example part of the mission of Smart, as an organisation looking to promote alternative structures of welfare⁵, but also interested in offering the spaces and the situations required for such encounters, for the building of solidarity networks. And this brings us to discuss the spatial conditions supporting such reconceptualization of work, as something we were supposed to directly address in the framework of the Metrolab workshop.

While the workshop proposed to question the notion of third places, the three cases rather suggest a reflection on the work-life balance, *potentially* related to the concept of third places, evoking the relational conditions of third places, but not fully coinciding with them. Third places have been defined in fact as those places where we do not either live, nor work, but where we rather can have leisure activities, make new acquaintances, where conversation and verbal and non-verbal exchanges are a main activity (Oldenburg, 1989). Examples of third places are churches and universities, restaurants, bars and coffee- shops, community centres, barbers, malls and markets, among many others. What may be confusing is the fact that indeed third places are increasingly being used to perform work activities –as shown in Saint Etienne- and they could indeed serve the increasing need for flexibility of people’s daily schedules, as well as the need for networking and inspiration, in some cases. Blurring the distinction between leisure time and work time, as many scholars pointed out in terms of labour exploitation, affecting in particular the workers of the cultural sector and creative industries. While this issue cannot be properly treated in the space of this paper, we simply point out the difficulty to fully recognise the three cases identified by the workshop as examples of third places. Especially when observed under the lens of the people who work there –not the clients or the occasional visitors. Recyclart is indeed also a restaurant and a cultural centre, but not for the employees hired as part of work based insertion programs: the way they perform their work in such a place is not very different than in other restaurant. Similarly, for the individuals crafting metal and wood objects at Fabrik, the space in which they work is an atelier, quite traditionally organised, where they are supposed to go every day, for a given number of hours, to perform what can still be recognised as work, not leisure, though leaving space to their creativity and interpretation.

On the other hand, what emerged as a common element in the three case is an emancipatory approach to work, though realised in different ways. Specifically, we observed a common attention to the work-life balance, not necessarily meant in term of rhythm, between the working hours and the time for the private life. Rather meant as redefinition of what work could mean in the life strategy of an individual –as a person and later collectively: in terms of self-expression, of emancipation, of claiming back opportunities and the capacity to contribute to the making of the world. In other words: not work as opposed to life, rather work as life.

And indeed such an approach could lead to the emergence of a third dimension: in between more mono-oriented, traditional working and living environments, in between the need for sheer productivity and the need

⁴ However, that is not always the case and a difference should be stressed between the engagement and urgency for gardening and the efforts made to claim back a housing unit or a squatting initiative.

⁵ Before the establishment of the welfare state regimes, cooperatives allowed workers to build solidarities and to organise primordial forms of welfare.

for the re-appropriation of the self. In between the competitiveness of the market and the need of self-expression. In the case of LaVallée for example, the appropriation of the space and of the work environment is somehow paramount and facilities, the supports and spaces are provided on purpose in a neutral condition, so that the new users could create their ideal setting. At Zinneke, artists and creatives have the possibility to reinterpret and recycle materials, while combining competences and ideas. Similarly, in the case of Fabrik, where in addition to what asked by the clients –mostly small-scale productions, which leave a lot of space to interpretation-, workers are invited to experiment new creations. At LaVallée and Zinneke a sense of a domestic environment often characterizes these working spaces: recreated by the very concerned individuals, looking for a comfortable atmosphere, fostering cooperation and exchange, allowing to reach the state of mind that leads to new ideas and innovations. Which is why a couple of sofas are just behind a cluster of desks and spaces are sometimes left unstructured, not furnished. Only basic supports are being provided, to use Habraken's words (Habraken, 1972). Something similar will probably happen in the new venue of Fabrik, big enough to combine the cultural and artistic production with the work trainings and insertion programs, and the restaurant. The courtyard promises hybridisations and exchanges, mixing users and activities, visitors and inhabitants, potentially from any corner of Brussels.

At the core of our case studies, overall, we observed some kind of emancipatory understanding of work, meant as an activity, which could and should lead to a re-appropriation of the self. In that direction, the spatial conditions realised inside the building promote individual creativity, but also exchange and collaboration, thus empowering the concerned individuals, allowing to learn from each other experiences or simply to build some sense of solidarity and mutualisation of resources. A way of resisting post-fordist processes of fragmentation. Necessarily such an approach has implications which cannot be contained within the walls of the building where is experimented.

While the emergence of a third form of spatiality -not for leisure but indeed allowing the interweaving of work-oriented and domestic atmospheres- can be easily observed in the interiors of the buildings, part of it seems to be manifested also exteriorly, though the distinction between interior and exterior is arguable in these cases. When looking at the urban impact, the spatial-urban attitude of each of the cases seems to be a continuation of the same philosophy expressed in the interiors. So the protective approach of Smart LaVallée, as a cooperative, is somehow mirrored in a spatial attitude that while being aware of the context where it operates, does not look to proactively fuel any relationship with it. "We have occasional relations with our neighbourhoods. At the same time we are not social workers, our mission is not to improve the neighbourhood. But we are open and welcoming and we do our best to maintain good relationships"⁶. In the case of Recyclart, both the cultural centre and the atelier of Fabrik have an impact in the surrounding neighbourhoods, more or less evident. The cultural centre -especially during the years of the most successful activities- engendered a lively atmosphere, making possible to keep under control the marginalisation and the stigmatisation of an otherwise isolated part of the city. Fabrik, on the other hand, is a well-known place for the realisation of few pieces or small-scale artefacts, fulfilling the most diverse and specific needs and local inhabitants maintain a friendly relation with the workers. What will happen once the new venue in Molenbeek will be conquered and transformed is an open question: though a certain level of interaction with the local inhabitants is foreseen as part of their grounding strategy. Finally, in the case of Zinneke, the governance of the building is supposed to be a neighbourhood affair, though not in the closest future. But the way the building is being reorganised and reconceived goes in the direction of allowing the appropriation by the local community. It would be a forced statement to say the three initiatives intentionally invest on the ecological continuity of the interiors towards the exteriors. As previously mentioned, it is rather a matter of attitude, of actors, aware of their impact, having different degrees of intentionality and willingness to interact with the surroundings. And the nature of their activities necessarily

⁶ From the conversation with one of the managers which accompanied us during the visit at LaVallée.

results in more or less extrovert patterns. In the case of LaVallée exchanges with the surroundings are occasional and supportive, but not essential to the functioning of the platform. In the case of Recyclart, they are the by-product of their activities, especially the cultural production. Zinneke is perhaps the only case to which such a statement could indeed apply and the continuity between the interior of the building and its surroundings is a relevant part of their medium-long term vision. The clarity of intentions and the spatial implications of their plans made their case more promising to the eyes of a group of architects and designers investigating their work re-interpretation and the related urban ecosystems.

While the spatial pattern of post-fordism is about fragmentation –of time and space- and delocalisation leading to individualism, isolation, *désaffiliation*, as Castel defined it (Castel & Haroche, 2001), what would be the spatial implications of an approach to work and productivity based on exchange and collaboration? Which kind of city could support or would derive from such a different approach to productivity, centred on the re-appropriation of the self, on the empowerment of the individual, beyond individualisms? How would neighbourhoods transform? And in particular, at the moment of shifting our views from the architectural scale to the surrounding neighbourhoods, as previously mentioned it was unavoidable to think about the risk of gentrification processes that the development of these initiatives could trigger. Happening in some of the poorest neighbourhoods of the city⁷, it is plausible to think that, as a result of a renewed productive ecosystem, land values could also rise, especially when considering that the surrounding neighbourhoods are already showcasing episodes of gentrification. Land values along the canal are in fact already increasing and a growing number of investors is being attracted by that area, after the way has been paved in the past years by the public administration policies and projects meant to improve the living conditions and indeed attract investments (Dessouroux et al., 2016) A risk especially tangible when considering that the core business of Recyclart and Zinneke is about arts and cultural production. And LaVallée is at the very least making room to creative businesses, potentially more attractive to well educated, middle class individuals with the capacities and the resources to stand some margin of entrepreneurial risk. While this could be in the future the prevailing direction in order to have an occupation –for anybody, independently from education and social status- it is clear the improvements directly and indirectly generated in those neighbourhoods will provoke the rise of land value. Instead of avoiding the improvements and investments, how to make sure the value being produced could be kept in the hands of the concerned communities?

A project of doors.

Also in consideration of the short amount of time, our group decided to focus on the spatial and ecological implications of one of the cases: the project of doors of Zinneke. Rather than simply describing existing dynamics, we opted for a design exercise as a means to imagine which kind of ecosystem could be generated by a different approach to work, productivity and -in particular in the case of Zinneke- the use of resources. It allowed to show how existing potentials and resources could be reinvented within an ecosystemic approach and how space could play an important role –among other things- in establishing an empowering governance for the concerned communities.

The project of doors described by the members of Zinneke was defined as such to stress the relevance of doors as devices allowing the coexistence within the same building and at the same time of activities implying very different needs, in terms of safety, self-expression of the involved individuals, logistics, scale, externalities and more. Within a similar perspective, the door is a device allowing to deal with the compatibilities and

⁷ Data can be verified at <http://monitoringdesquartiers.brussels/>. Number of scholars and researches have shown the concentration of poverty and the socio spatial segregation characterising the central neighbourhoods of the BCR. In particular, since the 80s, the work of Christian Kesteloot (Kesteloot, 1986, 1998; Kesteloot & Loopmans, 2009; Wayens et al., 2010)

incompatibilities of activities. To merge or to divide spaces, to regulate accessibility and to have the control on safety or privacy issues. To create gradients and atmospheres, to transform spaces intervening on their porosity and flexibility, according to changing needs and desires. In these terms, a project of doors would allow different activities not simply to coexist, but also to establish collaborations, while respecting each-other's boundaries and different needs. More ambitiously, it would also make possible the appropriation of the building by local and non-local actors, who could enjoy the use and the access to the building without interfering with the need for privacy or safety of other departments. The aspiration of Zinneke however, goes beyond use and accessibility: an effective project of doors should also imply a shared governance, which also means a shared responsibility and shared care. Appropriation and accessibility would hence imply the responsabilisation and the engagement of the concerned users, which should hence acquire the capacities to do so. A project of doors would thus become the occasion for individuals and collectives to increase their awareness and expertise concerning the governance of their resources, thus empowering them and ideally creating the conditions to recognise their contribution to the liveability of a place. And their power to decide about it.

While the project of doors the people of Zinneke describe is supposed to concern primarily the former *imprimerie*, at the moment of addressing the impact of Zinneke initiative at the neighbourhood level and within an ecosystemic perspective, we intuitively started to explore the possibility that the project of doors could in fact concern the whole neighbourhood. What if the concept could be extended to the whole neighbourhood, as a continuation of the work environment created within the building walls? What if the idea of a shared governance could be enlarged to other buildings, vacant plots and other assets in the neighbourhood? This would imply local actors to gradually appropriate not only the former *imprimerie*, but in fact the whole neighbourhood. Empowering them by means of increasing their expertise and capacities to govern them, thus ideally allowing to resist processes of expulsion and privatisation potentially deriving from gentrification. As previously mentioned: the idea would be not to avoid the improvement of living conditions in a given neighbourhood, rather to enable the local actors on the one hand to take part to the realisation of those improvements, on the other hand, beyond participation, to appropriate and have a voice in the governance of those improvements. As Henry George (George, 1883) and Ebenezer Howard (Howard, 1902) pointed out in the past, the problem with privatisation and speculation is the appropriation by very few individuals of the values and the assets produced by a whole community.

The building of Zinneke is situated in a somehow mixed neighbourhood, belonging to a fine grain piece of city, in between the monumental dimensions of the *projet Manhattan*⁸ to the south and, to the north, the more recent sheds of a productive area which begins right on the back of Zinneke's courtyard. A few blocks away, to the north-west, the Senne Canal hosts industrial and logistic activities. To the east, the railway lines heading to the station of Bruxelles Nord. Outside of the *imprimerie*, Place Masui is mostly occupied by cars and their circulation. The old urban fabric mixes residential units, shops, bars and a certain number of car repair activities, occasionally perceived as invasive. Vacancy is relevant and concerns both buildings and small plots. Not far from Zinneke, the final segment of a linear park, *Parc de la Senne*, is being realised. The park partially follows the trajectory of the vaulted river and for this reason is delimited by the back walls of former productive buildings, as well as the backyards of recent residential buildings, some vacant land and the bigger, the non-accessible perimeters of productive and commercial sheds. In similar conditions, the challenge is to engender a lively environment, avoiding the risk of a nicely paved corridor.

⁸ The *Projet Manhattan* was conceived and partially realised between the 60s and the 70s. It was supposed to provide office and related facilities to the companies and institutions increasingly investing in the Brussels agglomeration as global city. The big glossy towers, the large sidewalks, the functionalistic approach would have provided the allure of a modern business district. The project is infamously known for having been realised thanks to the eviction of thousands of inhabitants, most of whom were never relocated (Clerfayt, Houtart, Rigaux, & Al., 1975).

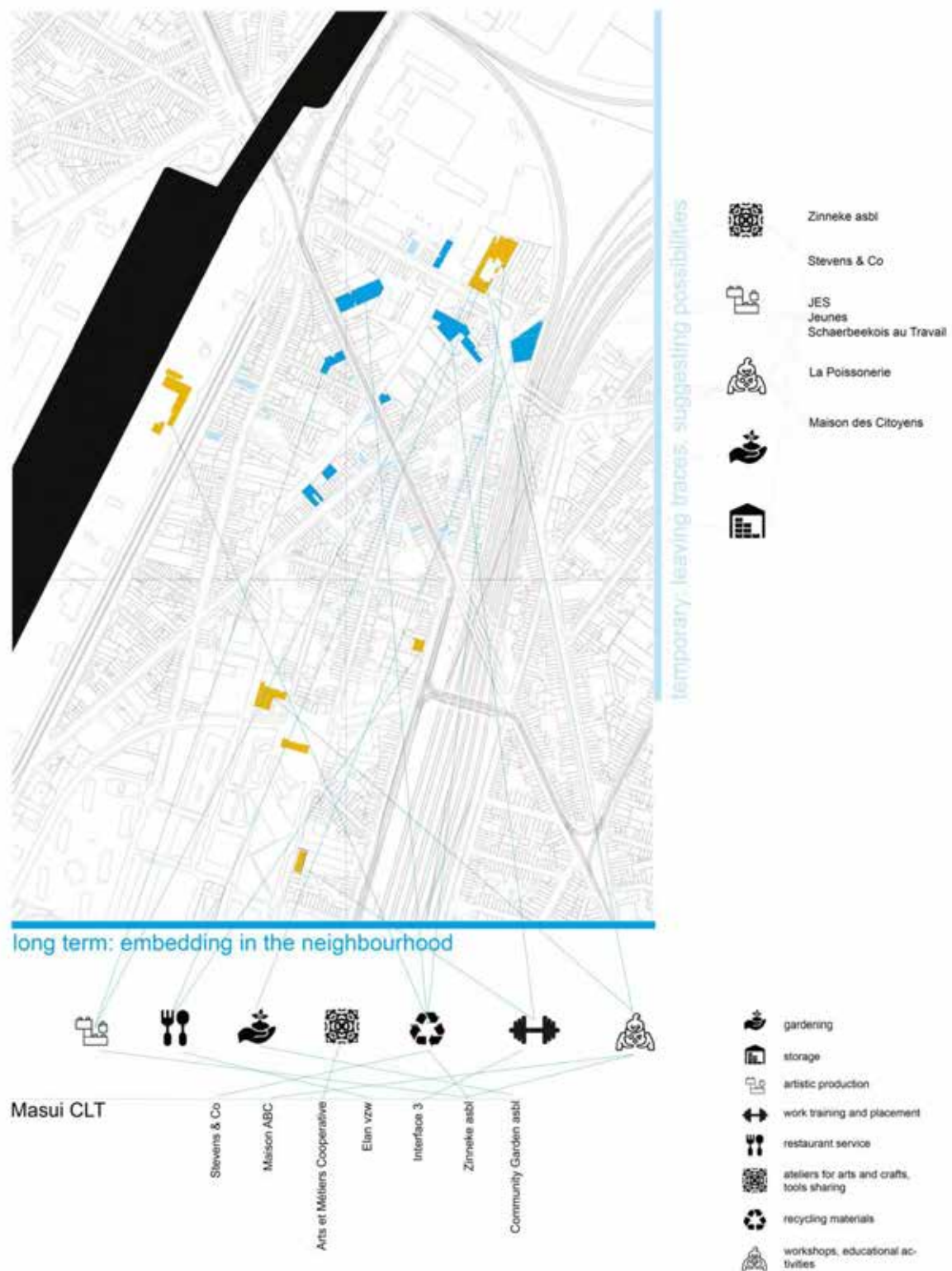


Figure 4. A project of doors. The configuration of short term and long term occupations in the area of Masui, leading to a neighbourhood governance.

The design exercise allowed to imagine which kind of ecosystem could respond to a work approach based on collaboration and sharing, of rights, but also responsibilities, centred on rebalancing work and life, of individuals and collectives, as embryonically experimented within the walls of the *imprimerie*. We explored how existing actors and spatial potentials could support the emergence of such an ecosystem. We tried to suggest in which way space could be reshaped and reprogrammed –at an urban and at an architectural level– thus allowing the coexistence and hybridisation of different activities, as a whole making possible a sustainable governance of resources, in this case meant as the socio-spatial assets of the whole neighbourhood.

Referring to the *modus operandi* at Zinneke, we identified three actions that we used as programs for specific parts of the neighbourhood, based on the mapping of their socio-spatial possibilities. To negotiate, to perform, to invade: these the three actions, three examples of a longer lists of patterns and attitudes we identified, emerging in the Zinneke environment. To negotiate time and space, for example, given the limitations of the built space and the compatibilities and incompatibilities of different activities: to negotiate is about building exchange and encounter. To perform is about the expression of the self –individual or collective–, the making, the experimentation on the existing resources, implying the capacity to risk, to innovate, to take the time to do so and inventing the required, *ad-hoc* collaborations. To invade, sometimes disturbing, out of necessity, provoking conflict but also encounter, of different activities and different users; it is about the need for more space, but also the hybridisation and the production of unavoidable externalities, such as noises, pollution. Each of the three actions worked as instructions at the origin of three different narratives that we tested in different parts of the city, exploring what a project of doors could do in each of them, in consideration of the provided occasions and potentials. We explored negotiation along *Parc de la Senne*, imagining how an alternative market could be organised involving local ateliers and community kitchen gardens, not only to sell their products and provide their services, but also to trigger the implication and the interest of the local inhabitants for the neighbourhood activities and the concerned spaces. The act of performing has been interpreted in the space of Place Masui, imagining how artistic events could bring new life to the square, working across the walls of the *imprimerie*, redefining the transition from one to the other, allowing local inhabitants to appropriate the public and the collective dimensions thus engendered. Finally, the canal banks are invaded by unusual activities such as promenades and festive events thus allowing the locals to appropriate this part of the city, opening to the potential collaborations and work insertion programs for example involving the existent metal recycling factory and the activities of Zinneke.

Through these narratives, the urban ecosystem of a whole neighbourhood is reshaped. At the core, a different system of values concerning work and the environment that could support it, centred on the empowerment of the individual as part of a community endeavour. Individuals in fact –meant as people or initiatives– are encouraged to experiment because immersed in a collaborative ecosystem, which could provide support and ideas. The work life balance is hence reconceived starting from the very definition of work and its meaning in relation to an individual's life and path of emancipation, beyond sheer productivity. The collateral aspect of the implementation of such an approach to work and the related ecosystem is a shared governance of resources and assets that are supposed to serve the concerned actors and users in different ways. For that reason, they need to be preserved, so that their activities and their living environment could also continue to exist in the long term. In other words, to re-appropriate the self through the doing, by contributing to the making of the world necessarily implies to have access and to govern the required resources: transforming the self implies the transformation of the world. This would imply the re-appropriation of neighbourhoods otherwise neglected or privatised, under the pretext of fuelling and supporting community centred forms of productivity.

Operatively, we imagined a combination of temporary uses and long term strategies and purposes. This would allow to combine permanent and non-permanent programs; people and collectives will thus have the chance to gradually become familiar with existing resources and to transform them while remaining open to the needs of the neighbourhood and adapting where necessary. In other words, it could engender a more resilient ecosystem, without losing the opportunity to determine some priorities and guiding directions.

Among others for example, a long-term goal could be the establishment of a neighbourhood based Community Land Trust (CLT), with the purpose of resisting gentrification and sustaining an aware and capable governance of resources, because based on the concrete needs and the competencies of the concerned communities. While their implication in the improvement of their living environment should be sufficient to recognise their right to stay and to govern the resources and assets they contribute to produce and valorise -literally and symbolically- with their daily activities, in fact this is not always the case. Processes of financialisation of the city and privatisation –as previously mentioned- simply concentrate such value in the hands of few investors and result in the expulsion of those who cannot afford the rising living costs of their neighbourhood. In the long term, our scenario suggested an empowering form of governance would have to recognise the role and the implication of the concerned communities, as in the case of the ecosystem we imagined, designed around their spatial and. The model of Community Land Trust currently being experimented in Brussels (Lenna, 2019) –though for the moment concerning only the residential function- would allow to retain the plus value generated by potential improvements at the advantage of the whole community.

Conclusion

As a result of such an emancipatory approach to work, conceived *as* life, centred on the individuals and their capacities of doing and exploring resources, overcoming fragmentation and alienation, on the one hand the living conditions of a neighbourhood would improve. On the other hand, the concerned communities –local and non-local, occasional users and inhabitants, administrative actors- would be empowered, on the base of their competences and capacity to govern the local resources: the resources they need for their life strategies. The model of the CLT here suggested is just one among many other possible models allowing to recognise the power to decide of those communities, thus retaining the value collectively produced.

The role of design, meant as a process of co-creation, is fundamental for the emergence of such an ecosystem at least on two interconnected levels: for the design of the systems and for the design of the spaces. On a strategic level, it would allow the involved actors to become aware of the resources and to imagine how to synergize them at best, which programs to enact, both temporarily and in the long term, adapting through the time, contributing to the resilience of the city. Concerning spaces, the challenge is the realisation of the conditions fostering encounter, exchange and collaboration, the coexistence of compatible and incompatible activities. Design in other words, would be fundamental for the establishing a horizontal form of governance, necessarily based on the appreciation of the environmental complexity that a new balance between life and work demands. From the architectural to the urban scale, allowing the individual to meet and to expand into the collective dimension, while expressing the self and his capacity to contribute to the making of the world. At the conclusion of our design exercise, we realised that the concept of a project of doors could possibly be applied also to the other two cases, the door being meant as a device allowing a certain flexibility, easily adaptable to the specificities of other neighbourhoods. The project of doors could hence be read rather as an approach: a concept about the need for porosity and the possibility to regulate it, for the coexistence of uses and the flexibility of spaces; for the intersection of scales and actors. An approach looking at the city as an environment where work and life intersect by definition engendering urbanity, inherently capable of resisting to the forms of existential alienation and dispossession of the city currently being enacted.

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