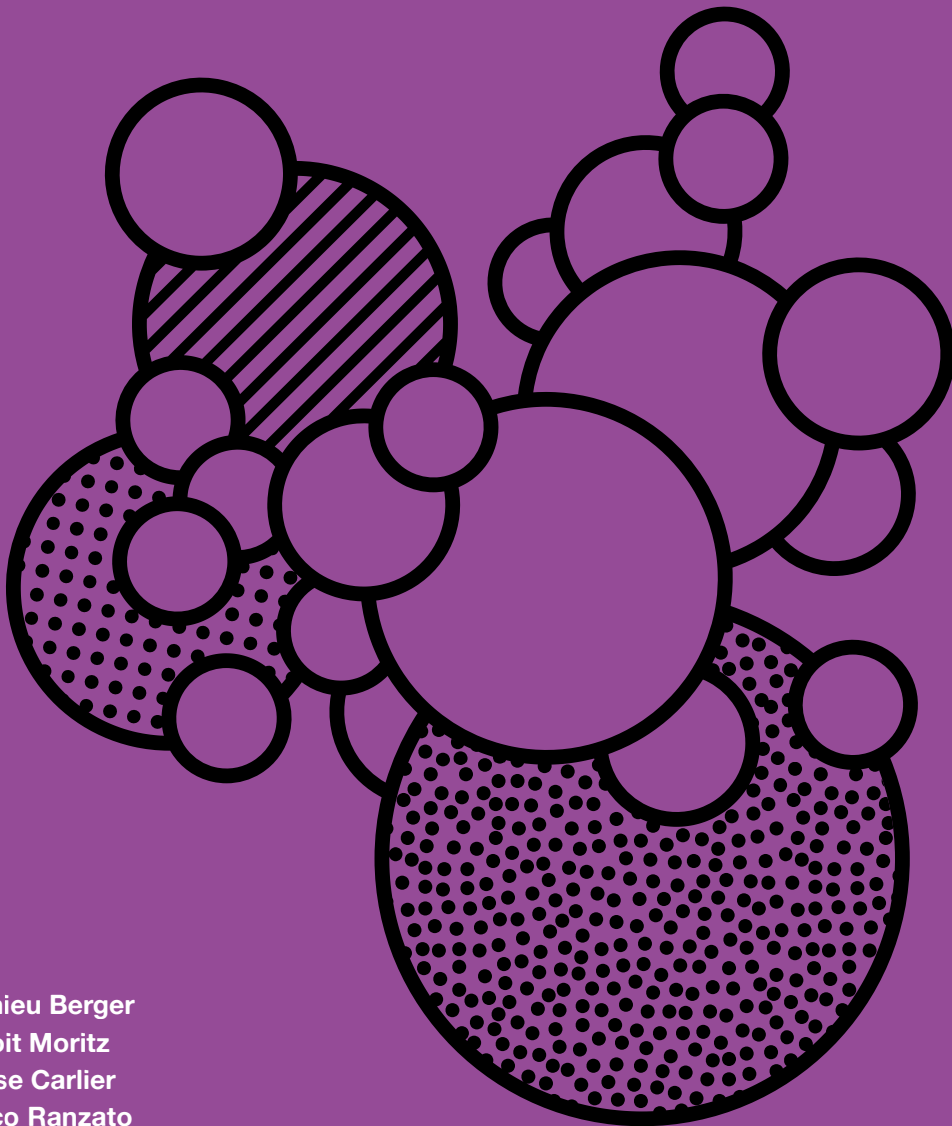# Designing Urban Inclusion

Metrolab Brussels MasterClass I

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(eds)

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Brussels' urban inclusion as a design matter

Louise Carlier, Marco Ranzato, Mathieu Berger and Benoit Moritz

This book is devoted to the issue of urban inclusion. Cities nowadays are spaces crossed by different dynamics of fragmentation and characterised by increasing social inequalities. Although urban inclusion is at the heart of the EU's urban policies and various urban projects, the term remains rather unclear. What form does inclusion take in the urban project? This question was at the core of the MasterClass entitled *Designing Urban Inclusion* held in Brussels in 2017, which anchored reflections on this topic in the specific context of Brussels. This book presents the works produced and develops the reflection on how the issue of inclusion could materialise in the design of the urban project.

The context of Brussels

Although Brussels is quite a small city, it is a truly international city. As the *de facto* capital of the European Union (since 1958), it hosts numerous EU institutions but also a large number of other international organisations (e.g. the NATO headquarters). While Brussels attracts an increasing number of international workers, the city also hosts a wide range of less advantaged population groups, often with a migrant background. Since the 1950s, various waves of immigration (mainly from Southern then Eastern Europe and from Central and North Africa) have contributed to the city's multicultural character — one-third of its population is of foreign nationality and over half of the population was not born in Belgium (Corijn and Vloeberghs, 2009).

While the international status of the city contributes to its wealth, Brussels' population has not yet fully benefited from it; a large part of the population lives in precarious conditions. This is the 'Brussels paradox'. In the Brussels-Capital Region, over half of all jobs are occupied by commuters who live in the city's outskirts, while the unemployment rate in Brussels is relatively high especially compared to the rates in the other two Belgian regions that are Flanders and Wallonia.

From an institutional point of view, the organisation of the city is a real puzzle. Starting in the 1960s, the federalisation process led to the division of the country into three Communities with different languages and cultures — Flemish, French and German-speaking — and in three Regions depending on their economic and territorial realities — Wallonia, Flanders and Brussels-Capital. The Communities have jurisdiction for cultural/educational matters, while the Regions are responsible for the environment, urban planning, and economic development.

Brussels has a special status: it is a Region in itself, but not a Community. As federal capital, Brussels hosts the two main Communities of Belgium — Flemish and the French —, each conducting its own cultural affairs. For this reason, and due to its cultural diversity, Brussels has been at the core of Belgium's political tensions. Moreover, the Flemish and French Communities do not represent the overall diversity of the city.

Due to the limited size of the regional territory (161 km²), the city's metropolitan area extends far beyond the Region's boundaries.

The already complex political organisation of the city has to face these tensions as well as changing conditions. The gap between this political structure — based on a rigid division of powers and territories of action — and the extent of the metropolitan area, as well as the complexity and transversality of urban realities, are often a matter of public debate and have resulted in calls for a proper framework of urban governance.

From a socio-spatial point of view, the city is so fragmented that the idea of polarisation is broadly shared by a wide range of players in politics, academia, and the civil society (e.g. Kesteloot, 2013; Vandermotten, 2013). The city is often represented schematically as being divided into two parts extending on either side of the canal area: the pericentral neighbourhoods in the west and in the north, inhabited largely by disadvantaged population groups of migrant origin, and a rich south-east, attracting international newcomers working in the city's international institutions. The central area along the canal symbolises this polarisation. Formerly an industrial, commercial, and mixed-use zone, the Canal Zone has been undergoing a transformation process since the 1970s. Its east side, especially, has gradually become a privileged place for the creative economy — a number of art galleries, art workshops, cultural organisations, fashion shops, and trendy bars have settled there. This is one of the reasons why academics and civil society players in Brussels view this dynamic as a

gentrification process. The other side of the canal is populated by socially mixed but mainly disadvantaged population groups, mostly with foreign origins. As a result, the canal has become a boundary line between different cultures, ways of living, and economies, or it is most probably the place where this polarisation process is most clearly embodied.

This polarised vision should however be nuanced. Several urban areas and/or neighbourhoods in Brussels feature internal differentiation dynamics and socio-spatial disparities. We can find pockets of poverty in wealthy neighbourhoods and, conversely, wealthy areas in disadvantaged parts of the city. Currently, in Brussels, diversity exists at multiple scales. This multi-scale variety also exists along the canal, where differences of fine-grained and broad-scale dynamics intertwine. This is also why urban development in the Canal Zone seems very uncertain and is in fact very complex to approach and define.

The fact remains that the zone along the Brussels-Charleroi Canal is at the core of urban policies. For many years now, numerous urban rehabilitation and development programs have been concentrated in this area. They aim to 'connect' the two sides, in order to increase quality of life in this zone and improve its image. As a result, a large number of urban projects are developed there, and the EU's development funds strongly contribute to this dynamic.

The implementation of the European Regional Development Fund in Brussels

Dozens of the ongoing or planned urban projects along the Canal Zone in Brussels are co-financed by the Brussels-Capital Region and, through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), by the European Union.

The main objective of the ERDF is to support, at a regional scale, projects and activities that aim to reduce the economic disparity within the EU 28 Member States. This fund is the European Union's financial lever for successfully achieving its cohesion and regional development policy. It sustains initiatives that stimulate economic development, increase employment, and help preserve the environment in order to improve quality of life, while also making regions of the European Union more attractive (European Commission n.d. a).

Along with the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the ERDF is the EU's third financial resource for inclusion policies and projects. While the ESF is the main fund to materialise the concept of inclusion in the European regions through employment and training projects[1], most projects supported by the ERDF focus on topics that are not directly tackled by the ESF. This is, for instance, the case of those projects that are more oriented towards culture. The main thematic objectives of the ERDF are research and innovation, information and communication technologies, small and medium enterprise competitiveness, low carbon economy (European Commission n.d. b). These objectives are fully in line with the three priorities of the EU's 'Europe 2020' strategy, namely smart growth, or 'developing an economy based on knowledge and

innovation', sustainable growth, or 'promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy', and inclusive growth, or 'fostering a high-employment economy delivering economic, social and territorial cohesion' (European Commission, 2010). The economic, environmental, and social pillars of sustainability are at the basis of the ERDF programme, but the emphasis remains on an economic development that is cross-cutting and intended to address both environmental and social concerns.

For the second programme period of the Brussels ERDF, covering years 2014 to 2020, the budget amounts to about 200 million euros. Forty-six projects were selected based on the criteria of 'reinforcement of the region's economic, social and territorial cohesion.' These projects are led by the public, private, and non-profit sectors. The regional institution, now in charge of assessing the project's implementation, has previously handled the call for projects and tailored it to Brussels' context and its main issues.

The operational programme (OP) for the Brussels-Capital Region — the call for proposals — involves specific policy orientations and targets. The starting point is the paradoxical socio-economic situation of Brussels, presented as an economy with good levels of production and wealth that mask the insecure and precarious situation of a significant part of the population (Brussels-Capital Region, 2014)[2]. The OP acknowledges that these socio-economic inequalities have a strong spatial connotation and that low income, high unemployment, and low school-age rate are concentrated in the centre and along the Brussels-Charleroi Canal in particular (see Kesteloot, 2013). In order to tackle this polarisation, which is described as social, economic and

1   See the contribution by Antoine Printz in this book, pp.183.

2   Brussels is identified as 'one of the best performing regions of Europe' (Brussels-Capital Region 2014: 1). At the same time, 33,7% of the population is below the poverty line, twice the national average (Brussels-Capital Region 2014: 10).

environmental all at once, the ERDF Brussels programme for 2014-2020 promotes above all the implementation of infrastructure projects. This 'principle of territorialisation' of the Brussels ERDF is actually taken from the Plan-Guide de la Rénovation Urbaine Durable[3] (PGRUD) of the Plan Régional de Développement Durable[4] (PRDD). Most of these infrastructures are set within the Zone de Rénovation Urbaine[5] (ZRU) proposed by the Brussels Plan-Guide. One of the ERDF's main goals is to play a key role in the implantation of large- and medium-scale facilities in the ZRU, i.e. facilities for 'culture, social cohesion, sports, health, education, children, training/employment, trade/market' that work at the supra-local/inter-neighbourhood scale (MSA and IDEA Consult, 2013: 40).

Overall, the Brussels ERDF projects are organised around four main axes:
—   increasing research and improving the transfer and promotion of innovation (axis 1);
—   strengthening entrepreneurship and improving the development of SMEs in promising industries (axis 2);
—   supporting the development of a circular economy through the rational use of resources in promising industries (axis 3);
—   improving the quality of life for deprived neighbourhoods and populations (axis 4).

The first two axes refer more directly to the economic dimension of sustainability, and the third to the environmental one; only the eleven projects covered by the last axis (n. 4) seem to be directly related to social inclusion and the specific polarisation of Brussels. However, the vast majority of the selected ERDF Brussels projects are more or less explicitly oriented to address the polarisation of the city by reducing social, economic, and environmental inequalities and by improving living conditions for disadvantaged neighbourhoods and populations.

**<u>Engaging design
in urban inclusion</u>**
In Brussels, the topic of inclusion is high on the political agenda. Counteracting polarisation is the primary focus of several urban policies. As mentioned above, 'inclusion' is also one of the three pillars of the European strategy underlying the ERDF programme. Nevertheless, in urban policies — and, it follows, in the projects funded by the ERDF programme — the concept of inclusion is still quite vague. Yet inclusion is a crucial political horizon for cities today, considering the hospitality they owe to the plurality of uses, audiences and environments that co-exist within them, undermined by different dynamics of exclusion and fragmentation.

Inclusion is approached here from the perspective of the spatial organisation of our urban environment. To analyse it in detail, we propose to work with the concept of hospitality as a way to question the room given to different groups, uses, and activities in urban environments.

Public architecture and city planning are, to a large extent, a matter of organising — spatially and materially — the coexistence/cohabitation of various types

of individuals and groups, and the co-functioning of different types of uses and activities. By providing an infrastructure for urban togetherness, they take on a crucial role in society. Many issues and deficiencies in cohabitation have to do with the space we share (or do not share); they have spatial causes and spatial consequences. Since many forms of social injustice are a matter of spatial injustice, a policy of social inclusion must also be a policy of spatial inclusion. This obviously starts with the unmaking of formally, institutionally segregated environments at the city-wide scale, but it continues at the level of local urban settings, through attention given to the various expressions of urban inhospitality, i.e. to informal and sometimes subtle dynamics of exclusion of certain individuals or groups (because of their disability, age, poverty, gender, education, culture, or sexual orientation) or forms of tyranny exerted by certain uses/activities over others (car traffic over bicycle traffic, built environments over natural environments, office over housing, tourism over inhabiting, etc.).

Designing Urban Inclusion was the challenge of the 2017 Metrolab MasterClass. While emphasising the fact that inclusion in urban life can never be addressed only with architectural devices and urbanistic solutions, the organisers of this 2017 MasterClass believe that the social qualities of urban environments constitute a basic, necessary — and therefore fundamental — condition for any public action or policy aiming at progressive social change in cities.

To deal with these issues, practices of urban planning and urban design can stop at limiting or regulating processes of exclusion. On a liberal mode, they will then create environments that are officially public, open to users that are recognised as formally equal. They will rely on the 'paradoxical hospitality' of indeterminate, free, open spaces.[6] But urban design — its practitioners and political/administrative principals — can

also be more affirmative about this ideal of spatial inclusion. Beyond simply limiting exclusion, the urban project can attempt to shape 'hospitable environments', to 'make room for others', in a way that may provoke actual inclusion.

Depending on the perspective — liberal or more affirmative —, the social qualities of an urban space will be assessed differently. Still, we will risk a cross-cutting definition of what makes an urban environment inclusive, based on the concept of urban hospitality. Interpreting Joan Stavo-Debauge's works, we state that hospitality is defined as the general quality of any place that all at once:
—   invites (readable, visible, appealing)
—   allows (accessible, accepting, enabling)
—   hosts (space capacity, reception, accommodation)
—   eases (in the sense of 'to put at ease' and 'to make easier' (ease of stay, ease of movement, ease of use)
—   shelters (insulation, covering, protection)

As represented in Figure 2 of Mathieu Berger's contribution to this publication (p.181), each of these five semantic aspects of hospitality may be related to three sub-aspects. Together, these five semantic aspects of hospitality form an analytical framework that, during the MasterClass entitled *Designing Urban Inclusion*, was proposed for the description, analysis and assessment of the ERDF Brussels projects. The framework was discussed, criticised, adapted, modified, reduced or extended during the MasterClass, in the light of the empirical observations conducted on very different sites, by different groups of participants, each with its own sensibility and approach.

For the 2017 MasterClass, four ERDF projects were chosen as test cases. These projects belong to four different areas

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3   The Guide-Plan defines new regional strategies for urban renovation: strengthening central urban areas and treating urban boundaries in the ZRU — margins, fringes — in order to improve connections between neighbourhoods. The overall plan is implemented using different tools.

4   The 'Regional Plan for Sustainable Development' points at tackling the major challenges of the Brussels-Capital Region. It is a valuable strategic tool for the development of the city. It defines the urban project's main guidelines at different levels — social, economic, and environmental.

5   This zone has been defined on the statistical basis of three socio-economic criteria: income below the regional average, population density above the regional average, and unemployment rate above the regional average.

6   See Stavo-Debauge's contribution in this book, p.165.

— food trade, healthcare, culture, and leisure —, and they all raise questions of social inclusion and hospitality in a specific way. The first project called 'Abattoir' is located in a socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhood characterised by the significant presence of population groups with a migrant background. It involves building a new slaughterhouse (now located in a smaller building) next to the city's largest marketplace. The second project is led by NGO Médecins du Monde and aims at implementing an integrated centre in a fragile neighbourhood undergoing a strong process of transformation. The third project deals with converting an old underused abbey into a cultural centre, in a relatively disadvantaged neighbourhood inhabited by several groups of varied socio-economic statutes and cultural backgrounds. The fourth and last project is outside the ZRU and consists in renovating a former horse racetrack in an affluent area of Brussels, in order to transform it into a 'melting park'. Each of these projects addresses the question of inclusion in a singular way, because they deal with different target groups, take place in very different areas, are related to different fields of activity, and are led by different kinds of players.

Structure of the book

The book is organised into two main parts.

The first part presents the methodological apparatus tailored for tackling the design of urban environments in order to enhance urban inclusion. This part also includes the results of the design investigation conducted during the Metrolab MasterClass on the four Brussels ERDF projects. In the first chapter, Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman offer a critical perspective on inclusion and hospitality. In the second chapter, Miodrag Mitrašinović displays the methodology, briefly discussing the results of how design — in the broader sense — has been employed as an agent of social and political change and a catalyst for spatial and urban transformations. Mitrašinović argues the central role of design in the conceptualisation and production of inclusive and participatory urban spaces. The chapter that follows introduces the four sites and related ERDF projects used as test cases during the MasterClass. Marco Ranzato and Louise Carlier briefly contextualise the four cases within the socio-spatial and institutional geography of Brussels. The results of the four design investigations on the Brussels cases follow. These four chapters are presented as a collection of commented visuals that were workshopped during the MasterClass. Each visual essay concludes with a text in which the Metrolab researchers review and put into perspective the design proposals produced during the MasterClass. Lastly, Benoit Moritz and Mathieu Berger offer a reading of the explorations developed during the MasterClass at the light of the challenges that the Brussels-Capital Region is facing and the engineering of the ERDF in Brussels.

The second part of the book is more theoretical, questioning the concept of urban inclusion. In the first chapter, Joan Stavo-Debauge examines how the concept of hospitality can contribute to our understanding of urban environments as we strive for more inclusive cities. According to Stavo-Debauge, more than a personal virtue, hospitality refers to a quality of environments, situations, ambiances, objects, spaces, buildings, or

institutions; a quality that cannot be reduced to accessibility, and that raises fundamental political questions.

In the chapter that follows, Mathieu Berger considers how urban design can provide environments suitable for the coexistence of various kinds of target groups and for the cofunctioning of different kinds of uses. He distinguishes three notions: inclusivity, friendliness, and hospitality, that involve different ways of conceiving the opening of urban spaces, the improvement of their social qualities, and the urban togetherness in the city.

In the last chapter, Antoine Printz looks at the issue of inclusion in the European Union's new public policy framework. Examining recent European policies and their reception at the level of the Brussels-Capital Region, Printz identifies three areas of reflection: the tendency for a quantitative and rational approach towards inclusion; the reduction of social issues to mere economic terms and the disappearance of political considerations, replaced by pragmatic initiatives; and the development of a functional model of social inclusion.

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